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Lectio Divina: Saturday, March 1, 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 10,13-16

People were bringing little children to Jesus, for him to touch them. The disciples scolded them, but when Jesus saw this he was indignant and said to them, 'Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. In truth I tell you, anyone who does not welcome the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.' Then he embraced them, laid his hands on them and gave them his blessing.

3) Reflection

- The Gospel of two days ago indicated the advice of Jesus concerning the relationship of the adults with little ones and with the excluded (Mk 9, 41-50). Yesterday's Gospel indicated the advice on the relationship between man and woman, husband and wife (Mk 10, 1-12). Today's Gospel indicates the advice on the relationship between parents and sons. Jesus asked for the greatest acceptance for the little ones and the excluded. In the relationship man-woman, he asked for the greatest equality. Now, with the sons and their mother, he asks for the greatest tenderness.
- Mark 10, 13-16: *Receive the Kingdom like a child*. People brought little children to him, for him to touch them. The disciples wanted to prevent this. Why? The text does not say it. Perhaps because according to the ritual norms of the time, the small children with their mothers lived almost constantly the legal impurity. To touch them meant to become impure! If they touched Jesus, he would become impure! But Jesus

does not feel uncomfortable with this ritual norm of legal purity. He corrects the disciples and welcomes the mothers with the children. *He touches them, embraces them saying: "Let the little children come to me, do not stop them: for it is to such as these that the Kingdom of God belongs"*. And he comments: *"In truth I tell you, anyone who does not welcome the Kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it"*. And then Jesus embraces the children and blesses them, and laid his hands on them. What does this phrase mean? (a) The children receive everything from their parents. They cannot merit what they receive, but live from gratuitous love. (b) The parents receive the children as a gift from God and take care of them with the greatest possible love. The concern of the parents is not to dominate the children, but to love them, educate them in a way in which they can grow and be fulfilled!

• *A sign of the Kingdom: To welcome the little ones and the excluded.* There are many signs of the acting presence of the Kingdom in the life and the activity of Jesus. One of these is the way of welcoming, of accepting the little ones and the children:

a) *To welcome them and not scandalize them.* One of the hardest words of Jesus was against those who cause scandal to the little ones, that is, who are the reason so that the little ones no longer believe in God. For them it is better to have a millstone hung round their neck and be thrown into the sea (Mk 9, 42; Lk 17, 2; Mt 18, 6).

b) *To identify oneself with the little ones.* Jesus embraces the little ones and identifies himself with them. Anyone who receives a child, "receives me" (Mk 9, 37). "And as long as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me". (Mt 25, 40).

c) *To become like children.* Jesus asks the disciples to become like children and to accept the Kingdom as they do. Otherwise it is not possible to enter into the Kingdom (Mk 10, 15; Mt 18, 3; Lk 9, 46-48). He makes the children teachers of adults! And that is not normal. Generally, we do the contrary.

d) *To defend the right that children have to shout and yell.* When Jesus, entering into the Temple, turned over the tables of the money changers, the children were those who shouted the most: "Hosanna to the Son of David!" (Mt 21, 15). Criticized by the high priests and by the Scribes, Jesus defends them and in defending them he recalls the Scriptures (Mt 21, 16).

e) *To be pleasing for the Kingdom present in little children.* Jesus' joy is great, when he perceives that the children, the little ones, understand the things of the Kingdom which he announced to the people. "I bless you, Father!" (Mt 11, 25-26). Jesus recognizes that the little ones understand the things of the Kingdom better than the doctors!

f) *To welcome, accept and take care.* Many are the little children and the young whom Jesus accepts, takes care of and raises from the death: the daughter of Jairus, she was 12 years old (Mk 5, 41-42), the daughter of the Canaanite woman (Mk 7, 29-30), the son of the widow of Nain (Lk 7, 14-15), the epileptic boy (Mk 9, 25-26), the son of the Centurion (Lk 7, 9-10), the son of the public officer (Jn 4, 50), the boy with the five loaves of bread and two fish (Jn 6, 9).

4) Personal questions

- In our society and in our community, who are the little ones and the excluded? How do we welcome and accept them?
- In my life, what have I learnt from children concerning the Kingdom of God?

5) Concluding Prayer

Yahweh, I am calling, hurry to me,
listen to my voice when I call to you.
May my prayer be like incense in your presence,
my uplifted hands like the evening sacrifice. (Ps 141,1-2)

Lectio Divina: Sunday, March 2, 2014

*Do not worry about tomorrow.
We are more important than birds and lilies
Matthew 6.24-34*

1. LECTIO

a) Opening prayer

Holy Spirit that covers me with your silence and speak without words touch the heart. Your joy is mine, anxieties and fears while flying away like autumn leaves to be replaced by another spring. You're the sweetest caress, when I surrender to the cares of life that loses hope. You're the light that enlightens me and guide me, to you O Lord. Come Holy Spirit take my hand and teach me to pray when you can not find the words ispiramele.

b) Reading of the Gospel: Matthew 6.24-34



Then Jesus told his disciples: "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one and love the other, or you and despise the other. You can not serve God and wealth. Therefore I say unto you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink, nor about your body, what you will wear life is not worth perhaps more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air neither sow nor reap, nor gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Not much better than they are worth? And which of you, as you worry, can extend their lives even a little? And the dress, why do you bother? Observe how the lilies of the field neither toil nor spin. Yet I tell you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of them. Now, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will do much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Do not worry, saying, "What shall we eat? What shall we drink? What shall we wear? ". Of all these things go in search of the pagans. Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need. Instead, try, first, the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will take care of itself. Each day has enough trouble of its'.

c) A moment of silent prayer

Because the Word of God may penetrate and enlighten our lives.

2. MEDITATIO

a) A key to reading

The track offered us for reflection, taken from the sixth chapter of Matthew's Gospel, we understand in the context of the discourse gospel of Jesus on the mountain (Mt 5.1 to 7.12). This discussion includes:

- The Beatitudes (5:1-12);

- The six topics that compare or contrast the old with the new law given by Jesus (5.21 to 48). Certainly the purpose of such arguments is not to oppose the New Testament to the Old, but to go deeper, the root of the commandments that govern the external behavior. Jesus came not to abolish but to perfect the law (5.17 to 20);
- Jesus' teachings on the three acts of piety: prayer (including the Lord's Prayer), almsgiving and fasting (6.1 to 18). The literary form is similar to that used for the six antitheses;
- The grouping of other courses without a special structure (6.19 to 7.12).

Our text begins with verse 24, which reiterates the issue of accession to the total life plan proposed by the teachings of the Master. Joining this project is to love one master, God, and devote himself to him. "No one can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one and love the other or one and despise the other." These poles of hate / love, affection / contempt Deuteronomy reminds us that seeks to regulate cases of polygamy, where it can happen that one has "two wives, one beloved and another hated" (cf. Dt 21.15 -17). The Genesis is the first book of Samuel we relate the two cases of Jacob, Rachel and Leah on the one hand and Elkanah, and Anne Peninnah the other (Gen 29.30-31, 1 Sam 1.2-8). St. Paul also speaks of an undivided heart in the service of the Lord (1 Cor 7.7 to 34). The Lord does not kill those who submit themselves! He is Father and is well aware of our needs. Already in the Lord's Prayer, Jesus invites us to ask the Father to provide us our daily bread (6.11).

Dedication to God, then, entails a drop in his father's hands and providential. Compassionate God who cares for the grass of the field and provides nourishment to the sparrows also takes care of us, Jesus assures us: "if God so clothe the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, not will do more for you ...?" (v. 30). The contrast with the wealth explains why, in Hebrew and Aramaic, Mammon is used in reference to trust in material things. The rich young man, in fact, Jesus asks us to indulge with confidence, leaving their security in tangible property, to freely follow the Master (Mark 10.17-31; Mt 19.16-30).

Jesus would have us understand that God alone is worthy of our trust and our abandonment of the branch. We are here in mind the warnings of Jesus about the danger of riches, and his coming (cf. Lk 16.19-30; 17.22 to 37, from 18.24 to 27 and parallel texts). The trouble for material things causes us to lose what is most needed (Luke 10:38-42) and fills us with a trivial concern.

b) A few questions

To guide the meditation and practice.

- What struck you about this book?

- Join the project of Jesus is to love one master, God, and devote himself to him. What practical implications does this choice in your life?
- God is a Father who cares for us. You trust him? How does it manifest that trust?
- Perhaps not the life more than food and the body more than clothing? What is life for you?
- What concerns you in life?

3. ORATIO

Moment of silent prayer

Our Father ...

4. CONTEMPLATIO

Imagine that Jesus speaks to you with these words:

Why do you confuse excitement? Let me care of your things and everything will calm down. Tell you the truth that every act of true, blind, complete abandonment to me, has the effect you desire and resolve difficult situations. Surrender to me does not mean smashing, upset and despair, turning to me a request then agitated because I follow you, and so changes in the stirring prayer. Surrendering means closing the eyes of quietly, diverting the mind from the tribulation and get back to me because I only do we find, like children asleep in his mother's arms, the other side. So many things I work when the soul in its spiritual needs and those materials turns to me, looks at me and saying, "you think," he closes his eyes and rest!

Lectio Divina: Monday, March 3, 2014

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Lord,
 guide the course of world events
 and give your Church the joy and peace
 of serving you in freedom.
 You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit,
 one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

2) Gospel Reading - Mark 10,17-27

Jesus was setting out on a journey when a man ran up, knelt before him and put this question to him, 'Good master, what must I do to inherit eternal life?' Jesus said to him, 'Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: You shall not kill; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not

steal; You shall not give false witness; You shall not defraud; Honour your father and mother.'

And he said to him, 'Master, I have kept all these since my earliest days.' Jesus looked steadily at him and he was filled with love for him, and he said, 'You need to do one thing more. Go and sell what you own and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.' But his face fell at these words and he went away sad, for he was a man of great wealth.

Jesus looked round and said to his disciples, 'How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!' The disciples were astounded by these words, but Jesus insisted, 'My children,' he said to them, 'how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for someone rich to enter the kingdom of God.'

They were more astonished than ever, saying to one another, 'In that case, who can be saved?' Jesus gazed at them and said, 'By human resources it is impossible, but not for God: because for God everything is possible.'

3) Reflection

- The Gospel today narrates two events: (a) it tells the story of a rich man who asks how to obtain eternal life (Mk 10, 17-22), and (b) Jesus warns on the danger of riches (Mk 10, 23-27). The rich man does not accept the proposal of Jesus, because he was very rich. A rich person is protected by the security which is given to him by his riches. He has difficulty to open his hand and detach himself from this security. He seizes strongly the advantage of his goods, lives concerned defending his own interests. A poor person is not accustomed to have this concern. But there may also be some poor people who have the mentality of the rich. And then, the desire for riches creates in them dependence and also makes them become slaves of consumerism. They have no time to dedicate themselves to the service of neighbour. Keeping these problems in mind, problems of persons, of countries, let us read and meditate on the text of the rich man.

- Mark 10, 17-19: *The observance of the commandments and eternal life.* A person came up to Jesus and asked: "Good Master, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" The Gospel of Matthew tells us that it was the case of a *young man* (Mt 19, 20.22). Jesus responds abruptly: "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone!" Jesus takes away the attention from himself to direct it toward God, because what is important is to do God's Will, to reveal the Father's project. Then Jesus affirms: "You know the commandments: You shall not kill. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not give false witness. You shall not defraud. Honour your father and mother". It is important to observe always the response of Jesus. The young man

had asked something concerning eternal life. He wanted to live *together with God*. But Jesus does not mention the first three commandments which define our relationship with God! He mentioned only those which indicate respect for the *life lived together with others*. According to Jesus, we can only be well with God if we know how to be well with our neighbour. It serves nothing to deceive ourselves. The door to reach God is our neighbour.

- Mark 10, 20: *What good is it to observe the commandments?* The young man answered that he observed the commandments since his earliest days. What is strange is what follows. He wanted to know which was the way to eternal life. Now, *the way of life* was and continues to be: to do God's will expressed in the *commandments*. It means that he observed the commandments without knowing for what purpose. Otherwise, he would not have asked any questions. This is what happens today to many Catholics: they do not know what it means to be a Catholic. "I was born in a Catholic country; this is why I am Catholic!" It is a habit!

- Mark 10, 21-22: To share the goods with the poor and to follow Jesus. Hearing the response of the young man, "Jesus looked at him and was full of love for him and said: You need to do one more thing: go and sell what you own and give the money to the poor and you will have a treasure in heaven, then come, follow me!" The observance of the commandments is only the first step of a stairway that goes higher. Jesus asks more! The observance of the commandments prepares the person for the total gift of self in behalf of neighbour. Jesus asks for very much but he asks it with much love. The rich young man does not accept the proposal of Jesus and goes away, because he was a man of great wealth".

- Mark 10, 23-27: *The camel and the eye of the needle*. After the young man left, Jesus commented on his decision: "*How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!*" The disciples were astounded. Jesus repeats the same phrase and adds: "*It is easier that a camel passes through the eye of a needle than for someone rich to enter the kingdom of God!*"

The expression "enter the kingdom" not only indicates and in first place entrance into heaven after death, but also and above all, the entrance into the community around Jesus. The community is and should be a model of the Kingdom. The reference to the impossibility for *a camel to pass through the eye of a needle* comes from a popular proverb of the time used by the people to say that a thing was humanly speaking, impossible and unfeasible. The disciples were astounded hearing the affirmation of Jesus and they ask themselves: "*Then who can be saved?*" This is a sign that they had not understood the response of Jesus to the young rich man: "*Go, sell all you all you own and give the money to the poor and then come follow me*". The young man had

observed the commandments since his earliest days, but without understanding the reason for this observance. Something similar was happening to the disciples. They had already abandoned all their goods as Jesus had asked the young rich man, but without understanding the reason, the why of this abandonment. If they had understood they would not have been astounded before the demands of Jesus. When riches or the desire for riches occupies the heart and the gaze, the person cannot perceive the sense of the Gospel. Only God can help! Jesus looks at the disciples and says: *“Impossible for man but not for God. For God everything is possible.”*

4) Personal questions

- A person who lives constantly concerned about her wealth or who lives always wanting to buy all the things about which the television makes propaganda, can she free herself from everything to follow Jesus and live in peace in a Christian community? Is it possible? What do you think? How do you do it and what do you do?
- Do you know somebody who has succeeded to abandon everything for the sake of the Kingdom? What does it mean for us today: “Go, sell all you own, and give the money to the poor”? How can we understand and practice today the counsels that Jesus gives to the young rich man?

5) Concluding Prayer

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

Lectio Divina: Tuesday, March 4, 2014

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Lord,
guide the course of world events
and give your Church the joy and peace
of serving you in freedom.
You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

2) Gospel Reading - Mark 10,28-31

Peter took this up. 'Look,' he said to Jesus, 'we have left everything and followed you.' Jesus said, 'In truth I tell you, there is no one who has left house, brothers, sisters, mother, father, children or land for my sake and for the sake of the gospel who will

not receive a hundred times as much, houses, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and land -- and persecutions too -- now in this present time and, in the world to come, eternal life. Many who are first will be last, and the last, first.'

3) Reflection

- In yesterday's Gospel, Jesus spoke about the conversation among the disciples about material goods: to get away from things, to sell everything, to give it to the poor and to follow Jesus. Or rather, like Jesus, they should live in total gratuity, placing their own life in the hands of God, serving the brothers and sisters (Mk 10, 17-27). In today's Gospel Jesus explains better how this life of gratuity and service of those who abandon everything for him, for Jesus and for the Gospel, should be (Mk 10, 28-31).

- Mark 10, 28-31: *A hundred times as much, and persecutions too, now.* Peter observes: *"We have left everything and followed you"*. It is like saying: *"We have done what the Lord asked of the young rich man. We have abandoned everything and we have followed you. Explain to us how should our life be?"* Peter wants Jesus to explain more the new way of living in the *service and in gratuity*. The response of Jesus is beautiful, profound and symbolical: *"In truth there is no one who has left house, brothers, sisters, mother, father, children or land for my sake and for the sake of the Gospel who will not receive a hundred times as much, houses, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and land and, persecutions too, now in the present time and in the world to come, eternal life. Many who are first will be last and the last first"*. The type of life which springs from the gift of everything is the example of the Kingdom which Jesus wants to establish (a) to extend the family and to create community; it increases a hundred times the number of brothers and sisters. (b) It produces the sharing of goods, because all will have a hundred times more houses and land. Divine Providence incarnates itself and passes through the fraternal organization, where everything belongs to everyone and there are no longer persons who are in need. They put into practice the Law of God which asks *"that there be no poor among you"* (Dt 15, 4-11). This was what the first Christians did (Ac 2, 42-45). It is the perfect living out of service and gratuity. (c) They should not expect any privilege in return, no security, no type of promotion. Rather, in this life they will have all this, but with *persecutions*. Because, in this world, organized on egoism and the interests of groups and persons, those who want to live a gratuitous love and the gift of self, they will be crucified as Jesus was. (d) They will be persecuted in this world, but in the future world they will have eternal life of which the rich young man spoke about.

- *Jesus is the choice of the poor.* A two-fold slavery characterized the situation of the people of the time of Jesus: the slavery of the politics of Herod supported by the Roman Empire and maintained by a whole well organized system of exploitation and

repression, and the slavery of the official religion, maintained by the religious authority of the time. This is why the clan, the family, the community, were being disintegrated and a great number of the people were excluded, marginalized, homeless, having no place neither in religion nor in society. This is why several movements arose which were seeking for a new way of living in community: the Esenes, the Pharisees and, later on, the Zelots. In the community of Jesus there was something new which made it different from other groups. It was the attitude toward the poor and the excluded. The communities of the Pharisees lived separated. The word “Pharisee” means “separated”. They lived separated from impure people. Many Pharisees considered people ignorant and cursed (Jn 7, 49), in sin (Jo 9, 34). Jesus and his community, on the contrary, lived together with excluded persons, considered impure: publicans, sinners, prostitutes, lepers (Mk 2, 16; 1, 41; Lk 7, 37). Jesus recognizes the richness and the values which the poor possess (Mt 11, 25-26; Lk 21, 1-4). He proclaims them blessed, because the Kingdom is theirs, it belongs to the poor (Lk 6, 20; Mt 5, 3). He defines his mission: “to proclaim the Good News to the poor” (Lk 4, 18). He himself lives as a poor person. He possesses nothing for himself, not even a rock where to lay his head (Lk 9, 58). And to those who want to follow him to share his life, he tells them to choose: God or money! (Mt 6, 24). He orders that they choose in favour of the poor! (Mk 10, 21). The poverty which characterized the life of Jesus and of the disciples, also characterized the mission. On the contrary of other missionaries (Mt 23,15), the disciples of Jesus could take nothing with them, neither gold, nor money, nor two tunics, nor purse, nor sandals (Mt 10, 9-10). They had to trust in the hospitality offered to them (Lk 9, 4; 10, 5-6). And if they would be accepted by the people, they should work like everybody else and live from what they would receive as wages for their work (Lk 10, 7-8). Besides they should take care of the sick and of those in need (Lk 10, 9; Mt 10, 8). Now they could tell the people: “The Kingdom of God is very near to you!” (Lk 10, 9).

4) Personal questions

- In your life, how do you practice Peter’s proposal: “We have left everything and have followed you”?
- Gratuitous sharing, service, acceptance to the excluded are signs of the Kingdom. How do I live this today?

5) Concluding Prayer

The whole wide world has seen
the saving power of our God.
Acclaim Yahweh, all the earth,
burst into shouts of joy! (Ps 98,3-4)

Lectio Divina: Wednesday, March 5, 2014

Lectio Divina: Matthew 6,1-6.16-18

Ash Wednesday

The meaning of prayer, almsgiving and fasting

The way to spend the time of Lent well

1. Opening prayer

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

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

2. Reading

a) A key to the reading:



The Gospel of Ash Wednesday is taken from the Sermon on the Mount and offers us help to understand the practice of the three works of mercy: prayer, almsgiving and fasting and the way to spend the time of Lent well. The manner of practising these three works has changed over the centuries, according to the culture and customs of people and their state of health. Old people today still remember when there was a strict and compulsory fast of forty days throughout Lent.

In spite of changes in the practice of the works of mercy, there still is the human and Christian obligation (i) to share our goods with the poor (almsgiving), (ii) to live in contact with the Creator (prayer) and (iii) to be able to control our urges and desires (fasting). The words of Jesus on which we meditate can give us the necessary creativity to find new forms of living these three practices so important in the life of Christians.

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

Matthew 6:1: A general key to the understanding of the teaching that follows

Matthew 6:2: How not to go about almsgiving

Matthew 6:3-4: How to go about almsgiving

Matthew 6:5: How not to pray

Matthew 6:6: How to pray

Matthew 6:16: How not to fast

Matthew 6:17-18: How to fast

c) Text:

'Be careful not to parade your uprightness in public to attract attention; otherwise you will lose all reward from your Father in heaven. So when you give alms, do not have it trumpeted before you; this is what the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets to win human admiration. In truth I tell you, they have had their reward. But when you give alms, your left hand must not know what your right is doing; your almsgiving must be secret, and your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you.

'And when you pray, do not imitate the hypocrites: they love to say their prayers standing up in the synagogues and at the street corners for people to see them. In truth I tell you, they have had their reward. But when you pray, go to your private room, shut yourself in, and so pray to your Father who is in that secret place, and your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you.

'When you are fasting, do not put on a gloomy look as the hypocrites do: they go about looking unsightly to let people know they are fasting. In truth I tell you, they have had their reward. But when you fast, put scent on your head and wash your face, 18 so that no one will know you are fasting except your Father who sees all that is done in secret; and your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you.

3. A moment of prayerful silence

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

4. Some questions

to help us in our personal reflection.

- a) What touched you or pleased you most in this text?
- b) What is the meaning of Jesus' initial warning?
- c) What does Jesus criticise and teach about almsgiving? Make a resume for yourself.
- d) What does Jesus criticise and teach about prayer? Make a resume for yourself.
- e) What does Jesus criticise and teach about fasting? Make a resume for yourself.

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

a) The context:

Jesus speaks of three things: almsgiving (Mt 6:1-6), prayer (Mt 6:5-15) and fasting (Mt 6:16-18). These were the three works of mercy of the Jews. Jesus criticises the fact that they practise these works to be seen by others (Mt 6:1). He will not allow that the practice of justice and mercy be used as a means to social promotion within the community (Mt 6:2.5.16). In the words of Jesus there comes to light a new kind of relationship with God that is revealed to us. He says: "your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you" (Mt 6:4), "your Father knows what you need before you ask him" (Mt 6:8), "if you forgive others their failings, your heavenly Father will forgive you yours" (Mt 6,14). Jesus presents us with a new way of approaching the heart of God. A meditation on his words concerning the works of mercy may help us discover this new way.

b) A commentary on the text:

Matthew 6:1: A general key to an understanding of the teaching that follows

Jesus says: Be careful not to parade your uprightness in public to attract attention; otherwise you will lose all reward from your Father in heaven. The justice referred to by Jesus is the place where God wants us to be. The way there is found in the Law of God. Jesus warns that it is not enough to observe the law so as to be praised by people. Earlier he had said: "For I tell you, if your uprightness does not surpass that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never get into the kingdom of Heaven" (Mt 5:26). In reading these words we must not think only of the Pharisees of Jesus' time, but above all of the Pharisee that is dormant in each one of us. Had Joseph, Mary's spouse, followed the justice of the law of the Pharisees, he would have had to renounce Mary. But he was "just" (Mt 1:19), and already possessed the new justice proclaimed by Jesus. That is why he broke the ancient law and saved Mary's and Jesus' lives. The new justice proclaimed by Jesus rests on another foundation, springs from another source. We must build our peace from inside, not in what we do for God,

but in what God does for us. This is the general key to an understanding of the teaching of Jesus on the works of mercy. In what follows, Matthew applies this general principle to the practice of almsgiving, prayer and fasting. Didactically, he first expresses what must not be and then immediately teaches what should be.

Matthew 6:2: How not to go about almsgiving

The wrong way of giving alms, then and now, is that of doing it in public so as to be acknowledged and acclaimed by others. We often see on pews of churches the words: "Gift of such-and-such a family". On television, politicians love to appear as great benefactors of humanity on occasions of inaugurations of public works at the service of the community. Jesus says: Those who act thus have already had their reward.

Matthew 6:3-4: How to go about almsgiving

The correct way of giving alms is this: "Your left hand must not know what your right hand is doing!" In other words, we must give alms in such a way that not even I must feel that I am doing something good that deserves a reward from God and praise from others. Almsgiving is an obligation. It is a way of sharing something that I have with those who have nothing. In a family, what belongs to one belongs to all. Jesus praises the example of the widow who gave of what was needed for herself (Mk 12:44).

Matthew 6:5: How not to pray

Speaking of the wrong way of praying, Jesus mentions some strange practices and customs of his day. When the trumpet sounded for morning, midday and evening prayer, there were those who sought to be in the middle of the road to pray solemnly with arms outstretched so as to be seen by all and thus be considered as pious people. Others took up extravagant poses in the synagogue so as to draw the attention of the community.

Matthew 6:6: How to pray

So as to leave no doubt, Jesus over-emphasises the manner of praying. He says that we must pray in secret, only before God the Father. No one will see you. May be before others you may even seem to be a person who does not pray. This does not matter! Even of Jesus it was said: "He is not God!" That is because Jesus often prayed at night and did not care what others thought. What matters is to have one's conscience at peace and to know that God is the Father who welcomes me, not because of what I do for God or because of the satisfaction that I seek in the fact that others appreciate me as one who is pious and prays.

Matthew 6:16: How not to fast

Jesus criticises wrong practices concerning fasting. There were those who bore a sad face, did not wash, wore torn clothes, did not comb their hair, so that all could see that they were fasting in a perfect manner.

Matthew 6:17-18: How to fast

Jesus suggests the opposite: When you fast, put scent on your head, wash your face, so that no one may know that you are fasting, only your Father who is in heaven.

As we said earlier, it is a new manner of accessing the heart of God that is opening before our eyes. For our own interior peace, Jesus does not ask what we do for God, but what God does for us. Almsgiving, prayer and fasting are not currency to buy God's favour, but are our response of gratitude for the love received and experienced.

c) Further information:

i) The broader context of Matthew's Gospel

Matthew's Gospel was written for a community of converted Jews who were experiencing a deep crisis of identity in relation to their past. After their conversion to Jesus, they continued to live according to their old traditions and frequented the synagogue, together with their relatives and friends, just as before. But they suffered because of the strong pressure from their Jewish friends who did not accept Jesus as the Messiah. This tension grew after the year 70 AD. When in 66 AD the revolt of the Jews against Rome broke out, two groups refused to take part, the Pharisees and the Jewish Christians. Both groups held that going against Rome had nothing to do with the coming of the Messiah, as some thought. After the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in the year 70, all the other Jewish groups disappeared. Only the Pharisees and the Jewish Christians remained. Both groups claimed to be the heirs of the promise of the prophets and, thus, the tension grew between brothers, because of the inheritance. The Pharisees reorganised the rest of the people and took an ever-stronger position against the Christians, who ended by being excommunicated from the synagogues. This excommunication rekindled the whole problem of identity. Now the Christians were officially and formally separated from the people of the promise. They could no longer frequent their synagogue, their rabbis. And they asked themselves: Who are the real people of God: they or us? On whose side is God? Is Jesus really the Messiah?

Thus, Matthew writes his Gospel (1) for this group of Christians, as a Gospel of consolation for those who had been excommunicated and persecuted by the Jews; helping them to overcome the trauma of breaking away; (2) as a Gospel of revelation, showing that Jesus is the true Messiah, the new Moses, who fulfils the promises; (3)

as a Gospel of the new practice, showing how they must achieve true justice, greater than the justice of the Pharisees.

ii) A key to the Sermon on the Mount

The Sermon on the Mount is the first of five sermons in Matthew's Gospel. It describes the conditions that will allow a person to enter the Kingdom of God: the way in, the new reading of the law, the new way of looking at and practising the works of mercy; the new way of living in community. In a word, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus communicates the new way of looking at the things of Life and the Kingdom. The following is a division that serves as a key to reading:

Mt 5:1-16: The way in

Mt 5:1-10: The eight Beatitudes help us to see where the kingdom is already present (Mt among the poor and persecuted) and where it will be soon (Mt among the other six groups).

Mt 5:12-16: Jesus addresses his words of consolation to his disciples and warns: anyone who lives the beatitudes will be persecuted (Mt 5:11-12), but his or her life will have meaning because he/she will be the salt of the earth (Mt 5:13) and the light of the world (Mt 5:14-16).

Mt 5:17-to-6:18: The new relationship with God: A new Justice

Mt 5:17-48: The new justice must be greater than that of the Pharisees

Jesus radicalises the law, that is, he brings it back to its roots, to its main and ultimate purpose which is to serve life, justice, love and truth. The commandments of the law point to a new way of life, avoided by the Pharisees (Mt 5:17-20).

Jesus immediately presents various examples as to how the commandments of the Law of God given to Moses are to be understood: of old it was said, but I say to you (Mt 5:21-48)

Mt 6:1-18: The new justice must not seek reward or merit (This is the Gospel of this Ash Wednesday).

Mt 6:19-34: The new relationship to the goods of this world: a new vision of creation

Jesus comes to grips with the primary needs of life: food, clothing, house and health. This is the part of life that causes most anxiety in people. Jesus teaches how to relate to material goods and to the riches of the world: do not accumulate goods (Mt 6:19-21), do not look at the world with sad eyes (Mt 6:22-23), do not serve God and money at the same time (Mt 6:24), do not worry about food and drink (Mt 6:23-34).

Mt 7:1-29: The new relationship with people: a new life in community

Do not seek the straw in your brother's eye (Mt 7:1-5); do not cast pearls before swine (Mt 7:6); Do not be afraid of asking for things from God (Mt 7:7-11); observe the golden rule (Mt 7:12); seek the narrow and difficult path (Mt 7:13-14); be wary of false prophets (Mt 7:15-20); do not just talk but do (Mt 7:21-23); the community built on these principles will stand in spite of raging storms (Mt 7:24-27). The outcome of these words is a new awareness in the face of the scribes and doctors (Mt 7:28-29).

6. Prayer in a Psalm: Psalm 40 (39)

Proclaiming the great justice of God

I waited, I waited for Yahweh,
then he stooped to me and heard my cry for help.

He pulled me up from the seething chasm,
from the mud of the mire.

He set my feet on rock,
and made my footsteps firm.

He put a fresh song in my mouth,
praise of our God.

Many will be awestruck at the sight,
and will put their trust in Yahweh.

How blessed are those who put their trust in Yahweh,
who have not sided with rebels
and those who have gone astray in falsehood.

How much you have done, Yahweh, my God
-- your wonders, your plans for us -- you have no equal.

I will proclaim and speak of them;
they are beyond number.

You wanted no sacrifice or cereal offering,
but you gave me an open ear,
you did not ask for burnt offering or sacrifice for sin;
then I said, 'Here I am, I am coming.'

In the scroll of the book it is written of me,

my delight is to do your will;

your law, my God, is deep in my heart.

I proclaimed the saving justice of Yahweh in the great assembly.

See, I will not hold my tongue,

as you well know.

I have not kept your saving justice locked in the depths of my heart,

but have spoken of your constancy and saving help.

I have made no secret of your faithful and steadfast love,

in the great assembly.

You, Yahweh, have not withheld your tenderness from me;

your faithful and steadfast love will always guard me.

For troubles surround me,

until they are beyond number;

my sins have overtaken me;

I cannot see my way.

They outnumber the hairs of my head,

and my heart fails me.

Be pleased, Yahweh, to rescue me,

Yahweh, come quickly and help me!

Shame and dismay to all who seek to take my life.

Back with them,

let them be humiliated who delight in my misfortunes.

Let them be aghast with shame,

those who say to me, 'Aha, aha!'

But joy and happiness in you to all who seek you!

Let them ceaselessly cry,

'Great is Yahweh' who love your saving power.

Poor and needy as I am,

the Lord has me in mind.

You, my helper, my Saviour, my God, do not delay.

7. Final Prayer

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

Lectio Divina: Thursday, March 6, 2014

Lent Time

1) Opening prayer

Lord our God,
you love us and you invite us
to share in your own life and joy,
through a personal decision.
Help us to choose you and life
and to remain ever loyal
to this basic option
by the power of Jesus Christ, your Son,
who was loyal to you and to us,
now and for ever.

2) Gospel Reading - Luke 9, 22-25

He said, 'The Son of man is destined to suffer grievously, to be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes and to be put to death, and to be raised up on the third day.'

Then, speaking to all, he said, 'If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross every day and follow me.'

Anyone who wants to save his life will lose it; but anyone who loses his life for my sake, will save it. What benefit is it to anyone to win the whole world and forfeit or lose his very self?

3) Reflection

- Yesterday we enter into the time of Lent. Up until now the daily Liturgy followed the Gospel of Mark, step after step. Beginning yesterday until Easter, the sequence of

the reading of the day will be given by the ancient tradition of Lent and of the Preparation for Easter. From the very first day, the perspective is that of the Passion, Death and Resurrection and of the sense which this mystery has for our life. This is what is proposed in the rather brief text of today's Gospel. The text speaks of the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus and affirms that the following of Jesus presupposes that we carry our cross after Jesus.

- Before, in Luke 9, 18-21, Jesus asks: "Who do the crowds say that I am?" They answered giving the different opinions: "John the Baptist", "Elijah or one of the ancient prophets". After having heard the opinions of others, Jesus asks: "Who do you say I am?" Peter answers: "The Christ of God!", that is, the Lord is the one expected by the people. Jesus agreed with Peter, but he orders and charges them not to say this to anyone. Why did Jesus forbid this? Because at that time everybody was expecting the Messiah, but each one according to his own mind: some as king, others as priest, doctor, warrior, judge or prophet! Jesus thinks in a different way. He identifies himself with the Messiah, servant and suffering, announced by Isaiah (42,1-9; 52,13-53, 12).

- The first announcement of the Passion. Jesus begins to teach that he is the Messiah, the Servant and affirms that, as Messiah, Servant announced by Isaiah, soon he will be put to death in the carrying out of his mission of justice (Is 49, 4-9; 53, 1-12). Luke usually follows the Gospel of Mark, but here he omits Peter's reaction who advised Jesus against or tried to dissuade him to think in the suffering Messiah and he also omits the hard response: "Far from me, Satan! Because you do not think as God, but as men!" Satan is a Hebrew word which means accuser, the one who draws away the others far from the path of God. Jesus does not allow Peter to get away from his mission.

- Conditions to follow Jesus. Jesus draws conclusions valid even until now: "If anyone wants to follow me, let him deny himself, take up his cross every day and follow me". At that time the cross was the death penalty which the Roman Empire gave to marginalized criminals. To take up the cross and to carry it following Jesus was the same as accepting to be marginalized by the unjust system which legitimized injustices. It was the same as to break away from the system. As St. Paul says in the letter to the Galatians: "The world has been crucified for me and I to the world" (Ga 6, 14). The cross is not fatalism, neither is it an exigency from the Father. The Cross is the consequence of the commitment freely assumed by Jesus to reveal the Good News that God is Father, and that, therefore, we all should be accepted and treated as brothers and sisters. Because of this revolutionary announcement, he was persecuted and he was not afraid to deliver his own life. There is no greater proof of love than to give one's life for the brother.

4) Personal questions

- Everybody was waiting for the Messiah, each one in his/her own way. Which is the Messiah whom I expect and which people today expect?
- The condition to follow Jesus is the cross. How do I react before the crosses of life?

5) Concluding Prayer

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

Lectio Divina: Friday, March 7, 2014

Lent Time

1) Opening prayer

Lord of the Covenant,
we have not to fear your judgment
if like you we become rich in mercy
and full of compassion for our neighbour.
May we not only know that you ask us
but practice with sincere hearts
to share our food with the hungry
and to loosen the bonds of injustice,
that through us your light may shine
and your healing spread far and wide.
Be with us in your goodness.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.

2) Gospel Reading - Matthew 9, 14-15

Then John's disciples came to him and said, 'Why is it that we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not?'

Jesus replied, 'Surely the bridegroom's attendants cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is still with them? But the time will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.'

3) Reflection

- Today's Gospel is a brief version of the Gospel on which we already meditated in January, when the same theme of fasting was proposed to us (Mk 2, 18-22), but there is a small difference. Today, the Liturgy omits the whole discourse of the new piece of cloth on an old cloak and the new wine in an old skin (Mt 9, 16-17), and concentrates its attention on fasting.
- Jesus does not insist on the practice of fasting. Fasting is a very ancient use, practiced in almost all religions. Jesus himself practiced it during forty days (Mt 4, 2). But he did not insist with the disciples to do the same. He leaves them free. For this reason, the disciples of John the Baptist and of the Pharisees, who were obliged to fast, want to know why Jesus does not insist on fasting.
- While the bridegroom is with them, therefore, they do not need to fast. Jesus responds with a comparison. When the bridegroom is with the friends of the spouse, that is, during the wedding feast, it is not necessary for them to fast. Jesus considers himself the spouse. The disciples are the friends of the spouse. During the time in which Jesus was with the disciples, is the wedding feast. One day will come in which the spouse will no longer be there. Then, they can fast if they so desire. In this phrase Jesus refers to his death. He knows and he becomes aware that if he continues along this path of freedom, of liberty, the religious authority will want to kill him.
- Fasting and abstinence from meat are universal practices which are actual. The Muslims have the fasting of the Ramadan, during which they neither eat, nor should they eat until the rising of the sun. Always more and for diverse reasons, persons impose upon themselves some form of fasting. Fasting is an important means to control oneself, and to dominate oneself, and this exists in almost all religions. It is also appreciated by sportsmen.
- The Bible has many reference to fasting. It was a way of making penance and of attaining conversion. Through the practice of fasting, Christians imitated Jesus who fasted during forty days. Fasting tends to attain the freedom of mind, self-control, a critical vision of reality. It is an instrument to maintain our mind free and not allow oneself to be transported by any breeze. Thanks to fasting, it increases the clearness of mind. It is a means that helps to take a better care of health. Fasting can be a form of identification with the poor who are obliged to fast the whole year and eat meat very rarely. There are also those who fast in order to protest.
- Even if fasting and abstinence are no longer observed today, the basic objective of this practice continues to remain unchanged and is a force which should animate our life: to participate in the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus. Surrender one's own life in order to be able to possess it in God. Become aware or conscious of the

fact that the commitment with the Gospel is a one way journey, without returning, which demands losing one's life in order to be able to possess and to find all things in full liberty.

4) Personal questions

- Which is the form of fasting which you practice? And if you do not practice any, which is the form which you could practice?
- How can fasting help me to prepare better for the celebration of Easter?

5) Concluding Prayer

Have mercy on me, O God, in your faithful love,
in your great tenderness wipe away my offences;
wash me clean from my guilt,
purify me from my sin. (Ps 51,1-2)

Lectio Divina: Saturday, March 8, 2014

Lent Time

1) Opening prayer

Lord our God, merciful Father,
when you call us to repentance,
you want us to turn to people
and to build up peace and justice among us all. According to your promise,
let us become, with your strength,
lights for those in darkness,
water for those who thirst,
rebuilders of hope and happiness for all.
May we thus become living signs
of your love and loyalty,
for you are our God for ever.

2) Gospel Reading - Luke 5, 27-32

When he went out after this, he noticed a tax collector, Levi by name, sitting at the tax office, and said to him, 'Follow me.' And leaving everything Levi got up and followed him.

In his honour Levi held a great reception in his house, and with them at table was a large gathering of tax collectors and others.

The Pharisees and their scribes complained to his disciples and said, 'Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?'

Jesus said to them in reply, 'It is not those that are well who need the doctor, but the sick. I have come to call not the upright but sinners to repentance.'

3) Reflection

- Today's Gospel presents the same theme on which we reflected in January in the Gospel of Mark (Mk 2, 13-17). But, this time it is only the Gospel of Luke which speaks and the text is much shorter, concentrating its attention on the principal supper which is the call and conversion of Levi and what the conversion implies for us who are entering into the time of Lent.

- Jesus calls a sinner to be his disciple. Jesus calls Levi, a tax collector, and he, immediately, left everything, follows Jesus and begins to form part of the group of the disciples. Immediately, Luke says that Levi had prepared a great banquet in his house. In the Gospel of Mark, it seemed that the banquet was in Jesus' house. What is important here is the insistence on communion of Jesus with sinners, around the table, which was a forbidden thing.

- Jesus did not come for the just, but for sinners. The gesture of Jesus causes great anger among the religious authority. It was forbidden to sit at table with tax collectors and sinners, because to sit at table with someone meant to treat him, consider him as a brother! With his way of doing things, Jesus was accepting the excluded and was treating them as brothers of the same family of God. Instead of speaking directly with Jesus, the Scribes of the Pharisees speak with the disciples: Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners? And Jesus answers: It is not those that are well who need the doctor; I have come to call not the upright, but sinners to repentance!" The consciousness of his mission helps Jesus to find the response and to indicate the way for the announcement of the Good News of God. He has come to unite the dispersed people, to reintegrate those who are excluded, to reveal that God is not a severe judge who condemns and expels, but rather he is Father/Mother who accepts and embraces.

4) Personal questions

- Jesus accepts and includes the persons. Which is my attitude?
- Jesus' gesture reveals the experience that he has of God the Father. Which is the image of God which I bear and express to others through my behaviour?

5) Concluding Prayer

Listen to me, Yahweh, answer me,

for I am poor and needy.

Guard me, for I am faithful,

save your servant who relies on you. (Ps 86:1-2)

Lectio Divina: Sunday, March 9, 2014

Jesus' encounter with the devil in the desert

Temptations in the desert of life

Matthew 4,1-11

1. Opening prayer

Lord Jesus, send your Spirit to help us read the Bible as you read it to the disciples on the way to Emmaus. In the light of the Word written in the Bible, you helped them to discover the presence of God in the disturbing events of your sentence and death. Thus, the cross, which seemed to signal the end of all hope, appeared to them as source of life and resurrection.

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

2. Reading

a) A key to the reading:

Let us read this text describing the temptations of Jesus, temptations that are also those of all human beings. While reading this text we should pay attention to the following: what are the temptations, where do they take place, and how does Jesus deal with them?

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

Mt 4,1-2: The situation where and whence the temptation arises: desert, spirit, fast and hunger

Mt 4,3-4: The temptation concerning bread.

Mt 4,5-7: The temptation concerning prestige.

Mt 4,8-11: The temptation concerning power.

c) The text:

1-2: Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And he fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterward he was hungry.

3-4: And the tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." But he answered, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'"

5-7: Then the devil took him to the holy city, and set him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, 'He will give his angels charge of you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.'" Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'You shall not tempt the Lord your God.'"



8-11: Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them; and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." Then Jesus said to him, "Be gone, Satan! for it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.'" Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and ministered to him.

3. A time of prayerful silence

so that the Word of God may enter into our hearts and enlighten our lives.

4. Some questions

to help us meditate and pray.

a) What were the temptations? What is the connection between the Spirit, the desert, the fast and hunger and the temptation of Jesus?

b) What does the word *temptation* suggest to us today? How does it affect me in my daily life?

c) The tempter or Satan is he or she or that which takes me away from or makes me deviate from God's path. It may be that I have already been Satan for someone, just like Peter was for Jesus.

d) The Spirit leads Jesus into the desert to be tempted by the devil. This recalls to mind the temptations of the people in the desert after the exodus from Egypt. What

does Matthew wish to suggest and teach through this reminder of the temptations of the people in the desert?

e) The devil uses the Bible to tempt Jesus. Jesus uses the Bible to overcome the temptation! Can the Bible be used for everything? How and for what end do I use the Bible?

f) The temptation of the bread. How can we speak of God to those who have all they need? How can we speak of God to those who are hungry?

g) The temptation concerning prestige. Prestige from knowledge, from money, from faultless moral conduct, from appearances, from fame, from honour. Do these exist in my life?

h) The temptation concerning power. Wherever two people meet, a relationship of power comes into play. How do I use the power that comes my way: in my family, in the community, in society, in my neighbourhood? Do I give in to the temptation?

5. A key to the reading

for those who wish to go deeper into the matter.

= Jesus was tempted. Matthew renders the temptations intelligible: temptation of the bread, temptation of prestige, temptation of power. These are various forms of messianic hope that, then, existed among the people. The glorious Messiah who, like a new Moses, would feed the people in the desert: "*command these stones to turn into bread!*" The unknown Messiah who would impose himself on all by means of a spectacular sign in the Temple: "*throw yourself from here!*" The nationalist Messiah who would come to dominate the world: "*All these things I will give to you!*"

= In the Old Testament, identical temptations allow the people in the desert to fall after their exodus from Egypt (Dt 6,3; 6,16; 6,13). Jesus repeats history. He resists the temptations and prevents them from perverting God's plan in order to suit it to his human interests of the moment. The tempter or Satan is whatever makes us deviate from God's plan. Peter was *Satan* for Jesus (Mt 16,23).

= Temptation was always there in the life of Jesus. It went with him from the beginning to the end, from his baptism to his death on the cross. For, the more the proclamation of the Good News of the Kingdom spread in the midst of the people, the greater the pressure on Jesus to adapt himself to the messianic expectations of the people to be the messiah desired and expected by others: "a glorious and nationalist messiah", "a messiah king", "a messiah high priest", "a messiah judge", "a warrior messiah", "a messiah doctor of the law". The letter to the Hebrews says, "Like us, he was tried in all things, except sin" (Heb 4,15).

= But temptation never succeeded in deviating Jesus from his mission. He continued firmly on his journey as "*The Servant Messiah*", as proclaimed by the prophet Isaiah and awaited especially by the poor, the *anawim*. In this, Jesus did not fear provoking conflicts with the authorities and with those dearest to him. All those who *tried* to make him deviate from his path received hard replies and unexpected reactions:

* *Peter* tried to take him away from the cross: "Far from it, Lord, this will never happen!" (Mt 16,22). And he heard the reply, "Get behind me, Satan!" (Mk 8,33).

* *His relatives*, wanted to take him home. They thought he was mad (Mk 3,21), but they heard harsh words, which seemed to create a rupture (Mk 3,33). Then, when Jesus had become famous, they wanted him to appear more often in public and to remain in Jerusalem, the capital (Jn 7,3-4). Again, Jesus replies showing that is a radical difference between his purpose and theirs (Jn 7,6-7).

* *His parents* complained: "Son, why have you done so?" (Lk 2,48). But Jesus replies, "Why were you looking for me? Do you not know that I must be about my Father's business?" (Lk 2,49).

* *The apostles* were glad of the publicity Jesus was getting in the midst of the people and wanted him to turn towards the people. "Everyone is looking for you!" (Mk 1,37). But they heard the refusal, "Let us go elsewhere, to the neighbouring villages and cities, so that I may preach also to them; it is for this that I have come!" (Mk 1,38).

* *John the Baptist* wanted to coerce Jesus to be "*the strict judge messiah*" (Lk 3,9; Mt 3,7-12; Mt 11,3). Jesus reminded John of the prophecies and asked him to compare them to facts, "Go tell John what you have heard and seen!" (Mt 11,4-6 and Is 29, 18-19; 35,5-6; 61,1).

* *The people*, when they saw the signs of the multiplication of the bread in the desert, concluded, "This surely is the prophet who is to come on earth!" (Jn 6,14). They got together to coerce Jesus to be "*the messiah king*" (Jn 5,15), but Jesus took refuge on the mountain to be with the Father in solitude.

* When in prison and at the hour of darkness (Lk 22,53), the temptation to be "*the warrior messiah*" appeared. But Jesus says, "Put your sword back into its scabbard!" (Mt 26,52) and "Pray that you may not enter into *temptation*" (Lk 22,40,45).

= Jesus turned to the Word of God and there found light and nourishment. Above all, it is the prophecy of the Servant, proclaimed by Isaiah (Is 42,1-9; 49,1-6; 50,3-9; 52,13-53, 12) that fills him and encourages him to go on. At the baptism and in the transfiguration, he receives the Father's confirmation for his journey, his mission. The voice from heaven repeats the words with which Isaiah presents the Servant of Yahweh to the people, "This is my beloved Son, hear him!" (Mk 1,11; 9,6).

= Jesus defines his mission with these words, "The Son of man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life for the redemption of many!" (Mt 20,28; Mk 10,45). This lesson he learnt from his mother who said to the angel, "Behold the servant of the Lord, be it done unto me according to your word!" (Lk 1,38). By turning to the Word of God to deepen awareness of his mission and by seeking strength in prayer, Jesus faced temptations. In the midst of the poor, the *anawim*, and united to his Father, faithful to both, he resisted and followed the way of the *Servant Messiah*, the way of service to the people (Mt 20,28).

6. Psalm 91 (90)

God our protector is with us in times of temptation

He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High,

who abides in the shadow of the Almighty,

will say to the Lord, "My refuge and my fortress;

my God, in whom I trust."

For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler

and from the deadly pestilence;

he will cover you with his pinions,

and under his wings you will find refuge;

his faithfulness is a shield and buckler.

You will not fear the terror of the night,

nor the arrow that flies by day,

nor the pestilence that stalks in darkness,

nor the destruction that wastes at noonday.

Because you have made the Lord your refuge,

the Most High your habitation,

no evil shall befall you,

no scourge come near your tent.

For he will give his angels charge of

you to guard you in all your ways.

On their hands they will bear you up,

lest you dash your foot against a stone.

You will tread on the lion and the adder,
the young lion and the serpent you will trample under foot.
Because he cleaves to me in love, I will deliver him;
I will protect him, because he knows my name.
When he calls to me, I will answer him;
I will be with him in trouble,
I will rescue him and honour him.
With long life I will satisfy him,
and show him my salvation.

7. Closing prayer

Lord Jesus, we thank you for your word, which has made the Father's will clearer to us. May your Spirit enlighten our actions and give us the strength to follow that which your Word has revealed to us. Like Mary, your Mother, may we not only listen to the Word but also put it into practice. Who live and reign with the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit for ever and ever. Amen.

Lectio Divina: Monday, March 10, 2014

Lent Time

1) Opening prayer

Lord, holy God, loving Father,
you give us the task to love one another
because you are holy
and you have loved us before we could love you.
Give us the ability to recognize your Son
in our brothers and sisters far and near.
Make us witnesses that love exists and is alive
and that you, the God of love,
exist and are alive now for ever.

2) Gospel Reading - Matthew 25, 31-46

'When the Son of man comes in his glory, escorted by all the angels, then he will take his seat on his throne of glory. All nations will be assembled before him and he will

separate people one from another as the shepherd separates sheep from goats. He will place the sheep on his right hand and the goats on his left.

Then the King will say to those on his right hand, "Come, you whom my Father has blessed, take as your heritage the kingdom prepared for you since the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you made me welcome, lacking clothes and you clothed me, sick and you visited me, in prison and you came to see me."

Then the upright will say to him in reply, "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and make you welcome, lacking clothes and clothe you? When did we find you sick or in prison and go to see you?"

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

3) Reflection

- The Gospel of Matthew presents Jesus, the New Messiah. Like Moses, Jesus also promulgates the Law of God. As the Ancient Law, the new one, given by Jesus, also contains five books or discourses. The Sermon on the Mountain (Mt 5, 1 to 7, 27), the first discourse opens with eight Beatitudes. The discourse on vigilance (Mt 24, 1 to 25, 46), the fifth discourse, contains the description of the Last Judgment. The Beatitudes describe the door of entrance into the Kingdom, enumerating eight categories of persons: the poor in spirit, the meek, the afflicted, those who hunger and thirst for justice, the merciful, the pure of heart, the peacemakers and the persecuted because of justice (Mt 5, 3-10). The parable of the Last Judgment tells us what we should do in order to possess the Kingdom: accept the hungry, the thirsty, the foreigners, the naked, the sick and the prisoners (Mt 25, 35-36): At the beginning as well as at the end of the New Law, there are the excluded and the marginalized.
- Matthew 25, 31-33: Opening of the Last Judgment. The Son of Man gathers together around him the nations of the world. He separates the persons as the shepherd does

with the sheep and the goats. The shepherd knows how to discern. He does not make a mistake; sheep on the right, goats on the left. Jesus does not make a mistake. Jesus does not judge nor condemn. (cfr. Jn 3, 17; 12, 47). He hardly separates. It is the person himself/herself who judges and condemns because of the way in which he/she behaves toward the little ones and the excluded.

- Matthew 25, 34-36: The sentence for those who are at the right hand of the Judge. Those who are at the right hand of the judge are called “Blessed of my Father!”, that is, they receive the blessing which God promised to Abraham and to his descendants (Gen 12, 3). They are invited to take possession of the Kingdom, prepared for them from the foundation of the world. The reason for the sentence is the following: “I was hungry, a foreigner, naked, sick and prisoner, and you accepted me and helped me!” This sentence makes us understand who are the sheep. They are the persons who accepted the Judge when he was hungry, thirsty, a foreigner, naked, sick and prisoner. And because of the way of speaking “my Father” and “the Son of Man”, we can know that the Judge is precisely Jesus Himself. He identifies himself with the little ones!

- Matthew 25, 37-40: A request for clarification and the response of the Judge: Those who accept the excluded are called “just”. That means that the justice of the Kingdom is not attained by observing norms and prescriptions, but rather by accepting those in need. But it is strange that the just do not even know themselves when they accepted Jesus in need. And Jesus responds: “Every time that you have done this to one of my brothers, you have done it to me”. Who are these little brothers of mine?” In other passages of the Gospel of Matthew, the expression “my brothers” and “the smallest brothers” indicates the disciples (Mt 10, 42; 12, 48-50; 18, 6.10.14; 28, 10). This also indicates the members of the community who are more abandoned and neglected who have no place and are not well received (Mt 10, 40). Jesus identifies himself with them. But not only this. In the broader context of the last parable, the expression “my smallest brothers” is extended and includes all those who have no place in society. It indicates all the poor. And the “just” and the “blessed by my Father” are all the persons from all nations who accept, welcome others with total gratuity, independently of the fact that they are Christians or not.

- Matthew 25, 41-43: The sentence for those who were at the left hand side. Those who were on the other side of the Judge are called “cursed” and they are destined to go to the eternal fire, prepared by the devil and his friends. Jesus uses a symbolical language common at that time to say that these persons will not enter into the Kingdom. And here, also, the reason is only one: they did not accept, welcome Jesus hungry, thirsty, a foreigner, naked, sick and prisoner. It is not that Jesus prevents them from entering into the Kingdom, rather it is our way of acting, that is our blindness which prevents us from seeing Jesus in the little ones.

- Matthew 25, 44-46: A request for clarification and the response of the Judge. The request for clarification indicates that it is a question of people who have behaved well, persons who have their conscience in peace. They are certain to have always practiced what God asked from them. For this reason they were surprised when the Judge says that they did not accept him, did not welcome him. The Judge responds: “Every time that you have not done these things to one of my brothers, the little ones, you did not do it to me”. It is the omission! They did not do anything extra. They only missed practicing good towards the little ones and the excluded. This is the way the fifth Book of the New Law ends!

4) Personal questions

- What struck you the most in this parable of the Last Judgment?
- Stop and think: if the Last Judgment would take place today, would you be on the side of the sheep or on the side of the goats?

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, March 11, 2014

Lent Time

1) Opening prayer

Lord God,
you speak your mighty word to us,
but we cannot hear it
unless it stirs our lives
and is spoken in human terms.
Keep speaking your word to us, Lord,
and open our hearts to it,
that it may bear fruit in us
when we do your will
and carry out what we are sent to do.
We ask you this through your living Word,

Jesus Christ our Lord.

2) Gospel Reading - Matthew 6, 7-15

In your prayers do not babble as the gentiles do, for they think that by using many words they will make themselves heard. Do not be like them; your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

So you should pray like this: Our Father in heaven, may your name be held holy, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we have forgiven those who are in debt to us. And do not put us to the test, but save us from the Evil One. 'Yes, if you forgive others their failings, your heavenly Father will forgive you yours; but if you do not forgive others, your Father will not forgive your failings either.

3) Reflection

- There are two versions of the Our Father: Luke (Lk 11, 1-4) and Matthew (Mt 6, 7-13). In Luke the Our Father is shorter. Luke writes for the communities which came from Paganism. In Matthew the Our Father is found in the Discourse on the Mountain, in the part where Jesus orientates the disciples in the practice of the three works of piety: alms (Mt 6, 1-4), prayer (Mt 6, 5-15) and fasting (Mt 6, 16-18). The Our Father forms part of a catechesis for the converted Jews. They were accustomed to pray, but had some vices which Matthew tries to correct.
- Matthew 6, 7-8: The faults to be corrected. Jesus criticizes the persons for whom prayer was a repetition of magic formulae, of strong words, addressed to God to oblige him to respond to our needs. The acceptance of our prayer by God does not depend on the repetition of words, but on God's goodness, on God who is Love and Mercy. He wants our good and knows our needs even before we pray to him.
- Matthew 6, 9a: The first words: "Our Father" Abba Father, is the name which Jesus uses to address himself to God. It reveals the new relationship with God which should characterize the life of the communities (Ga 4, 6; Rm 8, 15). We say "Our Father" and not "My Father". The adjective "our" places the accent on the awareness or knowledge that we all belong to the great human family of all races and creeds. To pray to the Father is to enter in intimacy with him, it also means to be sensitive to the cry of all the brothers and sisters who cry for their daily bread. It means to seek in the first place the Kingdom of God. The experience of God as our Father is the foundation of universal fraternity.
- Matthew 6, 9b-10: Three requests for the cause of God: The Name, the Kingdom, the Will. In the first part we ask that our relationship with God may be re-established again. To sanctify his Name: The name JAHVE means I am with you! God knows. In

this NAME of God he makes himself known (Ex 3, 11-15). The name of God is sanctified when it is used with faith and not with magic; when it is used according to its true objective, that is not for oppression but for the liberty or freedom of the people and for the construction of the Kingdom. The coming of the Kingdom: The only Lord and King of life is God (Is 45, 21; 46, 9). The coming of the Kingdom is the fulfilment of all the hopes and promises. It is life in plenitude, the overcoming of frustration suffered with human kings and governments. This Kingdom will come when the Will of God will be fully accomplished. To do his Will: The will of God is expressed in his Law. His will be done on earth as it is in Heaven. In Heaven the sun and the stars obey the laws of their orbit and create the order of the universe (Is 48, 12-13). The observance of the law of God will be a source of order and well-being for human life.

- Matthew 6, 11-13: Four petitions for the cause of the brothers: Bread, Pardon, Victory, Liberty. In the second part of the Our Father we ask that the relationship among persons may be restored. The four requests show how necessary it is to transform or change the structures of the community and of society in order that all the sons and daughters of God may have the same dignity. The daily bread. In Exodus the people received the manna in the desert every day (Ex 16, 35). Divine Providence passed through the fraternal organization, the sharing. Jesus invites us to live a new Exodus, a new fraternal way of living together which will guarantee the daily bread for all (Mt 6, 34-44; Jo 6, 48-51). Forgive us our debts: Every 50 years, the Jubilee Year obliged people to forgive their debts. It was a new beginning (Lv 25, 8-55). Jesus announces a new Jubilee Year, “a year of grace from the Lord” (Lk 4, 19). The Gospel wants to begin everything anew! Do not lead us into temptation, do not put us to the test: In Exodus, people were tempted and fell (Dt 9, 6-12). The people complained and wanted to go back (Ex 16, 3; 17, 3). In the new Exodus, the temptation will be overcome by the force which people receive from God (I Co 10, 12-13). Deliver us from evil: The Evil One is Satan, who draws away from God and is a cause of scandal. He succeeds in entering in Peter (Mt 16, 23) and to tempt Jesus in the desert. Jesus overcomes him (Mt 4, 1-11). He tells us: “Courage, I have conquered the world!” (Jn 16, 33).

- Matthew 6, 14-15: Anyone who does not forgive will not be forgiven. In praying the Our Father, we pronounce the phrase which condemns us or absolves us. We say: “Forgive our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass us” (Mt 6, 12). We offer God the measure of pardon that we want. If we forgive very much, He will forgive us very much. If we forgive little, he will forgive little. If we do not forgive, he will neither forgive us.

4) Personal questions

- Jesus prayer says “forgive our debts”. In some countries it is translated as “forgive our offenses”. What is easier to forgive, the offenses or to forgive the debts?
- Christian nations of the Northern Hemisphere (Europe and USA) pray everyday: “Forgive our debts as we forgive those who are in debt with us!” But they do not forgive the external debt of poor countries of the Third World. How can we explain this terrible contradiction, source of impoverishment of millions of persons?

5) Concluding Prayer

Proclaim with me the greatness of Yahweh,
let us acclaim his name together.
I seek Yahweh and he answers me,
frees me from all my fears. (Ps 34,3-4)

Lectio Divina: Wednesday, March 12, 2014

Lent Time

1) Opening prayer

Forgiving, merciful God,
we pray you for a good measure
of humility and honesty
to acknowledge before you and people
that we are weak and fallible men and women, who often try to turn a blind eye
to our shortcomings and our sins.
Strong with the grace won in the hard way
by your Son on the cross,
we beg you for the courage
to seek your forgiveness
and to turn and return wholeheartedly to you
and to serve you and people.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.

2) Gospel Reading - Luke 11, 29-32

The crowds got even bigger and he addressed them, "This is an evil generation; it is asking for a sign. The only sign it will be given is the sign of Jonah. For just as Jonah

became a sign to the people of Nineveh, so will the Son of man be a sign to this generation.

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

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

3) Reflection

- We are in Lent. The Liturgy presents texts which can help us to convert ourselves and to change our life. That which helps more in conversion are the facts of the history of the People of God. In today's Gospel, Jesus presents two episodes of the past: Jonah and the Queen of the South, and transforms this into a mirror in such a way that one can discover in them God's call to conversion.
- Luke 11, 29: The evil generation which asks for a sign. Jesus calls the generation evil, because it does not want to believe in Jesus and continues to ask for signs which can indicate that Jesus has been sent by the Father. But Jesus refuses to present these signs, because definitively, if they ask for a sign it is because they do not believe. The only sign which will be given is that of Jonah.
- Luke 11, 30: The sign of Jonah. The sign of Jonah has two different aspects. The first one is what the text of Luke affirms in today's Gospel. Jonah was a sign, through his preaching, for the people of Nineveh. Listening to Jonah, the people were converted. In the same way, the preaching of Jesus was a sign for his people, but the people did not show any sign of conversion. The other aspect is that which the Gospel of Matthew affirms when he quotes the same episode: "For as Jonah remained in the belly of the sea-monster for three days and three nights, so will the Son of man be in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights" (Mt 12, 40). When the fish vomited Jonah into the dry land, he went to announce the Word of God to the people of Nineveh. Thus, in the same way, after the death and resurrection on the third day, the Good News will be announced to the people of Judah.
- Luke 11, 31: The Queen of the South. Following this Jesus recalls the story of the Queen of the South, who came from the ends of the earth to meet Solomon, and to learn from his wisdom (cfr. I Kg 10, 1-10). And twice Jesus affirms: "And, look, there is something greater than Solomon here". "And, look, there is something much greater than Jonah here".

• A very important aspect which is subjacent in the discussion between Jesus and the leaders of his People is the diverse way in which Jesus and his enemies place themselves before God. The Book of Jonah is a parable, which criticizes the mentality of those who wanted God only for the Jews. In the story of Jonah, the pagans were converted listening to the preaching of Jonah and God accepts them in his goodness and does not destroy the city. When Jonah sees that God accepts the people of Nineveh and does not destroy the city “Jonah became very indignant, he fell into a rage. He prayed to the Lord : ‘Lord, please is not this what I said would happen when I was still in my own country? That was why I first tried to flee to Tarshish, since I knew you were a tender, compassionate God, slow to anger, rich in faithful love, who relents about inflicting disaster. So now, Lord, please take my life, for I might as well be dead as go on living!’” (Jon 4, 1-3). For this reason, Jonah was a sign for the Jews of the time of Jesus and it continues to be for us Christians. Then, in an imperceptible way, like Jonah, in us there is also the mentality according to which we Christians would have a certain monopoly on God and all others should become Christians. This would be proselytism. Jesus does not ask that all become Christians. He wants for all to be disciples (Mt 28, 19), that is, that they be persons who, like him, radiate and announce the Good News of the love of God for all peoples (Mk 16, 15).

4) Personal questions

- Lent, the time for conversion. What has to change in the image of God that I have? Am I like Jonah or like Jesus?
- On what is my faith based, founded? In signs or in the Word of Jesus?

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: Thursday, March 13, 2014

Lent Time

1) Opening prayer

Lord, our God,
you are a generous Father,
who give us what is good for us
simply because you love us. Gives us grateful hearts, Lord,

that we may learn from you
to give and share without calculation
but simply with love and joy,
as Jesus, your Son, did among us,
who lives with you and with us for ever.

2) Gospel reading - Matthew 7,7-12

Jesus said to his disciples: 'Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you. Everyone who asks receives; everyone who searches finds; everyone who knocks will have the door opened.

Is there anyone among you who would hand his son a stone when he asked for bread?
Or would hand him a snake when he asked for a fish?

If you, then, evil as you are, know how to give your children what is good, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!

'So always treat others as you would like them to treat you; that is the Law and the Prophets.

3) Reflection

- The Gospel today gives a part of the Sermon on the Mountain, the New Law of God which has been revealed to us by Jesus. The Sermon on the Mountain has the following structure:

a) Mathew 5, 1-16: The entrance door: the Beatitudes (Mt 5, 1-10) and the mission of the disciples: to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Mt 5, 12-16).

b) Mathew 5, 17 a 6, 18: The new relationship with God: The new justice (Mt 5, 17-48) which does not expect the reward for practicing alms giving, for praying and fasting (Mt 6, 1-18).

c) Mathew 6, 19-34: The new relationship with the goods of the earth:(Mt 6, 19-21), do not look at the world with a diseased eye (Mt 6, 22-23), do not serve God and money (Mt 6, 24), do not be concerned about food and drink (Mt 6, 23-34).

d) Mathew 7, 1-23: The new relationship with persons: do not look for the splinter in your brother's eye (Mt 7, 1-5); do not throw your pearls in front of pigs (Mt 7, 6); the Gospel today: do not be afraid to ask things from God (Mt 7, 7-11); and the Golden Rule (Mt 7, 12); choose the hard and narrow roads (Mt 7, 13-14), beware of false prophets (Mt 7, 15-20).

e) Mathew 7, 21-29: Conclusion: do not only speak but practice also (Mt 7, 21-23); the community built on this basis will resist the storm (Mt 7, 24-27). The result of these words is a new conscience before the Scribes and the Doctors (Mt 7, 28-29).

- Mathew 7, 7-8: The three recommendations of Jesus. The three recommendations: to ask, to seek and to knock: "Ask and you shall receive; seek and you shall find; knock and it shall be opened to you!" A person is asked. The response depends both on the person as well as on the insistence with which it is asked. To seek is done oriented by some criteria. The better the criteria, the more certainty one can have of finding what one is looking for. To knock at the door is done with the hope that there will be someone on the other side of the door, at home. Jesus completes the recommendation offering the certainty of the response: "Ask and you shall receive; seek and you shall find; knock and it will be opened; because anyone who asks receives, and anyone who seeks will find and to anyone who knocks the door will be opened". That means that when we ask God, he listens to our petition. When we seek God, he allows Himself to be found (Is,

Is 5, 5-6). When we knock on the door of God's house, he opens the door for us.

- Mathew 7, 9-11: The question of Jesus to the people. "Is there anyone among you who would hand his son a stone when he asked for bread? Or would hand him a snake when he asked for a fish?" Here appears the simple and direct way which Jesus has for teaching the people the things of God to the people. Speaking to the parents, He connects himself to the daily experience. Between the lines of the question one can guess the response the people yelled out: "No!" because nobody gives a stone to a son who asks for bread. There is no father and no mother who would give a snake to the son when he asks for a fish. And Jesus draws the conclusion: "If you, then, evil as you are, know how to give your children what is good, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!" Jesus calls us evil to stress the certainty of being listened to by God when we ask Him for something. And this, because if we who are not saints, know how to give good things to our children, how much more the Father in heaven. This comparison has as its objective to take away from our heart any doubt concerning the prayer addressed to God with trust. God will listen! Luke adds that God will give the Holy Spirit (Lk 11, 13).

- Mathew 7, 12: The Golden Rule. "So always treat others as you would like them to treat you; that is the Law and the Prophets." This is the summary of all the Old Testament, of the Law and the Prophets. And this is the summary of everything which God wants to tell us, the summary of all the teaching of Jesus. This Golden Rule is not found only in the teaching of Jesus, but also, in one way or other, in all religions. This responds to the most profound and more universal sentiment of the human being.

4) Personal questions

- Ask, seek, knock on the door: How do you pray and speak with God?
- How do you live the Golden Rule?

5) Concluding prayer

Lord I praise your name for your faithful love and your constancy;
your promises surpass even your fame.

You heard me on the day when I called,
and you gave new strength to my heart. (Ps 138, 2-3)

Lectio Divina: Friday, March 14, 2014

Lent Time

1) Opening prayer

God of mercy and compassion,
you challenge us to be responsible
for the good and the evil we do
and you call us to conversion.
God, help us to face ourselves
that we may not use flimsy excuses
for covering up our wrongs.
Make us honest with ourselves,
and aware that we can always count on Jesus Christ
to be our guide and strength on the road to you,
now and for ever.

2) Gospel Reading - Matthew 5, 20-26

'For I tell you, if your uprightness does not surpass that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never get into the kingdom of Heaven.

'You have heard how it was said to our ancestors, You shall not kill; and if anyone does kill he must answer for it before the court. But I say this to you, anyone who is angry with a brother will answer for it before the court; anyone who calls a brother "Fool" will answer for it before the Sanhedrin; and anyone who calls him "Traitor" will answer for it in hell fire.

So then, if you are bringing your offering to the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar, go and be reconciled with your brother first, and then come back and present your offering.

Come to terms with your opponent in good time while you are still on the way to the court with him, or he may hand you over to the judge and the judge to the officer, and you will be thrown into prison. In truth I tell you, you will not get out till you have paid the last penny.

3) Reflection

- The text of today's Gospel forms part of a broader or more extensive whole: Mt 5, 20 up to Mt 5, 48. In these passages Matthew tells us how Jesus interprets and explains the Law of God. Five times he repeats the phrase: "You have heard how it was said to our ancestors, in truth I tell you!" (Mt 5, 21. 27. 33.38. 43). Before, he had said: "Do not imagine that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; no, I have come not to abolish, but to complete them" (Mt 5, 17). The attitude of Jesus before the Law is, at the same time, one of breaking and of continuity. He breaks away from the erroneous interpretations, but maintains firm the objective which the Law should attain: the practice of a greater justice, which is Love.

- Matthew 5, 20: An uprightness which surpasses that of the Pharisees. This first verse presents the general key of everything which follows in Matthew 5, 20-48. The word Justice never appears in the Gospel of Mark, and it appears seven times in that of Matthew (Mt 3, 15; 5, 6.10.20; 6, 1.33; 21, 32). This has something to do with the situation of the communities for which Mark wrote. The religious ideal of the Jews of the time was "to be just before God". The Pharisees taught: "Persons attain justice before God when they succeed to observe all the norms of the law in all its details!" This teaching generated a legalistic oppression and caused great anguish in persons, because it was very difficult to be able to observe all the norms (cfr. Rm 7, 21-24). This is why Matthew takes the words of Jesus on justice to show that it has to surpass the justice of the Pharisees (Mt, 5, 20). According to Jesus, justice does not come from what I do for God observing the law, but rather from what God does for me, accepting me as his son, as his daughter. The new ideal which Jesus proposes is the following: "Therefore, be perfect as perfect is your Heavenly Father!" (Mt 5, 48). That means: You will be just before God when you try to accept and forgive persons as God accepts and pardons me, in spite of my defects and sins.

- By means of these five very concrete examples, Jesus shows us what to do in order to attain this greater justice which surpasses the justice of the Scribes and the Pharisees. As we can see, today's Gospel takes the example of the new interpretation

of the fifth commandment: You shall not kill! Jesus has revealed what God wanted when he gave this commandment to Moses.

- Matthew 5, 21-22: The law says: "You shall not kill!" (Ex 20, 13). In order to observe fully this commandment it is not sufficient to avoid murdering. It is necessary to uproot from within everything which, in one way or another, can lead to murder, for example, anger, hatred, the desire to revenge, insult, and exploitation, etc.
- Matthew 5, 23-24. The perfect worship which God wants. In order to be accepted by God and to remain united to him, it is necessary to reconcile oneself with the brother, the sister. Before the destruction of the Temple, in the year 70, when the Christian Jews participated in the pilgrimages in Jerusalem to present their offerings at the altar and to pay their promises, they always remembered this phrase of Jesus. In the year 80, at the time when Matthew wrote, the Temple and the Altar no longer existed. They had been destroyed by the Romans. The community and the communitarian celebration became the Temple and the Altar of God.
- Matthew 5, 25-26: To reconcile oneself. One of the points on which the Gospel of Matthew exists the most is reconciliation. That indicates that in the communities of that time, there were many tensions among the radical groups with diverse tendencies and sometimes even opposed ones. Nobody wanted to cede before the other. There was no dialogue. Matthew enlightens this situation with the words of Jesus on reconciliation which request acceptance and understanding. Because the only sin that God does not forgive is our lack of pardon toward others (Mt 6, 14). That is why, try to reconcile yourself before it is too late!

4) Personal questions

- Today there are many persons who cry out "Justice!" What meaning does evangelical justice have for me?
- How do I behave before those who do not accept me as I am? How did Jesus behave before those who did not accept him?

5) Concluding Prayer

From the depths I call to you, Yahweh:

Lord, hear my cry.

Listen attentively to the sound of my pleading! (Ps 130,1-2)

Lectio Divina: Saturday, March 15, 2014

Lent Time

1) Opening prayer

Lord God, from you comes the initiative of love.

You seek us out and you tell us:

“I am your God; you are my people.”

You love us in Jesus Christ, your Son.

God, may our response of love

go far beyond the demands of any law.

May we seek you and commune with you

in the deepest of our being

and may we express our gratitude to you

by going to our neighbour

with a love that is spontaneous like yours.

We ask you this through Christ our Lord.

2) Gospel Reading - Matthew 5, 43-48

'You have heard how it was said, You will love your neighbour and hate your enemy. But I say this to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you; so that you may be children of your Father in heaven, for he causes his sun to rise on the bad as well as the good, and sends down rain to fall on the upright and the wicked alike.

For if you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Do not even the tax collectors do as much? And if you save your greetings for your brothers, are you doing anything exceptional?

Do not even the gentiles do as much? You must therefore be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect.'

3) Reflection

- In today's Gospel we see how Jesus has interpreted the commandment: “You shall not kill” in such a way that its observance may lead to the practice of love. Besides saying “You shall not kill” (Mt 5, 21), Jesus quoted four other commandments of the ancient law: you shall not commit adultery (Mt 5, 27), You shall not bear false witness (Mt 5, 33), eye for eye, and tooth for tooth (Mt 5, 38) and, in today's Gospel: “You shall love your neighbour and will hate your enemy” (Mt 5, 43), five times, Jesus

criticizes and completes the ancient way of observing these commandments and indicates the new way to attain the objective of the law, which is the practice of love (Mt 5, 22-26; 5, 28-32; 5, 34-37; 5, 39-42; 5, 44-48).

- Love your enemies. In today's Gospel Jesus quotes the ancient law which says: "You will love your neighbour and hate your enemy". This text is not found like this in the Old Testament. It is rather a question of the mentality of the time, according to which there was no problem in the fact that a person hated his enemy. Jesus was not in agreement and says: "But I tell you : For if you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Do not even the tax collectors do as much? And if you save your greetings for your brothers, are you doing anything exceptional? Do not even the gentiles do as much? You must, therefore, set no bounds to your love, just as your heavenly Father sets none to his". And Jesus gives us the proof. At the hour of his death he observed that which he preached.

- Father, forgive them, they do not know what they are doing. A soldier takes the wrist of Jesus and places it on the arm of the cross, places a nail and begins to hammer it in. Several times. The blood was flowing down. The body of Jesus contorted with pain. The soldier, a mercenary, ignorant, far from knowing what he was doing, and of what was happening around him, continued to hammer as if it were a piece of the wall of his house and had to put up a picture. At that moment Jesus prays for the soldier who tortures him and addresses his prayer to the Father: "Father, forgive them! They know not what they are doing!" He loved the soldier who killed him. Even wanting it with all their strength, the lack of humanity did not succeed to kill in Jesus, humanity and love! He will be imprisoned, they will spit on him, will laugh and make fun of him, they will make of him a false king crowning him with a crown of thorns, will torture him, will oblige him to go through the streets like a criminal, hearing the insults of the religious authority, on Calvary they will leave him completely naked in the sight of all. But the poison of the lack of humanity did not succeed to attain the source of love and of humanity which sprang from within Jesus. The water of the love which sprang from within was stronger than the poison of hatred which was coming from without. Looking at that soldier, Jesus felt sorrow and prayed for him and for all: "Father, forgive them! They know not what they are doing!" Jesus, in solidarity, almost excuses those who were ill treating and torturing him. He was like a brother who goes with his murder brothers before the Judge and, he the victim of his own brothers, says to the judge: "They are my brothers, you know they are ignorant. Forgive them! They will become better!" He loved the enemy!

- Be perfect as perfect is your Father who is in Heaven. Jesus does not simply want to frighten, because this would be useless. He wants to change the system of human living together. The Novelty which he wants to construct comes from the new

experience which he has from God, the Father, full of tenderness who accepts all! The words of threat against the rich cannot be an occasion of revenge on the part of the poor. Jesus orders that we have the contrary attitude: "Love your enemies!" True love cannot depend on what one receives from others. Love should want the good of others independently of what they does for me. Because this is the way God's love is for us.

4) Personal questions

- To love the enemies. Am I capable to love my enemies?
- Contemplate Jesus, in silence who at the hour of his death, he loved the enemy who killed him.

5) Concluding Prayer

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

Blessed are those who observe his instructions,
who seek him with all their hearts (Ps 119,1-2)

Lectio Divina: Sunday, March 16, 2014

*The Transfiguration of Jesus
Matthew 17, 1-9*

1. LECTIO

a) Initial Prayer:

Oh God, who in the glorious Transfiguration of Christ, the Lord, you confirmed the mysteries of faith by the witness of the Law and of the prophets and you have admirably pre-announced our definite adoption as your children, may we listen to the Word of your Beloved Son to become coheirs of his immortal life.

b) Reading of the Gospel:

1 Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain by themselves. 2 There in their presence he was transfigured: his face shone like the sun and his clothes became as dazzling as light. 3 And suddenly Moses and Elijah appeared to them; they were talking with him. 4 Then Peter spoke to Jesus. 'Lord,' he said, 'it is wonderful for us to be here; if you want me to, I will make three shelters here, one



for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.' 5 He was still speaking when suddenly a bright cloud covered them with shadow, and suddenly from the cloud there came a voice which said, 'This is my Son, the Beloved; he enjoys my favour. Listen to him.' 6 When they heard this, the disciples fell on their faces, overcome with fear. 7 But Jesus came up and touched them, saying, 'Stand up, do not be afraid.' 8 And when they raised their eyes they saw no one but Jesus. 9 As they came down from the mountain Jesus gave them this order, 'Tell no one about this vision until the Son of man has risen from the dead.'

c) Moments of silence:

So that God's Word may enter in us and enlighten our life.

2. MEDITATIO

a) Key for the Reading:

The Gospel according to Matthew insists on the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven. This is why Matthew's Gospel is the Gospel of the Church, that is of the People of God guided by its Head and Master Jesus, the Christ. The text which narrates the event of the Transfiguration forms part of a section of the Gospel in which, the Evangelist develops the theme of the beginning of the coming of the Kingdom in a group of disciples who gradually will constitute the Body of the Church. We find the account of the Transfiguration in all the Synoptic Gospels (Mk 9, 2-8; Lk 9, 28-36), and we also find a reference to this event in the second letter of Peter (2 Pt 1, 16-18). The text of Matthew (17, 1-9) though presents some diversity. The account is found immediately after the first announcement of the Passion and the mentioning of the conditions necessary for the *following of Christ* and also the event of the glorification of the Son of Man in the glory of the Father (Mt 16, 21-28). Before the glorification, Jesus has to go to Jerusalem for the fulfillment of the Pascal mystery, that is: Passion, Death and Resurrection (Mt 16, 21). Those who desire and wish to follow Jesus have to deny themselves and then, also carry their cross to follow the Master. (Mt 16, 24). Only in this way can we participate in his glory: "Anyone who wants to save his life will lose it; but anyone who loses his life for my sake will find it" (Mt 16, 25). Those who do not accept the event of the Cross in the life of Christ and therefore in the program of following him, are considered by Jesus as "Satan", because they do not think "according to God but as human beings do" (Mt 16, 23). The expression which Jesus addresses to Peter: "Get behind me, Satan!" (Mt 16, 23) reminds us of a similar expression used by Jesus in the parable of the final judgment "When the Son of man comes in his glory", (Mt 25, 31-46): "Go away from me, with your curse upon you, to the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Mt 25, 41). This curse is

addressed to those who do not know the Lord and thus they do not form part of his Kingdom.

Then follows the account of the Transfiguration (Mt 17, 1-9) with the question on the coming of Elijah and the healing of the epileptic demoniac (Mt 17, 10-21). After these events Jesus, for the second time, announces his Passion (Mt 17, 22) and concerning the question of the payment of taxes for the needs of the temple, Jesus plays on the words regarding the reality of son-ship (Mt 17, 24-27). In the Transfiguration the Father declares that Jesus is “My Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Listen to him” (Mt 17, 5). We are also sons, in him, of the same Father (Mt 5, 45; Mt 17 25-26).

Jesus then presents himself as our guide on the journey towards the Kingdom. In the account of the Transfiguration Jesus is presented as the new Moses who encounters God “on a high mountain” (Mt 17, 1) in the “bright cloud” (Mt 17, 5), with his face shining (Mt 17, 2). Moses also encounters God in the cloud on Mount Sinai (Ex 24, 15-18) with the bright face (Ex 34, 29-35). Elijah also encounters the Lord on Mount Horeb, the mountain of God (1 K 19, 9-13). Just as in the event of Sinai (Ex 19, 20; 33-34), here also in the Transfiguration there is the revelation of the new law. To listen to the Beloved Son in whom God the Father is pleased (Mt 17, 5). This new law, given by God on Tabor by means of the new Moses, reminds us what the Patriarch says in the Book of Deuteronomy: “Yahweh, your God will raise up a prophet like me; you will listen to him” (Dt 18, 15). In this text of the Transfiguration, more important than the law, of which Jesus is the fulfillment (that is why after the vision the Apostles “saw no one, but Jesus alone” (Mt 17, 7), the revelation on the part of the Father is stressed who proclaims the divine filiation of Jesus Christ. Besides this proclamation in the Transfiguration, the identity of the Son is proclaimed two other times in the Gospel of Matthew: at the beginning and at the end. After the Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan, a voice from heaven says: “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am pleased” (Mt 3, 17); and when Jesus dies on the Cross, the centurion exclaims using words of revelation and of faith: “Truly this one was the Son of God!” (Mt 27, 54). Besides, in this proclamation, the Father reveals Jesus as the servant of the Lord, pre-announced by Isaiah: “Behold my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom my soul delights” (Is 42, 1).

The discovery of the identity of the Son, arouses in the three witnesses the fear of God, falling on their faces (Mt 17, 6). Already at the beginning of the Gospel, in the birth of Jesus, the Magi “Entering into the house saw the Child with his mother Mary, and falling to their knees, they did him homage” (Mt 2, 11). A similar reaction is also found in the Gospel of John, after the self revelation of the Lord, in the account when Jesus was arrested in Gethsemane. Jesus says to them: I am he!” [...] As soon as he said, “I am he”, they moved back and fell on the ground” (Jn 18, 5-6). Also in the

Book of Revelation, John “in ecstasy” (Rv 1, 10), saw “one similar to a son of man [...] his face like the sun shining with all its force” (Rv 1, 12-16), and because of all these visions he fell at his feet like dead (Rv 1, 17). The apostle in Rm 14: 11 and Ph 2:10 will proclaim that before the Lord, “in the name of Jesus every knee will bow before him in heaven, on earth and in the underworld; every tongue shall proclaim that Jesus Christ is the Lord, to the glory of God the Father”.

This vision is strictly linked to the mystery of the Passover, it seems like an apparition of the Risen Jesus in all his glory, it is a pre-announcement of the future life. For this reason, “coming down from the mountain, Jesus ordered them: “Tell no one about this vision until the Son of man has risen from the dead” (Mt 17, 9).

b) To orientate the meditation and the realization:

= Read once again the passage from the Gospel, and find in the Bible all the texts quoted in the key to the reading. Try to find other parallel texts which can help you to penetrate deeper into the text in the meditation.

= Some questions:

- i) Have you ever asked yourself who the Person of Christ is? Your vision of the identity of Jesus corresponds to that proclaimed in the Transfiguration?
- ii) What meaning does the proclamation of Jesus as Son of God have in your life?
- iii) Jesus cannot be understood without the Pascal mystery of the Passion, Death and Resurrection. What sense does this mystery have for you? How do you live it daily?

3. ORATIO

a) Psalm 97:

I seek your face, oh Lord, show me your face.

Yahweh is king!

Let earth rejoice, the many isles be glad!

Cloud, black cloud enfolds him,

saving justice and judgement the foundations of his throne.

I seek your face, oh Lord, show me your face.

The mountains melt like wax,

before the Lord of all the earth.

The heavens proclaim his saving justice,

all nations see his glory.

For you are Yahweh,
Most High over all the earth, far transcending all gods.
I seek your face, oh Lord, show me your face.

b) Concluding prayer:

Let us rejoice, Beloved,
and let us go forth to behold ourselves in your beauty
to the mountain and to the hill,
to where the pure water flows,
and further, deep into the thicket.

(John of the Cross, *Spiritual Canticle*, 36)

4. CONTEMPLATIO

“Let us go forth to behold ourselves in your beauty”

This means: Let us so act that by means of this loving activity we may attain to the vision of ourselves in your beauty in eternal life. That is: That I be so transformed in your beauty that we may be alike in beauty, and both behold ourselves in your beauty, possessing then your very beauty; this, in such a way that each looking at the other may see in the other their own beauty, since both are your beauty alone, I being absorbed in your beauty; hence, I shall see you in your beauty, and you will see me in your beauty, and I shall see myself in you in your beauty, and you will see yourself in me in your beauty; that I may resemble you in your beauty, and you resemble me in your beauty, and my beauty be your beauty and your beauty my beauty; wherefore I shall be you in your beauty, and you will be me in your beauty, because your very beauty will be my beauty; and thus we shall behold each other in your beauty. (John of the Cross, *Spiritual Canticle*, 36/5)

Lectio Divina: Monday, March 17, 2014

Lent Time

1) Opening prayer

Just and holy God,
our loving Father,
you offered us your hand in friendship
and you sent us your Son Jesus

to go with us the road
of obedience and loyalty. God, we often hurt this friendship,
we act as if we were not your sons and daughters.
See the look of shame on our faces.
Forgive us, for we count on you.
Accept our thanks
for continuing to take us as we are
and loving us notwithstanding our sins.
We ask you this through Christ our Lord.

2) Gospel Reading - Luke 6, 36-38

'Be compassionate just as your Father is compassionate. Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and there will be gifts for you: a full measure, pressed down, shaken together, and overflowing, will be poured into your lap; because the standard you use will be the standard used for you.'

3) Reflection

- These three brief verses of today's Gospel (Lk 6, 36-38) are the final part of a brief discourse of Jesus (Lk 6, 20-38). In the first part of his discourse, he addresses himself to the disciples (Lk 6, 20) and to the rich (Lk 6, 24) proclaiming four beatitudes for the disciples (Lk 6, 20-23), and four curses for the rich (Lk 6, 24-26). In the second part, he addresses himself to all those who are listening (Lk 6, 27), that is, the immense crowd of poor and sick, who had come from all parts (Lk 6, 17-19). The words which he addresses to this people and to all of us are demanding and difficult: to love the enemy (Lk 6, 27), not curse them (Lk 6, 28), offer the other cheek to the one who slaps you on one and do not complain if someone takes what is ours (Lk 6, 29). How can this difficult advice be understood? The explanation is given in the three verses of today's Gospel, from which we draw the centre of the Good News brought by Jesus.
- Luke 6, 36: Be merciful as your Heavenly Father is merciful. The Beatitudes for the disciples (Lk 6, 20-23) and the curses against the rich (Lk 6, 24-26) cannot be interpreted as an occasion for the poor to revenge against the rich. Jesus orders to have the contrary attitude. He says: "Love your enemies!" (Lk 6, 27). The change or the conversion which Jesus wants to bring about in us does not consist in merely turning something to invert the system because in this way nothing would change. He wants

to change the system. The Novelty which Jesus wants to construct comes from the new experience that he has of God Father/Mother full of tenderness who accepts all, good and bad, who makes the sun shine on both the good and on the bad and makes the rain fall on both good and bad (Mt 5, 45). True love does not depend nor it can depend on what I receive from others. Love must want the good of the other independently of what he does for me. Because this is how God's love is for us. He is merciful not only toward those who are good, but with all, even with the "ungrateful and the evil" Lk 6, 35). The disciples of Jesus should radiate this merciful love.

- Luke 6, 37-38: Do not judge and you will not be judged. These last words repeat in a clearer way what Jesus had said before: "Treat others as you would like them to treat you" (Lk 6, 31; cf. Mt 7, 12). If you do not want to be judged, do not judge! If you do not want to be condemned, do not condemn" If you want to be forgiven, forgive! If you want to receive a good measure, give this good measure to others! Do not wait for the other one to take the initiative, but you take it and begin now! And you will see that it is like this!.

4) Personal questions

- Lent is a time of conversion. Which is the conversion which today's Gospel is asking of me?
- Have you already been merciful as the Heavenly Father is?

5) Concluding Prayer

Help us, God our Saviour,
for the glory of your name;
Yahweh, wipe away our sins,
rescue us for the sake of your name. (Ps 79,9)

Lectio Divina: Tuesday, March 18, 2014

Lent Time

1) Opening prayer

Lord God,
you want us to live our faith
not so much as a set of rules and practices
but as a relationship from person to person
with you and with people. God, keep our hearts turned to you,
that we may live what we believe

and that we may express our love for you
in terms of service to those around us,
as Jesus did, your Son,
who lives with you and the Holy Spirit
for ever and ever.

2) Gospel Reading - Matthew 23, 1-12

Then addressing the crowds and his disciples Jesus said, 'The scribes and the Pharisees occupy the chair of Moses. You must therefore do and observe what they tell you; but do not be guided by what they do, since they do not practise what they preach.

They tie up heavy burdens and lay them on people's shoulders, but will they lift a finger to move them? Not they! Everything they do is done to attract attention, like wearing broader headbands and longer tassels, like wanting to take the place of honour at banquets and the front seats in the synagogues, being greeted respectfully in the market squares and having people call them Rabbi. 'You, however, must not allow yourselves to be called Rabbi, since you have only one Master, and you are all brothers. You must call no one on earth your father, since you have only one Father, and he is in heaven. Nor must you allow yourselves to be called teachers, for you have only one Teacher, the Christ.

The greatest among you must be your servant. Anyone who raises himself up will be humbled, and anyone who humbles himself will be raised up.

3) Reflection

- Today's Gospel presents the criticism of Jesus against the Scribes and the Pharisees of his time. At the beginning of the missionary activity of Jesus, the Doctors of Jerusalem went to Galilee to observe him (Mk 3, 22; 7, 1). Disturbed by Jesus' preaching, they had based their calumny saying that he was possessed (Mk 3, 22). All along the three years the popularity of Jesus grew. And at the same time, the conflict between he and the religious authority also grew. The origin of this conflict was the way in which they placed themselves before God. The Pharisees sought their own security, not so much in God's love toward them, but rather in the rigorous observance of the Law. Before this mentality, Jesus insists on the practice of love which makes the observance of the law relative and gives it its true significance.

- Matthew 23, 1-3: The root or origin of the criticism: "They say but they do not do". Jesus recognizes the authority of the Scribes and of the Pharisees. They occupy the chair of Moses and teach the law of God, but they themselves do not observe what

they teach. So Jesus tells them: “You must, therefore, do and observe what they tell you, but do not do as they do, because they say but do not do!” This is a terrible criticism! Immediately, like in a mirror, Jesus shows some aspects of the incoherence of the religious authority.

- Matthew 23, 4-7: Look in the mirror in order to make a revision of life. Jesus calls the attention of the disciples concerning the incoherent behaviour of some doctors of the Law. In meditating on this incoherence, it is convenient to think not in the Pharisees and the Scribes of that time already past, but rather in ourselves and in our incoherence: they tie up heavy burdens and lay them on people’s shoulders, but will not lift a finger to move them; they do their works in order to be admired; they love to take the first places and to be called doctors. The Scribes liked to enter into the houses of the widows and to recite long prayers to receive money in exchange! (Mk 12, 40).

- Matthew 23, 8-10): You are all brothers. Jesus orders that we have the contrary attitude. Instead of using the religion and the community as means for self-promotion in order to appear as being more important before others, he asks not to use the title of Rabbi or Teacher, of Master, Father and Guide because only one is the Guide, Christ; only God in Heaven is Father, and Jesus is the Master, the Teacher. You are all brothers. This is the basis of the fraternity which comes from the certainty that God is our Father.

- Matthew 23, 11-12: The final summary: the greatest must be the servant. This phrase is what characterizes both the teaching and the behaviour of Jesus: “The greatest among you must be your servant; the one who raises himself up, will be humbled” (cfr. Mk 10, 43; Lk 14, 11; 18, 14).

4) Personal questions

- In what does Jesus criticize the Doctors of the Law and in what does he praise them? In what would he criticize me and in what would he praise me?

- Have you already seen in the mirror?

5) Concluding Prayer

'Honour to me is a sacrifice of thanksgiving;

to the upright I will show God's salvation.' (Ps 50,23)

Lectio Divina: Wednesday, March 19, 2014

Matthew 1,16.18-21.24a

Joseph, the Spouse of Mary, the Mother of Jesus

1. LECTIO

a) Opening prayer:

Spirit who moves over the water,
calm in us all discordance,
the agitated waves, the noise of the words,
the whirlwind of vanity,
and make the Word which recreates,
arise in silence.

Spirit who in a sigh you Whisper
to our spirit the Name of the Father,
come and gather together all our desires,
make them grow in a beam of light
which will be a response to your light,
the Word of the new Day.

Spirit of God, the sap of love
of the immense tree on which you graft us,
so that all our brothers
will seem to us as a gift
in the great Body in which
the Word of communion matures.

(Frère Pierre-Yves of Taizé)



b) Reading of the Gospel: Matthew 1, 16-24

Jacob fathered Joseph the husband of Mary; of her was born Jesus who is called Christ. The sum of generations is therefore: fourteen from Abraham to David; fourteen from David to the Babylonian deportation; and fourteen from the Babylonian deportation to Christ. This is how Jesus Christ came to be born. His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph; but before they came to live together she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being an upright man and wanting to spare her disgrace, decided to divorce her informally. He had made up his mind to do this when suddenly the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because she has conceived what is in her by the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son and you must name him Jesus, because he is the one who is to save his people from their sins.' Now all this took place to fulfil what the Lord had spoken through the prophet: Look! the virgin is with child and will give birth to a son whom they will call Immanuel, a name which means 'God-is-with-us'. When Joseph woke up he did what the angel of the Lord had told him to do: he took his wife to his home; he had not had intercourse with her when she gave birth to a son; and he named him Jesus.

c) A moment of silence:

so that the Word of God may enter into our hearts and enlighten our lives.

2. MEDITATIO

a) A key to the reading:

The passage of today's Gospel is taken from the first chapter of the Gospel of Matthew which forms part of the section concerning the conception, birth and infancy of Jesus. The center of all this account is the Person of Jesus around which are all the events and the persons mentioned. One must keep in mind that the Gospel reveals a Theology of the history of Jesus, and so getting close to the Word of God we should get the message which is hidden under the veils of the account without losing ourselves, as Paul so wisely advises us "in foolish speculations", avoiding "those genealogies and the quibbles and disputes about the Law, they are useless and futile" (Tt 3,9).

In fact, this text is connected to the genealogy of Jesus, which Matthew arranges with the intention of stressing the dynastic succession of Jesus, the Saviour of his people (Mt 1, 21). To Jesus are conferred all the rights inherited from the lineage of David, of "Joseph, son of David" (Mt 1:20; Lk 2:4-5) his legal father. For the Biblical and Hebrew world legal paternity was sufficient to confer all the rights of the lineage in question (cf.: the law of the levirate and of adoption (Dt 25:5ff). That is why from the beginning of the genealog, Jesus is designed as "Christ the Son of David" (Mt 1:1) that is, the anointed one of the Lord Son of David, with whom all the promises of God

to David his servant, are fulfilled (2 Sam 7:1-16; 2 Cr 7:18; 2 Cr 21:7; Ps 89:30). This is why Matthew adds to the account of the genealogy and of the conception of Jesus the prophecy of Isaiah: “All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken through the prophet: The young woman is with child and will give birth to a son whom she will call Immanuel, which means God with us” (Mt 1, 21-23 and Is 7:14).

Let us stop to say something, on the spiritual reality of adoption, we can refer to the fact that the elected people possess “the glory, the covenants, the legislation, the cult, the promises”, because “they are Israelites and possess the adoption of sons” (Rm 9:4). But we also, the new people of God in Christ receive the adoption of sons because “when the completion of the time came God sent his Son, born of a woman, born a subject of the Law, to redeem the subjects of the Law, so that we could receive adoption as sons” (Gal 4:4-5). This is the salvation which Jesus has brought to us. Christ “will save his people from their sins” (Mt 1:21) because he is the “God with us!” (Mt 1: 23) who makes adopted sons of God.

Jesus is born from “Mary who was betrothed to Joseph” (Mt 1:18a)) who “was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit” (Mt 1: 18b). Matthew does not give the account of the annunciation as Luke does (Lk 1, 26-38), but structures the account from the point of view of the experience of Joseph the just man. The Bible reveals to us that God loves the just and many times chooses them for an important mission, protects them and does not join them to the impious (Gen 18:23ff). In the Old Testament we find many persons who are considered just. We think of Noah “a good man, an upright man among his contemporaries” (Gen 6:9). Or also Jehoash who “did what Yahweh regards as right” (2 K 12:3).

A constant idea in the Bible is the “dream” as a privileged place where God makes his projects and designs known, and sometimes reveals the future. The dreams of Jacob and Betel are well known (Gen 28: 10ff) and Joseph his son, as also those of the cup-bearer and the chief baker imprisoned in Egypt with him (Gen 37:5ff; Gen 40: 5ff) and the dreams of Pharaoh which revealed the future years of plenty and of famine and want (Gen 41:1ff).

“An Angel of the Lord“ appeared to Joseph (Mt 1:20) to reveal to him God’s design. In the Gospels of the infancy frequently the Angel of the Lord is mentioned as the heavenly messenger (Mt 1:20.24; 2:13.19; Lk 1:11; 2:9) and also on other occasions the angel appears to calm down, to reveal the project of God, to heal, to liberate from slavery (cf. Mt 28:2; Jn 5:4; Acts 5:19; 8:26; 12:7.23). Many are the references to the Angel of the Lord also in the Old Testament where originally the angel represented the Lord himself who guided and protected his people being close to them (cf. Gen 16:7-16; 22:12; 24:7; Ex 3:3; 23:20; Tb 5:4).

b) Questions to orientate the meditation and make it relevant:

- What has struck you in this passage? Why?
- In the key to the reading, have we given enough consideration to some terms (adoption, angel, dream, just)? What sentiments or thoughts did these arise in your heart? What relevance can they have for your journey of spiritual maturation?
- Which do you think is the central message in this Gospel passage?

3. ORATIO

a) Psalm 92

It is good to give thanks to Yahweh,
to make music for your name, Most High,
to proclaim your faithful love at daybreak,
and your constancy all through the night,
on the lyre, the ten-stringed lyre,
to the murmur of the harp.
You have brought me joy, Yahweh,
by your deeds, at the work of your hands I cry out,
'How great are your works, Yahweh,
immensely deep your thoughts!'
Stupid people cannot realise this,
fools do not grasp it.
The wicked may sprout like weeds,
and every evil-doer flourish,
but only to be eternally destroyed;
whereas you are supreme for ever, Yahweh.
Look how your enemies perish,
how all evil-doers are scattered!
You give me the strength of the wild ox,
you anoint me with fresh oil;
I caught sight of the ambush against me,
overheard the plans of the wicked.

The upright will flourish like the palm tree,
will grow like a cedar of Lebanon.
Planted in the house of Yahweh,
they will flourish in the courts of our God.
In old age they will still bear fruit,
will remain fresh and green,
to proclaim Yahweh's integrity;
my rock, in whom no fault can be found.

b) Moments for a prayerful silence

4. CONTEMPLATIO

The Christian contemplation of God's dream, of the project which God cherishes for the history of humanity does not produce alienation but keeps the consciences vigilant and active and stimulates us to face with courage and altruism the responsibilities which life gives us.

Lectio Divina: Thursday, March 20, 2014

Lent Time

1) Opening prayer

Lord our God,
many of us never had it so good
and so we have become smug and self-satisfied, happy in our own little world.
God, may our ears remain open to your word
and our hearts to you
and to our brothers and sisters.
Do not allow us to forget you,
or to place our trust in ourselves.
Make us restless for you
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

2) Gospel Reading - Luke 16, 19-31

'There was a rich man who used to dress in purple and fine linen and feast magnificently every day. And at his gate there used to lie a poor man called Lazarus,

covered with sores, who longed to fill himself with what fell from the rich man's table. Even dogs came and licked his sores.

Now it happened that the poor man died and was carried away by the angels into Abraham's embrace. The rich man also died and was buried. In his torment in Hades he looked up and saw Abraham a long way off with Lazarus in his embrace. So he cried out, "Father Abraham, pity me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in agony in these flames." Abraham said, "My son, remember that during your life you had your fill of good things, just as Lazarus his fill of bad. Now he is being comforted here while you are in agony. But that is not all: between us and you a great gulf has been fixed, to prevent those who want to cross from our side to yours or from your side to ours." So he said, "Father, I beg you then to send Lazarus to my father's house, since I have five brothers, to give them warning so that they do not come to this place of torment too." Abraham said, "They have Moses and the prophets, let them listen to them." The rich man replied, "Ah no, father Abraham, but if someone comes to them from the dead, they will repent." Then Abraham said to him, "If they will not listen either to Moses or to the prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone should rise from the dead."

3) Reflection

- Every time that Jesus has something important to communicate, he creates a story and tells a parable. In this way, through the reflection on an invisible reality, he leads those who listen to him to discover the invisible call of God, who is present in life. A parable is made to make us think and reflect. For this reason it is important to pay attention even to the smallest details. In the parable in today's Gospel there are three persons. The poor Lazarus, the rich man without a name and Father Abraham. In the parable, Abraham represents the thought of God. The rich man without a name represents the dominating ideology of that time. Lazarus represents the silent cry of the poor of the time of Jesus and of all times.
- Luke 16, 19-21: The situation of the rich man and the poor man. The two extremes of society. On the one side, aggressive richness, on the other the poor man without resources, without rights, covered with wounds, without anybody to accept him, to receive him, except the dogs which came to lick his wounds. What separates both of them is the closed door of the house of the rich man. On the part of the rich man, there is no acceptance nor pity concerning the problem of the poor man at his door. But the poor man has a name and the rich man does not. That is, the poor man has his name written in the book of life, not the rich one. The poor man's name is Lazarus. It means God helps. And through the poor man, God helps the rich man who could have a name in the book of life. But the rich man does not accept to be helped by the poor man,

because he keeps his door closed. This beginning of the parable which describes the situation, is a faithful mirror of what was happening during the time of Jesus and the time of Luke. It is the mirror of everything which is happening today in the world!

- Luke 16, 22: The change which reveals the hidden truth. The poor man died and was carried away by the angels into Abraham's embrace. The rich man also died and was buried. In the parable the poor man dies before the rich one. This is an advertisement for the rich. Up to the time when the poor man is alive and is at the door, there is still the possibility of salvation for the rich man. But after the poor man dies, the only instrument of salvation for the rich man also dies. Now, the poor man is in Abraham's embrace. The embrace of Abraham is the source of life, from where the People of God is born, Lazarus, the poor man, forms part of the People of Abraham, from which he was excluded, when he was before the door of the rich man. The rich man who believes that he is a son of Abraham does not go toward the embrace of Abraham! The introduction of the parable ends here. Now its significance begins to be revealed, through the three conversations between the rich man and Father Abraham.

- Luke 16, 23-26: The first conversation. In the parable, Jesus opens a window on the other side of life, the side of God. It is not a question of Heaven. It is a question of life which only faith generates and which the rich man who has no faith cannot perceive. It is only in the light of death that the ideology of the empire disintegrates and appears for him what the true value of life is. On the part of God, without the deceiving propaganda of the ideology, things change. The rich man sees Lazarus in the embrace of Abraham and asks to be helped in his suffering. The rich man discovers that Lazarus is his only possible benefactor. But now, it is too late! The rich man without a name is pious, because he recognizes Abraham and calls him Father Abraham responds and calls him son. In reality this word of Abraham is addressed to all the rich who are alive. In so far as they are alive, they have the possibility to become sons and daughters of Abraham, if they know how to open the door to Lazarus, the poor man, the only one who in God's name can help them. Salvation for the rich man does not consist in Lazarus giving him a drop of fresh water to refresh his tongue, but rather, that he, the rich man, open the closed door to the poor man so as fill the great abyss that exists.

- Luke 16, 27-29: The second conversation. The rich man insists: "Then, Father, I beg you to send Lazarus to my father's house, because I have five brothers!" The rich man does not want his brothers to end in the same place of suffering. Lazarus, the poor man, is the only true intermediary between God and the rich. He is the only one, because it is only to the poor that the rich have to return what they had and, thus, re-establish the justice which has been damaged! The rich man is worried for his brothers, but was never concerned about the poor! Abraham's response is clear: "They

have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them!” They have the Bible! The rich man had the Bible. He knew it by heart. But he was never aware of the fact that the Bible had something to do with the poor. The key which the rich man has in order to be able to understand the Bible is the poor man sitting at his door!

- Luke 16, 30-31: The third conversation. “No, Abraham, but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent!” The rich man recognizes that he is wrong, he has committed an error, because he speaks of repenting, something which he never heard during his life. He wants a miracle, a resurrection! But this type of resurrection does not exist. The only resurrection is that of Jesus. Jesus, risen from the dead comes to us in the person of the poor, of those who have no rights, of those who have no land, of those who have no food, of those who have no house, of those who have no health. In his final response, Abraham is clear and convincing, forceful: “If they will not listen either to Moses or to the prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone should rise from the dead!” The conversation ends this way! This is the end of the parable!

- The key to understand the sense of the Bible is the poor Lazarus, sitting before the door! God presents himself in the person of the poor, sitting at our door, to help us cover the enormous abyss which the rich have created. Lazarus is also Jesus, the poor and servant Messiah, who was not accepted, but whose death changed all things radically. And everything changes in the light of the death of the poor. The place of torment, of torture is the situation of the person without God. Even if the rich man thinks that he has religion and faith, in fact, he is not with God because he does not open the door to the poor, as Zacchaeus did. (Lk 19, 1-10).

4) Personal questions

- How do we treat the poor? Do they have a name for us? In the attitude that I have before them, am I like Lazarus or like the rich man?
- When the poor enter in contact with us, do they perceive something different? Do they perceive the Good News? And I, to which side do I tend, toward the miracle or toward God’s Word?

5) Concluding Prayer

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

Lectio Divina: Friday, March 21, 2014

Lent Time

1) Opening prayer

God, we do not want to die;

we want to live.

We want to be happy

but without paying the price.

We belong to our times,

when sacrifice and suffering are out of fashion.

God, make life worth the pain to be lived.

Give us back the age-old realization,

that life means to be born

again and again in pain,

that it may become again

a journey of hope to you,

together with Christ Jesus, our Lord.

2) Gospel reading - Matthew 21,33-43.45-46

Jesus said to the chief priests and the elders of the people: 'Listen to another parable. There was a man, a landowner, who planted a vineyard; he fenced it round, dug a winepress in it and built a tower; then he leased it to tenants and went abroad.

When vintage time drew near he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his produce. But the tenants seized his servants, thrashed one, killed another and stoned a third.

Next he sent some more servants, this time a larger number, and they dealt with them in the same way.

Finally he sent his son to them thinking, "They will respect my son." But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, "This is the heir. Come on, let us kill him and take over his inheritance." So they seized him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?' They answered, 'He will bring those wretches to a wretched end and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will deliver the produce to him at the proper time.'

Jesus said to them, 'Have you never read in the scriptures: The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this is the Lord's doing and we marvel at it? I tell you, then, that the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit.'

When they heard his parables, the chief priests and the scribes realised he was speaking about them, but though they would have liked to arrest him they were afraid of the crowds, who looked on him as a prophet.

3) Reflection

- The text of today's Gospel forms part of a whole which is more vast or extensive which includes Mathew 21, 23-40. The chief priests and the Elders had asked Jesus with which authority he did those things (Mt 21, 23). They considered themselves the patrons of everything and they did not want anybody to do things without their permission. The answer of Jesus is divided into three parts: 1) He, in turn, asks them a question because he wants to know from them if John the Baptist was from heaven or from earth (Mt 21, 24-27). 2) He then tells them the parable of the two sons (Mt 21, 28-32). 3) He tells them the parable of the vineyard (Mt 21, 33-46) which is today's Gospel.

- Mathew 21, 33-40: The parable of the vineyard. Jesus begins as follows: "Listen to another parable: There was a man, a landowner, who planted a vineyard, he fenced it around, dug a winepress in it and built a tower". The parable is a beautiful summary of the history of Israel, taken from the prophet Isaiah (Is 5, 1-7). Jesus addresses himself to the chief priests, to the elders (Mt 21, 23) and to the Pharisees (Mt 21, 45) and He gives a response to the question which they addressed to him asking about the origin of his authority (Mt 21, 23). Through this parable, Jesus clarifies several things: (a) He reveals the origin of his authority: He is the Son, the heir. (b) He denounces the abuse of the authority of the tenants, that is of the priests and elders who were not concerned and did not take care of the people of God. (c) He defends the authority of the prophets, sent by God, but who were killed by the priests and the elders. (4) He unmasks the authority by which they manipulate the religion and kill the Son, because they do not want to lose the source of income which they succeed to accumulate for themselves, throughout the centuries.

- Mathew 21, 41: The sentence which they give to themselves. At the end of the parable Jesus asks: "Now, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants? They are not aware that the parable was speaking precisely of them. This is why, with the response that they give, they decree their own condemnation: "The chief priests and the elders of the people answered: 'He will bring those wretches to a wretched end and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will deliver

the produce to him at the proper time". Several times Jesus uses this same method. He leads the person to say the truth about himself, without being aware that he condemns himself. For example in the case of the Pharisee who condemns the young woman considering her a sinner (Luke 7, 42-43) and in the case of the parable of the two sons (Mt 21, 28-32).

- Mathew 21, 42-46: The sentence given by themselves was confirmed by their behaviour. From the clarification given by Jesus, the chief priests, the elders and the Pharisees understand that the parable speaks about them, but they do not convert. All the contrary! They keep to their own project to kill Jesus. They will reject "the corner stone". But they do not have the courage to do it openly, because they fear the reaction of the people.

- The diverse groups which held the power at the time of Jesus. In today's Gospel two groups appear which, at that time, governed: the priests, the elders and the Pharisees. Then, some brief information on the power which each of these groups and others had is given:

- a) The priests: They were the ones in charge of the worship in the Temple. The people took to the Temple the tithe and the other taxes and offerings to pay the promises made. The High Priest occupied a very important place in the life of the nation, especially after the exile. He was chosen and appointed from among the three or four aristocratic families who possessed more power and riches.

- b) The elders or the Chief Priests of the People: They were the local leaders in the different villages of the city. Their origin came from the heads of the ancient tribes.

- c) The Sadducees: they were the lay aristocratic elite of society. Many of them were rich merchants or landlords. From the religious point of view they were conservative. They did not accept the changes supported by the Pharisees, for example, faith in the resurrection and the existence of the angels.

- d) The Pharisees: Pharisee means: separated. They struggled in a way that through the perfect observance of the Law of purity, people would succeed in being pure, separated and saint as the Law and Tradition demanded! Because of the exemplary witness of their life according to the norms of the time, their moral authority was greatly extended in the villages of Galilee.

- e) Scribe or doctor of the Law: They were the ones in charge of teaching. They dedicated their life to the study of the Law of God and taught people what to do to observe all the Law of God. Not all the Scribes belonged to the same line. Some were united with the Pharisees, others with the Sadducees.

4) Personal questions

- Some times have you felt that you were controlled in an undue manner, at home, at work, in the Church? Which was your reaction? Was it the same as that of Jesus?
- If Jesus would return today and would tell us the same parable, how would I react?

5) Concluding prayer

As the height of heaven above earth,
so strong is faithful the love of the Lord for those who fear him.
As the distance of east from west,
so far from us does he put our faults. (Ps 103,11-12)

Lectio Divina: Saturday, March 22, 2014

Lent Time

1) Opening prayer

Faithful Father, you are our God
of grace, mercy and forgiveness.
When mercy and pardon
sound paternalistic to modern ears, make us realize, Lord,
that you challenge us to face ourselves
and to become new people,
responsible for the destiny of ourselves
and for the happiness of others.
Make us responsive to your love
through Christ Jesus our Lord.

2) Gospel Reading - Luke 15, 1-3. 11-32

The tax collectors and sinners, however, were all crowding round to listen to him, and the Pharisees and scribes complained saying, 'This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.' So he told them this parable:

'There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, "Father, let me have the share of the estate that will come to me." So the father divided the property between them. A few days later, the younger son got together everything he had and left for a distant country where he squandered his money on a life of debauchery.

'When he had spent it all, that country experienced a severe famine, and now he began to feel the pinch; so he hired himself out to one of the local inhabitants who put him on his farm to feed the pigs. And he would willingly have filled himself with the husks the pigs were eating but no one would let him have them. Then he came to his senses and said, "How many of my father's hired men have all the food they want and more, and here am I dying of hunger! I will leave this place and go to my father and say: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired men." So he left the place and went back to his father.

'While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was moved with pity. He ran to the boy, clasped him in his arms and kissed him. Then his son said, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son." But the father said to his servants, "Quick! Bring out the best robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the calf we have been fattening, and kill it; we will celebrate by having a feast, because this son of mine was dead and has come back to life; he was lost and is found." And they began to celebrate.

'Now the elder son was out in the fields, and on his way back, as he drew near the house, he could hear music and dancing. Calling one of the servants he asked what it was all about. The servant told him, "Your brother has come, and your father has killed the calf we had been fattening because he has got him back safe and sound." He was angry then and refused to go in, and his father came out and began to urge him to come in; but he retorted to his father, "All these years I have slaved for you and never once disobeyed any orders of yours, yet you never offered me so much as a kid for me to celebrate with my friends. But, for this son of yours, when he comes back after swallowing up your property -- he and his loose women -- you kill the calf we had been fattening."

'The father said, "My son, you are with me always and all I have is yours. But it was only right we should celebrate and rejoice, because your brother here was dead and has come to life; he was lost and is found." '

3) Reflection

- Chapter 15 of Luke's Gospel is enclosed in the following information: "The tax collectors and sinners, were all crowding round to listen to him, and the Pharisees and Scribes complained saying: This man welcomes sinners and eats with them" (Lk 15, 1-3). Immediately Luke presents these three parables which are bound together by the same theme: the lost sheep (Lk 15, 4-7), the lost drachma (Lk 15, 8-10), the lost son (Lk 15, 11-32). This last parable constitutes the theme of today's Gospel.

- Luke 15, 11-13: The decision of the younger son. A man had two sons. The younger one asks for the part of the estate which will be his. The father divides everything between the two and both receive their part. To receive the inheritance is not any merit of ours. It is a gratuitous gift. The inheritance of the gifts of God is distributed among all human beings, whether Jewish or Pagans, whether Christians or non Christians . All receive something of the inheritance of the Father. But not all take care of it in the same way. In this same way, the younger son leaves and goes to a distant country and squandered his money on a life of debauchery, getting away from the Father. At the time of Luke, the elder one represented the communities which came from Judaism, and the youngest represented, the communities from Paganism. And today who is the youngest and who the less young?

- Luke 15, 14-19: The disillusionment and the will to return to the Father's home. The need to find some food makes the young man lose his freedom and he becomes a slave and takes care of the pigs. This was the condition of life of millions of slaves in the Roman Empire at the time of Luke. The situation in which he finds himself makes the young man remember how he was in his Father's home. Finally, he prepares the words which he will say to his Father: "I no longer deserve to be called your son! Treat me as one of your hired men!" The hired man executes the orders, fulfils the law of servants. The younger son wants to fulfil the law as the Pharisees and the Scribes of the time of Jesus wanted (Lk 15, 1). The missionaries of the Pharisees accused the Pagans who were converted to the God of Abraham (Mt 23, 15). At the time of Luke, some Christians who came from Judaism, submitted themselves to the yoke of the Law (Ga 1, 6-10).

- Luke 15, 20-24: The joy of the Father when he meets his younger son again. The parable says that the younger son was still a long way off from the house, but the Father sees him, and runs to the boy, clasps him in his arms and kissed him. The impression given by Jesus is that the Father remained all the time at the window to see if his son would appear around the corner. According to our human way of thinking and feeling, the joy of the Father seems exaggerated. He does not even allow his son to finish his words, what he was saying. Nobody listens! The Father does not want his son to be his slave. He wants him to be his son! This is the great Good News which Jesus has brought to us! A new robe, new sandals, a ring on his finger, the calf, the feast! In the immense joy of the encounter, Jesus allows us to see how great the sadness of the Father is because of the loss of his son. God was very sad and the people now become aware of this, seeing the immense joy of the Father because of the encounter with his son! It is joy shared with all in the feast that he has prepared.

- Luke 15, 25-28b: The reaction of the older son. The older son returns from his work in the fields and finds that there is a feast in the house. He refuses to enter. He wants

to know what is happening. When he is told the reason for the feast, he is very angry and does not want to go in. Closing up in himself, he thinks he has his own right. He does not like the feast and he does not understand the why of his Father's joy. This is a sign that he did not have a great intimacy with the Father, in spite of the fact that they lived in the same House. In fact, if he would have had it, he would have remarked the sadness of the Father for the loss of his younger son and would have understood his joy when his son returned. Those who live very worried about the observance of the Law of God, run the risk of forgetting God himself! The young son, even being far away from home, seemed to know the Father better than the older son who lived with him. Because the younger one had the courage to go back home to his Father, while the older one no longer wants to enter the house of the Father. He is not aware that the Father without him, will lose his joy. Because he, the older son, is also son as much as the younger one!

- Luke 15, 28a-30: The attitude of the Father and the response of the older son. The Father goes out of the house, and begs the older son to enter into the house. But he answers: "All these years I have slaved for you and never once disobeyed any orders of yours, yet you never offered me so much as a kid for me to celebrate with my friends. But for this son of yours, when he comes back after swallowing up your property, he and his loose women, you kill the calf we had been fattening". The older son also wants feast and joy, but only with his own friends. Not with his brother and much less with his Father, and he does not even call brother his own brother, but rather "this your son", as if he were no longer his brother. And he, the older brother, speaks about prostitutes. It is his malice which makes him interpret the life of his younger brother in this way. How many times the older brother interprets badly the life of the younger brother. How many times, we Catholics interpret badly the life and the religion of others! The attitude of the Father is the contrary! He accepts the younger son, but does not want to lose the older son. Both of them form part of the family. One cannot exclude the other!

- Luke 15, 31-32: The final response of the Father. In the same way, like the Father who does not pay attention to the arguments of the younger son, in the same way he does not pay attention to those of the older son and he says: "My son, you are with me always and all I have is yours, but it was only right we should celebrate and rejoice, because your brother here was dead and has come to life; he was lost and is found!" Is it that the older son was really aware that he was always with his Father and to find in his presence the reason for his joy? The expression of the Father: "All I have is yours!" includes also the younger son who has returned! The older brother does not have the right to make a distinction, and if he wants to be the son of the Father, he has to accept him as he is and not as he would like the Father to be! The parable does not

say which was the final response of the older brother. It is up to the older son, whom we are, to give it!

- The one who experiences the gratuitous and surprising irruption of the love of God in his life becomes joyful and wishes to communicate this joy to others. The salvation action of God is a source of joy: “Rejoice with me!” (Lk 15, 6.9). And from this experience of God’s gratuitousness emerges the sense of feast and joy (Lk 15, 32). At the end of the parable, the Father asks to be happy and to celebrate, to feast. The joy is threatened by the older son, who does not want to enter. He thinks he has the right to joy only with his own friends and does not want to share the joy with all the members of the same human family. He represents those who consider themselves just and observant, and who think that they do not need any conversion.

4) Personal questions

- Which is the image of God that I have since my childhood? Has it changed during these past years? If it has changed, why?
- With which of the two sons do I identify myself: with the younger one or with the older one? Why?

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: Sunday, March 23, 2014

*The Meeting of Jesus with the Samaritan Woman
A Dialogue that brings new life
John 4,5-42*

1. Opening prayer

Lord Jesus, send your Spirit to help us read the Scriptures in the same way that you read them to the disciples on the road to Emmaus. With the light of the Word in the Bible, you helped them to discover the presence of God in the distressing events surrounding your condemnation to death. The cross, which seemed to put an end to all hope, was revealed to them as the source of life and resurrection.

Create in us the silence necessary to hear your voice in creation and in the Scriptures, in the events of daily life and in people, above all in the poor and the suffering. May your word give us direction, just as it did to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, so that we too will experience the power of your resurrection and bear witness to

others that you are alive in our midst as the source of community, of justice and of peace. We ask this of you, Jesus, son of Mary, you who revealed the Father to us and sent us your Spirit. Amen.

2. Reading

a) A key for unlocking the text:

The text describes the dialogue between Jesus and the Samaritan woman. It is a very human conversation, which shows how Jesus related to people and how he himself learned and became enriched in talking with others. While reading the text, try to be aware of *what surprises you most about the attitude both of Jesus and the woman.*

b) A division of the text to assist a careful reading:

Jn 4,5-6: Sets the scene in which the dialogue takes place

Jn 4,7-26: Describes the dialogue between Jesus and the woman

7-15: about water and thirst

16-18: about the husband and family

19-25: about religion and the place for adoration

Jn 4,27-30: Describes the effect of the conversation on the woman

Jn 4,31-38: Describes the effect of the conversation on Jesus

Jn 4,39-42: Describes the effect on the mission of Jesus in Samaria

c) The text:

5-6: So he came to a city of Samaria, called Sychar, near the field that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and so Jesus, wearied as he was with his journey, sat down beside the well. It was about the sixth hour.

7-15: There came a woman of Samaria to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food. The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans. Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." The woman said to him, "Sir, you have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep; where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank from it himself, and his sons, and his cattle?" Jesus said to her, "Every one who drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst; the water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling up

to eternal life." The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw."

16-18: Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here." The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and he whom you now have is not your husband; this you said truly."



19-26: The woman said to him, "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain; and you say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship." Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for such the Father seeks to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ); when he comes, he will show us all things." Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am he."

27-30: Just then his disciples came. They marvelled that he was talking with a woman, but none said, "What do you wish?" or, "Why are you talking with her?" So the woman left her water jar, and went away into the city, and said to the people, "Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?" They went out of the city and were coming to him.

31-38: Meanwhile the disciples besought him, saying, "Rabbi, eat." But he said to them, "I have food to eat of which you do not know." So the disciples said to one another, "Has any one brought him food?" Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work. Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, then comes the harvest? I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see how the fields are already white for harvest. He who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' I sent you to reap that for which you did not labour; others have laboured, and you have entered into their labour."

39-42: Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me all that I ever did." So when the Samaritans came to him, they

asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of your words that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Saviour of the world."

3. A moment of silent prayer

so that the Word of God can enter into us and light up our lives.

4. Some questions

to help us in our meditation and prayer.

- a) What most attracted your attention in Jesus' attitude to the woman during the dialogue? What method did Jesus use to help the woman become aware of a deeper dimension to life?
- b) What most attracted your attention about the attitude of the Samaritan woman during her conversation with Jesus? How did she influence Jesus?
- c) Where in the Old Testament, is water associated with the gift of life and the gift of the Holy Spirit?
- d) How does Jesus' attitude during the conversation question me or touch something within me or correct me?
- e) The Samaritan woman led the discussion towards religion. If you could come across Jesus and talk to him, what would you like to talk about? Why?
- f) Do I adore God in spirit and in truth or do I find my security in rituals and regulations?

5. A key to the reading

for those who wish to go deeper.

a) The symbolism of water:

* Jesus uses the word *water* in two senses. The first sense is the *material*, normal sense of water that one drinks; the second is the *symbolic* sense as the source of life and the gift of the Spirit. Jesus uses a language that people can understand and, at the same time, awakes in them, the desire to go deeper and to discover a more profound meaning to life.

* The symbolic sense of water has its roots in the Old Testament, where it is frequently a symbol for the action of the Spirit of God in people. For example, Jeremiah compares running water to water in a cistern (Jer. 2,13). The more water is taken from a cistern, the less it has; the more water is taken from a stream of living water, the more it has. Other texts from the Old Testament: Is.12,3; 49,10; 55,1; Ez.

47, 1-3. Jesus knew the traditions of his people and he uses these in his conversation with the Samaritan woman. Suggesting the symbolic meaning of water, he suggests to her (and to the readers) various episodes and phrases from the Old Testament.

b) The dialogue between Jesus and the woman:

* Jesus meets the woman at the well, a traditional place for meetings and conversations (Gen 24,10-27;29,1-14). He starts off from his own very real need because he is thirsty. He does this in such a way that the woman feels needed and she serves him. Jesus makes himself needy in her regard. From his question, he makes it possible for the woman to become aware that he depends on her to give him something to drink. Jesus awakens in her the desire to help and to serve.

* The conversation between Jesus and the woman has two levels.

(i) **The superficial level**, in the material sense of *water* that quenches someone's thirst, and in the normal sense of *husband* as the father of a family. At this level the conversation is tense and difficult and does not flow. The Samaritan woman has the upper hand. At the beginning, Jesus tries to meet her by talking about daily chores (fetching *water*), but he does not succeed. Then he tries by talking about family (call your *husband*), and still there is no breakthrough. Finally the woman speaks about religion (the place of *adoration*). Jesus then gets through to her by the door she herself has opened.

(ii) **The deeper level**, in the symbolic sense of *water* as the image of the new life brought by Jesus, and of the *husband* as the symbol of the union of God with the people. At this level, the conversation flows perfectly. After revealing that he himself is offering the water of new life, Jesus says, "Go and get your husband and then return". In the past, the Samaritans had five husbands, or five idols, attached to the five groups of people who were taken off by the King of Assyria (2 Kings 17, 30-31). The sixth husband, the one the woman had at present, was not truly her husband: "the one you have now is not your husband" (Jn. 4,18). What the people had did not respond to their deepest desire: union with God, as a husband who unites himself to his spouse (Is. 62,5; 54,5). The true husband, the seventh, is Jesus, as promised by Hosea: "I will espouse you to me forever; I will espouse you in right and in justice, in love and in mercy. I will espouse you in fidelity, and you shall know the Lord." (Hos. 2, 21-22). Jesus is the bridegroom who has arrived (Mk. 2, 19) to bring new life to the woman who has been searching for it her whole life long, and until now, has never found it. If the people accept Jesus as "husband", they will have access to God wherever they are, both in spirit and in truth (vv. 23-24).

* Jesus declares his thirst to the Samaritan woman but he does not drink. This is a sign that we are talking about a symbolic thirst, which had to do with his mission: the thirst

to accomplish the will of his Father (Jn. 4, 34). This thirst is ever present in Jesus and will be until his death. At the moment of his death, he says, "I am thirsty" (Jn. 19, 28). He declares his thirst for the last time and so he can say, "It is accomplished." Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. (Jn. 19,30). His mission had been accomplished.

c) The importance of women in the Gospel of John:

* In John's Gospel, women feature prominently seven times, which are decisive for the spreading of the Good News. To women are given functions and missions, some of which, in the other Gospels, are attributed to men:

- At the wedding feast in Cana, the mother of Jesus recognises the limits of the Old Testament and affirms the law of the Gospel, "Do whatever he tells you". (Jn. 2, 1-11).

- The Samaritan woman is the first person to have revealed to her by Jesus the great secret, that he is the Messiah. "It is I who speak to you." (Jn. 4,26). She then becomes the evangeliser of Samaria (Jn. 4, 28-30. 39-42).

- The woman, who is called an adulteress, at the moment of receiving the forgiveness of Jesus, becomes the judge of the patriarchal society (or of male power) that seeks to condemn her. (Jn. 8, 1-11).

- In the other Gospels it is Peter who makes the solemn profession of faith in Jesus (Mt. 16, 16; Mk. 8,29; Lk. 9,20). In the Gospel of John, it is Martha, sister of Mary and Lazarus, who makes the solemn profession of faith (Jn. 11,27).

- Mary, the sister of Martha, anoints the feet of Jesus for the day of his burial (Jn. 12,7). At the time of Jesus, the one who died on a cross was not buried nor embalmed. Mary anticipated the anointing of Jesus' body. This means that she accepted Jesus as the Messiah-Suffering Servant, who must die on the cross. Peter did not accept this (Jn.13,8) and sought to dissuade Jesus from this path (Mt. 16,22). In this way, Mary is presented as a model for the other disciples.

- At the foot of the cross, Jesus says, "Woman, behold your son; son, behold your mother" (Jn. 19,25-27). The Church is born at the foot of the cross. Mary is the model for the Christian community.

- Mary Magdalene must announce the Good News to the brothers (Jn. 20,11-18). She receives an order, without which all the other orders given to the apostles would have no effect or value.

* The Mother of Jesus appears twice in John's Gospel: at the beginning, at the wedding feast in Cana (Jn. 2, 1-5), and at the end, at the foot of the cross (Jn. 19, 25-

27). In both cases, she represents the Old Testament that waits for the arrival of the New, and, in both cases, assists its arrival. Mary unites what has gone before with what would come later. At Cana, it is she, the Mother of Jesus, symbol of the Old Testament, who perceives its limits and takes steps so that the New will arrive. At the hour of Jesus' death, it is the Mother of Jesus, who welcomes the "Beloved Disciple". In this case the Beloved Disciple is the new community, which has grown around Jesus. It is the child that has been born from the Old Testament. In response to Jesus' request, the son, the New Testament, welcomes the Mother, the Old Testament, into his home. The two must journey together. The New Testament cannot be understood without the Old. It would be a building without a foundation. The Old without the New would be incomplete. It would be a tree without fruit.

6. Psalm 19 (18)

God speaks to us through nature and through the Bible

The heavens are telling the glory of God;
and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.

Day to day pours forth speech,
and night to night declares knowledge.

There is no speech, nor are there words;
their voice is not heard;
yet their voice goes out through all the earth,
and their words to the end of the world.

In them he has set a tent for the sun,
which comes forth like a bridegroom leaving his chamber,
and like a strong man runs its course with joy.

Its rising is from the end of the heavens,
and its circuit to the end of them;
and there is nothing hid from its heat.

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

The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever;

the ordinances of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether.
More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold;
sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb.
Moreover by them is thy servant warned;
in keeping them there is great reward.
But who can discern his errors?
Clear thou me from hidden faults.
Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins;
let them not have dominion over me!
Then I shall be blameless,
and innocent of great transgression.
Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord,
my rock and my redeemer.

7. Final Prayer

Lord Jesus, we thank you for your word, which has helped us see better the will of the Father. Let your Spirit illumine all that we do and give us the strength to carry out that which your Word has made us see. Let us, like Mary, your Mother, not only listen to the Word but also put it into practice. You who live and reign with the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit forever and ever. Amen.

Lectio Divina: Monday, March 24, 2014

Lent Time

1) Opening prayer

Just and holy God,
our loving Father,
you offered us your hand in friendship
and you sent us your Son Jesus
to go with us the road
of obedience and loyalty. God, we often hurt this friendship,
we act as if we were not your sons and daughters.

See the look of shame on our faces.

Forgive us, for we count on you.

Accept our thanks

for continuing to take us as we are

and loving us notwithstanding our sins.

We ask you this through Christ our Lord.

2) Gospel Reading - Luke 4, 24-30

And Jesus went on, 'In truth I tell you, no prophet is ever accepted in his own country.

'There were many widows in Israel, I can assure you, in Elijah's day, when heaven remained shut for three years and six months and a great famine raged throughout the land, but Elijah was not sent to any one of these: he was sent to a widow at Zarephath, a town in Sidonia. And in the prophet Elisha's time there were many suffering from virulent skin-diseases in Israel, but none of these was cured -- only Naaman the Syrian.'

When they heard this everyone in the synagogue was enraged. They sprang to their feet and hustled him out of the town; and they took him up to the brow of the hill their town was built on, intending to throw him off the cliff, but he passed straight through the crowd and walked away.

3) Reflection

- Today's Gospel (Lk 4, 24-30) forms part of a larger part (Lk 4, 14-32) Jesus had presented his program in the Synagogue of Nazareth, using a text from Isaiah which spoke about the poor, the prisoners, the blind and the oppressed (Is 61, 1-2) and which mirrored the situation of the people of Galilee at the time of Jesus. In the name of God, Jesus takes a stand and defines his mission: to proclaim the Good News to the poor, to proclaim liberation to prisoners, to give back their sight to the blind, to restore liberty to the oppressed. After finishing the reading, he updated the text and says: "Today this text is being fulfilled even while you are listening. !" (Lk 4, 21). All those present were astonished (Lk 4, 16, 22b). But immediately after there was a reaction of discredit. The people in the Synagogue were scandalized and did not want to know anything about Jesus. They said: "Is he not the son of Joseph?" (Lk 4, 22b). Why were they scandalized? Which is the reason for this unexpected reaction?
- Because Jesus quoted the text of Isaiah only to the part that says: "to proclaim a year of favour from the Lord", and he omits the end of the sentence which says: "to proclaim a day of vengeance for our God" (Is 61, 2). The people of Nazareth remained surprised because Jesus omitted the phrase on vengeance. They wanted the Good

News of the liberation of the oppressed to be an action of vengeance on the part of God against the oppressors. In this case the coming of the Kingdom would be only a superficial change, and not a change or conversion of the system. Jesus does not accept this way of thinking. His experience of God the Father helps him to understand better the significance of the prophecies. He takes away the vengeance. The people of Nazareth do not accept that proposal and the authority of Jesus begins to diminish: “Is he not Joseph’s son?”

- Luke 4, 24: No prophet is ever accepted in his own country. The people of Nazareth was jealous because of the miracles which Jesus had worked in Capernaum, because he had not worked them in Nazareth. Jesus answers: “No prophet is ever accepted in his own country!” In fact, they did not accept the new image of God which Jesus communicated to them through this new and freer interpretation of Isaiah. The message of the God of Jesus went beyond the limits of the race of the Jews and opened itself to accept the excluded and the whole humanity.

- Luke 4, 25-27: Two stories of the Old Testament. In order to help the community to overcome the scandal and to understand the universality of God, Jesus uses two well known stories of the Old Testament: one of Elijah and the other one of Elisha. Through these stories he criticized the people of Nazareth who were so closed up in themselves. Elijah was sent to the foreign widow of Zarephah (1 Kg 17, 7-16). Elisha was sent to take care of the foreigner of Syria (2 Kg 5, 14).

- Luke 4, 28-30: They intended to throw him off the cliff, but he passed straight through the crowd and walked away. What Jesus said did not calm down the people. On the contrary! The use of these two passages of the Bible also caused them to get more angry. The community of Nazareth reached the point of wanting to kill Jesus. And thus, at the moment in which he presented his project to accept the excluded, Jesus himself was excluded! But he remained calm! The anger of the others did not succeed to make him change his mind. In this way, Luke indicates that it is difficult to overcome the mentality of privilege which is closed up in itself. And he showed that the polemic attitude of the Pagans already existed in the time of Jesus. Jesus had the same difficulty which the Hebrew community had in the time of Luke.

4) Personal questions

- Is Jesus’ program also my program, our program? Is my attitude that of Jesus or that of the people of Nazareth?
- Who are those excluded whom we should accept better in our community?

5) Concluding Prayer

My whole being yearns

and pines for Yahweh's courts,
My heart and my body cry out
for joy to the living God. (Ps 84,2)

Lectio Divina: Tuesday, March 25, 2014

*God's covenant with humanity
Mary's yes and our yes
Luke 1,26-38*

1. Opening prayer

Merciful Father, in this holy time of prayer and of listening to your Word, send also to me your holy angel that I may receive the proclamation of salvation and that, after opening my heart, I may offer my yes to Love. Let, I beg you, the Holy Spirit overshadow me as an overwhelming power. As from now, Father, I do not wish to express anything other than my “Yes!” and to say to you: “Behold, I am here for you. Do unto me whatever pleases you”. Amen.

2. Reading

a) The context of the passage:

The story of the annunciation takes us from the temple, a holy place par excellence, to the house, to the intimacy of a personal meeting of God with his creature; it leads us into ourselves, into the deepest part of our being and our story, where God alone can reach and touch us. The announcement of the birth of John the Baptist had opened the sterile womb of Elisabeth, thus overcoming the absolute powerlessness of humankind and transforming it into the ability to collaborate with God. On the other hand, the announcement of the birth of Jesus, knocks on the door of a fertile womb of the one who is “full of grace” and awaits a reply: it is God who waits for our yes so as to work everything in us.

b) An aid to the reading of this passage:

vv. 26-27: The first two verses place us at the time and sacred space of the event on which we are meditating and which we relive: we are in the sixth month from the conception of John the Baptist and in Nazareth, a city in Galilee, the land of the marginalized and unclean. Here God has come down to speak with a virgin, to speak to our hearts.

The persons involved in this unsettling event are presented to us: Gabriel, the messenger of God, a young woman called Mary and her spouse Joseph of the royal house of David. We too are made welcome into this company and are called to enter into the mystery.

vv. 28-29: These are the very first words of the dialogue between God and his creature. Just a few words, a mere breath, but all-powerful words that disturb the heart, that question deeply the meaning of human life, plans and expectations. The angel announces joy, grace and the presence of God; Mary is disturbed and asks herself how can any of this be happening to her. Where can such a joy come from? How can such a great grace, that can change her very being, be hers?

vv. 30-33: These are the central verses of the excerpt: it is the explosion of the announcement, the manifestation of the gift of God, of his omnipotence in the life of human beings. Gabriel, the strong, speaks of Jesus: the eternal king, the Saviour, the God made child, the humble all-powerful. He speaks of Mary, of her womb, of her life that she was chosen to be the gateway to welcoming God in this world and into the lives of all people. Even at this stage of the events, God begins to draw near, to knock. He stands, attentive, by the door of the heart of Mary; and even now by our house, our hearts...

v. 34: Mary, faced by God's proposal, allows herself to stand naked, she allows herself to be read to her very depths. She speaks of herself, her heart, her wishes. She knows that for God the impossible is possible, she does not doubt or harden her heart and mind, she does not count the cost; she only wants to be fully available, open, and allows herself to be reached by that humanly impossible touch, but one already written, already realised in God. In a gesture of utter poverty, she places before God her virginity, her not knowing man. This is a complete and absolute surrender of self, full of faith and trust. It is her preliminary yes.

vv. 35-37: God, most humble, gives an answer; the all-powerful bends over the fragility of this woman, who represents each one of us. The dialogue continues, the covenant grows and is strengthened. God reveals the how, he speaks of the Holy Spirit, of the fruitful overshadowing, which does no violence, does not break, but preserves intact. He speaks of the human experience of Elisabeth, he reveals another impossible thing made possible; almost like a guarantee or security. And then comes the last word when one must make a choice: to say yes or no, believe or doubt, dissolve or harden oneself, to open the door or close it. "Nothing is impossible for God".

v. 38: The last verse seems to contain an infinity. Mary says her "Here I am", she opens herself wide to God and then the meeting, the union takes place forever. God

enters into the human and the human becomes the place of God: these are the most sublime Nuptials possible on earth. And yet, the Gospel ends on a sad and hard note: Mary stays alone, the angel leaves. What remains, however, is the yes pronounced to God and God's presence; what remains is real Life.

c) The Text:

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the House of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. He went in and said to her, 'Rejoice, you who enjoy God's favour! The Lord is with you.' She was deeply disturbed by these words and asked herself what this greeting could mean, but the angel said to her, 'Mary, do not be afraid; you have won God's favour. Look! You are to conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you must name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David; he will rule over the House of Jacob for ever and his reign will have no end.' Mary said to the angel, 'But how can this come about, since I have no knowledge of man?' The angel answered, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will cover you with its shadow. And so the child will be holy and will be called Son of God. And I tell you this too: your cousin Elizabeth also, in her old age, has conceived a son, and she whom people called barren is now in her sixth month, for nothing is impossible to God.' Mary said, 'You see before you the Lord's servant, let it happen to me as you have said.' And the angel left her.

3. A moment of prayerful silence

I have read and listened to the words of the Gospel. Now I stand in silence ... God is present, at the door, and asks for shelter, yes, even from me and from my poor life ...

4. A few questions

- a) God's announcement, his angel, enters my life, stands before me and speaks to me. Am I prepared to welcome him, to give him space, to listen to him attentively?
- b) Suddenly I receive an upsetting announcement; God speaks to me of joy, grace and presence. All the things that I have been seeking for so long, always. Who can make me really happy? Am I willing to trust in his happiness and his presence?
- c) Not much is needed, just a movement of the heart, of my being; He is already aware of this. He is already overwhelming me with light and love. He says to me: "You have found favour in my sight". So, I please God? He finds me pleasant, loveable? Yes, that is how it really is. Why is it that I would not believe it before? Why have I not listened to him?

d) The Lord Jesus wants to come into this world also through me; he wants to reach my brothers and sisters through the paths of my life, of my being. Would I lead him astray? Would I refuse him, keep him at a distance? Would I wipe him out of my story, my life?

5. A key to the reading

Some important and strong words that resonate in this passage of the Gospel.

- Rejoice!

This is a really strange greeting from God to his creature; it seems hard to explain and perhaps even senseless. And yet, for centuries it resonated in the pages of Sacred Scripture and thus also on the lips of the Hebrew people. Rejoice, be glad, exult! Many times the prophets had repeated this gentle breath of God and had shouted the silent beat of his heart for his people, his remnant. I read this in Joel: “Land, do not be afraid; be glad, rejoice, for Yahweh has done great things... (2: 21-23); in Zephaniah: “Shout for joy, daughter of Zion, Israel, shout aloud! Rejoice, exult with all your heart, daughter of Jerusalem! Yahweh has repealed your sentence” (3: 14); in Zechariah: “Sing, rejoice, daughter of Zion, for now I am coming to live among you – Yahweh declares!” (2, 14). I read and listen to it, today, I say it also in my heart, in my life; a joy is announced to me, a new happiness, never before experienced. I rediscover the great things that the Lord has done for me; I experience the freedom that comes from his pardon: I am no longer sentenced, but graced forever; I live the experience of the presence of the Lord next to me, in me. Yes, He has come to dwell in our midst; He is once more setting up his tent in the land of my heart, of my existence. Lord, as the Psalm says, you rejoice in your creatures (Ps 104: 31); and I too rejoice in you, thanks to you, my joy is in you (Ps 104: 34).

- The Lord is with you

These simple and enlightened words pronounced by the angel to Mary, liberate an all-powerful force; I realise that these words alone would suffice to save my life, to lift me up again from whatever fall or humiliation, to bring me back when I go astray. The fact that He, my Lord, is with me, keeps me alive, gives me courage and trust to go on being. If I am, it is because He is with me. Who knows but that the experience of Isaac told in Scripture might not be valid for me, the most beautiful thing imaginable that could happen to a person who believes in and loves God, when one day Abimelech came to Isaac with his men to tell him: “It became clear to us that Yahweh was with you” (Gen 26: 28) and then asked to become friends and form an alliance. Would that the same thing might be said of me; would that I could show that the Lord is truly with me, in my life, in my desires, in my affections, in my choices and actions; would

that others might meet Him through me. Perhaps for this, it is necessary for me to absorb more the presence of God, for me to eat and drink of Him.

Let me go to the school of Scripture, to read and re-read some passages where the voice of the Lord tells me again and again of this truth and, while He speaks, to be transformed, ever more in-dwelt. “Remain for the present in that country; I shall be with you and bless you” (Gen 26: 3). “To Joshua son of Nun, Yahweh gave this order: Be strong and stand firm, for you are to be the one to bring the Israelites into the country which I have promised them on oath, and I myself shall be with you” (Dt 31: 23). “They will fight against you but will not overcome you, because I am with you to save you and rescue you” (Jer 15: 20). “The angel of Yahweh appeared to him and said: Yahweh is with you, valiant warrior!” (Judges 6: 12). “Yahweh appeared to him the same night and said: I am the God of your father Abraham. Do not be afraid, for I am with you. I shall bless you and multiply your offspring for my servant Abraham’s sake” (Gen 26: 24). “Be sure, I am with you; I shall keep you safe wherever you go, and bring you back to this country, for I shall never desert you until I have done what I have promised you” (Gen 28: 15). “Do not be afraid, for I am with you; do not be alarmed, for I am your God. I give you strength, truly I help you, truly I hold you firm with my saving right hand” (Is 41: 10)

- Do not be afraid

The Bible is packed with this pronouncement full of kindness; like a river of mercy, these words are found throughout the sacred books, from Genesis to the Apocalypse. It is the Father who repeats to his children not to be afraid, because He is with them, he will not abandon them, he will not forget them, He will not leave them in the hands of their enemies. It is like a declaration of love from God to humanity, to each one of us; it is a pledge of fidelity that is relayed from hand to hand, from heart to heart, and finally comes down to us. Abraham heard these words and after him his son Isaac, then the patriarchs, Moses, Joshua, David, Solomon and, with them, Jeremiah and all the prophets. No one is excluded from this embrace of salvation that the Father offers his children, even those furthest from him, most rebellious against him. Mary knows how to listen to these words and knows how to believe full of faith, in an attitude of absolute surrender; She listens and believes, welcomes and lives for us too. She is the strong and courageous woman who opens herself to the coming of God, letting go of all fears, incredulity and a closed spirit. She repeats these same words of God in our lives and invites us to believe like her.

- You enjoy God’s favour

“Lord, if I enjoy favour in your sight...”. This is the prayer that time and time again comes out of the lips and hearts of those who seek refuge in the Lord; the Scriptures

tell us about such people, we come across them in our crossroads when we know not where to go, when we feel hounded by solitude or by temptation, when we experience abandonment, betrayals, heavy defeats of our own existence. When we no longer have anyone and we fail to find even ourselves, then we too, like them, find ourselves praying by repeating these same words: “Lord, if I enjoy favour in your sight...”. Who knows how often we have repeated these words, even alone and in silence. But today, here, in this simple passage of the Gospel, we are forestalled, we are welcomed in anticipation; we need no longer plead, because we have already found everything that we always sought and much more. We have received freely, we are overwhelmed and now we can overflow.

- Nothing is impossible to God

I have nearly come to the end of this strong journey of grace and liberation; I now come across a word that shakes me in my depths. My faith is being sifted; the Lord is testing me, scrutinising me, testing my heart. What the angel says here in front of Mary, had already been proclaimed many times in the Old Testament; now the time has come for the fulfilment, now all the impossible things come to pass. God becomes man; the Lord becomes friend, brother; the distant is very close. And I, even I, small and poor as I am, am given to share in the immensity of this gift, this grace; I am told that in my life too the impossible becomes possible. I only have to believe, to give my consent. But this means that I have to allow myself to be shattered by the power of God; to surrender to Him, who will transform me, free me and renew me. Not even this is impossible. Yes, I can be reborn today, here and now, by the grace of the voice that has spoken to me, that has reached me even to the very depths of my heart. I seek and transcribe the passages of Scripture that repeat this truth. And as I write them, as I re-read them and say them slowly, devouring every word, and what they say takes place in me... Genesis 18: 14; Job 42: 2; Jeremiah 32: 17; Jeremiah 32: 27; Zechariah 8: 6; Matthew 19: 26; Luke 18: 27.

- Here I am

Now I cannot escape, nor can I avoid the conclusion. I knew from the beginning that here, in this word, so small and yet so full, so final, that God was waiting for me. The appointment of love, of the covenant between Him and me had been fixed precisely on this word, just a gentle voice, just a kiss. I am unsettled by the richness of the presence I feel in this “Here I am!”; I need not make much effort to recall the number of times that God first pronounced and repeated these words to me. He is the ‘Here I am’ made man, absolutely faithful, unforgettable. I only need to tune into him, only find his footprints in the sand of my poverty, of my desert; I only need to welcome his infinite love that never ceases to seek me, to stay close to me, to walk with me

wherever I go. The 'Here I am' has already been pronounced and realised, it is already real. How many before me and how many today have experienced this! I am not alone. I still remain silent, listening before I reply...

"Here I am!" (Is 65: 1) God repeats; Mary replies, "Here I am, I am the servant of the Lord"; and Christ says, "I come to do your will" (Ps 39: 8)...

6. A time of prayer: Psalm 138

Ref. Father, into your hands I commend my life.

Yahweh, you examine me and know me,

you know when I sit, when I rise,

you understand my thoughts from afar.

You watch when I walk or lie down,

you know every detail of my conduct.

A word is not yet on my tongue before you,

Yahweh, know all about it.

You fence me in, behind and in front,

you have laid your hand upon me.

Such amazing knowledge is beyond me,

a height to which I cannot attain.

Where shall I go to escape your spirit?

Where shall I flee from your presence?

If I scale the heavens you are there,

if I lie flat in Sheol, there you are.

You created my inmost self,

knit me together in my mother's womb.

For so many marvels I thank you;

a wonder am I, and all your works are wonders.

You knew me through and through,

How hard for me to grasp your thoughts,

how many, God, there are!

If I count them, they are more than the grains of sand;

if I come to an end, I am still with you.

God, examine me and know my heart,

test me and know my concerns.

Make sure that I am not on my way to ruin,

and guide me on the road of eternity.

7. Closing prayer

Father, you came down to me, you have come to me, you have touched my heart, you have spoken to me and promised joy, presence and salvation. By the grace of the Holy Spirit, who overshadows me, I, together with Mary, have been able to say to you yes, the 'Here I am' of my life for you. Now there remains only the force of your promise, of your truth: "You are to conceive and bear Jesus". Lord, here is the womb of my life, of my being, of all that I am and have, open before you. I place all things in you, in your heart. Enter, come, come down again, I beg you, and make me fruitful, make me one who gives birth to Christ in this world. May the overflowing love I receive from you find its fullness and truth in touching the brothers and sisters that you place beside me. May our meeting, Father, be open, a gift to all. May Jesus be the Saviour. Amen.

Lectio Divina: Wednesday, March 26, 2014

Lent Time

1) Opening prayer

Lord our God,

your prophets remind us

in season and out of season

of our responsibilities toward you

and toward the world of people. When they disturb and upset us,

let it be a holy disturbance

that makes us restless, eager to do your will

and to bring justice and love around us.

We ask you this through Christ our Lord.

2) Gospel Reading - Matthew 5, 17-19

'Do not imagine that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets. I have come not to abolish but to complete them. In truth I tell you, till heaven and earth disappear, not

one dot, not one little stroke, is to disappear from the Law until all its purpose is achieved.

Therefore, anyone who infringes even one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be considered the least in the kingdom of Heaven; but the person who keeps them and teaches them will be considered great in the kingdom of Heaven.

3) Reflection

- Today's Gospel (Mt 5, 17-19) teaches how to observe the law of God in such a way that its practice indicates in what its complete fulfilment consists (Mt 5, 17-19). Matthew writes in order to help the communities of the converted Jews to overcome the criticism of the brothers of their own race who accused them saying: "You are unfaithful to the Law of Moses". Jesus himself had been accused of infidelity to the Law of God. Matthew has the clarifying response of Jesus concerning his accusers. Thus, he gives some light to help the communities solve their problems.
- Using images of daily life, with simple and direct words, Jesus had said that the mission of the community, its reason for being, is that of being salt and light! He had given some advice regarding each one of the two images. Then follow two or three brief verses of today's Gospel.
- Matthew 5, 17-18: Not one dot, nor one stroke is to disappear from the Law. There were several different tendencies in the communities of the first Christians. Some thought that it was not necessary to observe the laws of the Old Testament, because we are saved by faith in Jesus and not by the observance of the Law (Rm 3, 21-26). Others accepted Jesus, the Messiah, but they did not accept the liberty of spirit with which some of the communities lived the presence of Jesus. They thought that being Jews they had to continue to observe the laws of the Old Testament (Acts 15, 1.5). But there were Christians who lived so fully in the freedom of the Spirit, who no longer looked at the life of Jesus of Nazareth, nor to the Old Testament and they even went so far as to say: "Anathema Jesus!" (1 Co 12, 3). Observing these tensions, Matthew tries to find some balance between both extremes. The community should be a space, where the balance can be attained and lived. The answer given by Jesus to those who criticized him continued to be actual for the communities: "I have not come to abolish the law, but to complete it!" The communities could not be against the Law, nor could they close up themselves in the observance of the law. Like Jesus, they should advance, and show, in practice, which was the objective which the law wanted to attain in the life of persons, that is, in the perfect practice of love.
- Matthew 5, 17-18: Not one dot or stroke will disappear from the Law. It is for those who wanted to get rid of all the law that Matthew recalls the other parable of Jesus:

“Anyone who infringes even one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be considered the least in the Kingdom of Heaven; but the person who keeps them and teaches them will be considered great in the Kingdom of Heaven”. The great concern in Matthew’s Gospel is to show that the Old Testament, Jesus of Nazareth and the life in the Spirit cannot be separated. The three of them form part of the same and unique project of God and communicate to us the certainty of faith: The God of Abraham and of Sarah is present in the midst of the community by faith in Jesus of Nazareth who sends us his Spirit.

4) Personal questions

- How do I see and live the law of God: as a growing horizon of light or as an imposition which limits my freedom?
- What can we do today for our brothers and sisters who consider all this type of discussion as obsolete and not actual? What can we learn from them?

5) Concluding Prayer

Praise Yahweh, Jerusalem,

Zion, praise your God.

For he gives strength to the bars of your gates,

he blesses your children within you. (Ps 145,12-13)

Lectio Divina: Thursday, March 27, 2014

Lent Time

1) Opening prayer

Lord our God,

many of us never had it so good

and so we have become smug and self-satisfied,

happy in our own little world. God, may our ears remain open to your word

and our hearts to you

and to our brothers and sisters.

Do not allow us to forget you,

or to place our trust in ourselves.

Make us restless for you

through Jesus Christ our Lord.

2) Gospel Reading - Luke 11, 14-23

He was driving out a devil and it was dumb; and it happened that when the devil had gone out the dumb man spoke, and the people were amazed. But some of them said, 'It is through Beelzebul, the prince of devils, that he drives devils out.'

Others asked him, as a test, for a sign from heaven; but, knowing what they were thinking, he said to them, 'Any kingdom which is divided against itself is heading for ruin, and house collapses against house. So, too, with Satan: if he is divided against himself, how can his kingdom last? - since you claim that it is through Beelzebul that I drive devils out. Now if it is through Beelzebul that I drive devils out, through whom do your own sons drive them out? They shall be your judges, then. But if it is through the finger of God that I drive devils out, then the kingdom of God has indeed caught you unawares. So long as a strong man fully armed guards his own home, his goods are undisturbed; but when someone stronger than himself attacks and defeats him, the stronger man takes away all the weapons he relied on and shares out his spoil.

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

3) Reflection

- Today's Gospel is that of Luke. We already meditated on the parallel text of Mark (Mk 3, 22-27) during January.

- Luke 11, 14-16: *The diverse reactions before the expulsion of a devil.* Jesus had expelled a devil which was dumb. The expulsion produced two different reactions. On the one side, the crowd of persons who remain astonished and surprised. The people accept Jesus and believe in him. On the other side, those who do not accept Jesus and do not believe in him. Among the latter, some said that Jesus cast out the devils in the name of Beelzebul, the prince of devils, and others wanted a sign from heaven. Mark says that it was a question of the Scribes who had come from Jerusalem (Mk 3,22), who were not in agreement with the liberty of Jesus. They wanted to defend the Tradition against the novelty of Jesus.

- Luke 11, 17-22: Jesus' answer is divided into three parts:

1st part: Comparison with a divided kingdom. (vv. 17-18a) Jesus denounces the absurdity of the calumny of the Scribes. To say that he casts out the devils with the help of the prince of the devils means to deny the evidence. It is the same thing as saying that water is dry, and that the sun is darkness. The Doctors of Jerusalem slandered against him because they did not know how to explain the benefits which Jesus fulfilled for the people. They were afraid to lose their leadership. They felt threatened in their authority before the people.

2nd part: through whom do your own sons drive them out? (

vv. 18b-20) Jesus provokes the accusers and asks: “”But if it is through Beelzebul that I drive out devils, in whose name do your disciples drive them out?” Let them respond and explain themselves! “If I drive out the devil through the finger of God, then the Kingdom of God has indeed caught you unawares”.

3rd part: *when someone stronger than himself attacks and defeats him, the stronger one takes away all weapons.* (vv. 21-22) Jesus compares the devil to a strong man. Nobody, except a stronger person, can rob in the house of a strong man: Jesus is the strongest. This is why he succeeds to enter into the house and to get hold of the strong man. He succeeds in driving out the devils. Jesus seizes the strong man and now robs in his house, that is, he liberates the persons who were under the power of evil. The Prophet Isaiah had used the same comparison to describe the coming of the Messiah (Is 49, 24-25). This is why Luke says that the expulsion of the devil is an evident sign that the Kingdom of God has arrived.

- Luke 11, 23: *Anyone who is not with me is against me.* Jesus ends his response with this phrase: “Anyone who is not with me is against me. And anyone who does not gather in with me throws away”. On another occasion, also regarding the expulsion of a devil, the disciples prevented a man to use the name of Jesus to drive out the devil because he was not one of their group. Jesus answered: “You must not stop him: anyone who is not against you is for you!”. (Lk 9, 50). These two phrases seem to be contradictory, but they are not. The phrase in today’s Gospel is said against the enemies who have a preconception against Jesus: “Anyone who is not with me is against me. And anyone who does not gather in with me throws away”. The preconception and the lack of acceptance make dialogue impossible and break the union. The other phrase is said for the disciples who thought they had the monopoly on Jesus. “Anyone who is not against you is for you!” Many persons who are not Christians practice love, goodness, justice, many times in a much better way than Christians. We cannot exclude them. They are brothers and workers in the construction of the Kingdom. We Christians are not the owners of Jesus. On the contrary: Jesus is our Lord!

4) Personal questions

- “Anyone who is not with me, is against me. And anyone who does not gather in with me, throws away”. How does this take place in my life?
- “Do not stop him, because anyone who is not against you is for you!” How does this take place in my life?

5) Concluding Prayer

Come, let us cry out with joy to Yahweh,
acclaim the rock of our salvation.

Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving,
acclaim him with music. (Ps 95-1-2)

Lectio Divina: Friday, March 28, 2014

Lent Time

1) Opening prayer

God, we do not want to die;
we want to live.

We want to be happy
but without paying the price. We belong to our times,
when sacrifice and suffering are out of fashion.

God, make life worth the pain to be lived,
Give us back the age-old realization
that life means to be born
again and again in pain,
that it may become again
a journey of hope to you,
together with Christ Jesus our Lord.

2) Gospel Reading - Mark 12, 28-34

One of the scribes who had listened to them debating appreciated that Jesus had given a good answer and put a further question to him, 'Which is the first of all the commandments?'

Jesus replied, 'This is the first: Listen, Israel, the Lord our God is the one, only Lord, and you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: You must love your neighbour as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these.'

The scribe said to him, 'Well spoken, Master; what you have said is true, that he is one and there is no other. To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and

strength, and to love your neighbour as yourself, this is far more important than any burnt offering or sacrifice.'

Jesus, seeing how wisely he had spoken, said, 'You are not far from the kingdom of God.' And after that no one dared to question him any more.

3) Reflection

- In today's Gospel (Mk 12, 28b-34), the Scribes and the Doctors of the Law want to know from Jesus which is the greatest commandment of all. Even today, many people want to know what is more important in religion. Some say that it is to be baptized. Others say that it is to go to Mass and to participate in the Sunday Mass. Others still say: to love our neighbour and to struggle for a more just world! Others are concerned only of the appearances and of the tasks in the Church.

- Mark 12, 28: The question of the Doctor of the Law. Some time before the question of the Scribe, the discussion was with the Sadducees concerning faith in the resurrection (Mk 12, 23-27). The doctor who had participated in the debate, was pleased with Jesus' answer, he perceived in it his great intelligence and wishes to profit of this occasion to ask a question to clarify something: "Which is the greatest commandment of all?" At that time; the Jews had an enormous amount of norms to regulate the observance of the Ten Commandments of the Law of God. Some said: "All these norms have the same value, because they all come from God. It is not up to us to introduce any distinction in the things of God". Others said: "Some laws are more important than others, and for this reason, they oblige more!" The Doctor wants to know what Jesus thinks.

- Mark 12, 29-31: The response of Jesus. Jesus responds quoting a passage from the Bible to say that the greatest among the commandments is "to love God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all our strength!" (Dt 6, 4-5). At the time of Jesus, the pious Jews recited this phrase three times a day: in the morning, at noon and in the evening. It was so well known among them just as the Our Father is among us. And Jesus adds, quoting the Bible again: "The second one is: You shall love your neighbour as yourself" (Lec 19, 18). There is no other greater commandment than these two". A brief but very profound response! It is the summary of everything that Jesus teaches on God and his life (Mt 7, 12).

- Mark 12, 32-33: The response of the Doctor of the Law. The doctor agrees with Jesus and concludes: "Well said, to love your neighbour as yourself, this is far more important than any burnt offering or sacrifice". That is, the commandment of love is more important than the commandments which concern the worship and sacrifices of the Temple. The Prophets of the Old Testament already had affirmed this (Ho 6, 6; Ps

40, 6-8; Ps 51, 16-17). Today we would say that the practice of love is more important than novenas, promises, sermons and processions.

- Mark 12, 34: The summary of the Kingdom. Jesus confirms the conclusion of the Doctor and says: “You are not far from the Kingdom of God!”. In fact, the Kingdom of God consists in the union of two loves: love toward God and love toward neighbour. Because if God is Father/Mother, we are all brothers and sisters, and we should show this in practice, living in community. “On these two commandments, depend all the law and the prophets!” (Mt 22, 40). We, disciples, should keep this law in our mind, in our intelligence, in our heart, in our hands and feet, which is the first one, because one cannot reach God without giving oneself totally to one’s neighbour!.
- Jesus had said to the Doctor of the law: “You are not far from the Kingdom of God!”(Mk 12, 34). The Doctor was already close, but in order to be able to enter into the Kingdom he had to still go a step forward. In the Old Testament the criterion of the love toward neighbour was: “Love the neighbour as yourself”. In the New Testament Jesus extends the sense of love: “This is my commandment: love one another as I have loved you! (Jn 15, 12-23). Then the criterion will be “Love the neighbour as Jesus has loved us”. This is the sure path to be able to live together in a more just and fraternal way.

4) Personal questions

- Which is the most important thing in religion for you?
- Today, are we closer or farther away from the Kingdom of God than the Doctor who was praised by Jesus? What do you think?

5) Concluding Prayer

Among the gods there is none to compare with you,
for you are great and do marvellous deeds,
you, God, and none other. (Ps 86,8.10)

Lectio Divina: Saturday, March 29, 2014

Lent Time

1) Opening prayer

Lord our God,
you yourself remind us through your holy people
that all our religious practices,
even this eucharistic sacrifice, are not worth anything

if we use them to bend you our way.

God, may we come to you

in humility and repentance,

ready to encounter you in love

and to turn your way.

Accept us as your sons and daughters,

together with Jesus Christ,

your Son and our Lord for ever.

2) Gospel Reading - Luke 18,9-14

Jesus spoke the following parable to some people who prided themselves on being upright and despised everyone else, "Two men went up to the Temple to pray, one a Pharisee, the other a tax collector.

The Pharisee stood there and said this prayer to himself, "I thank you, God, that I am not grasping, unjust, adulterous like everyone else, and particularly that I am not like this tax collector here. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes on all I get."

The tax collector stood some distance away, not daring even to raise his eyes to heaven; but he beat his breast and said, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner."

This man, I tell you, went home again justified; the other did not. For everyone who raises himself up will be humbled, but anyone who humbles himself will be raised up.'

3) Reflection

- In today's Gospel, Jesus, in order to teach us to pray, tells the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector. Jesus has a different way of seeing things. He saw something positive in the tax collector, of whom everybody said: "He does not know how to pray!" Jesus, through prayer, lived so united to the Father that everything became an expression of prayer for him.
- The way of presenting the parable is very didactic. Luke gives a brief introduction which serves as the key for reading. Then Jesus tells the parable and at the end Jesus himself applies the parable to life.
- Luke 18, 9: The introduction. The parable is presented by the following phrase: "He spoke the following parable to some people who prided themselves on being upright and despised everyone else!" This phrase is Luke's. It refers to the time of Jesus. But it also refers to our own time. There are always persons and groups of persons who

consider themselves upright and faithful and who despise others, considering them ignorant and unfaithful.

- Luke 18, 10-13: The Parable. Two men went up to the Temple to pray: one a Pharisee, the other a tax collector. According to the opinion of people at that time, the tax collectors were not considered at all, and they could not address themselves to God because they were impure persons. In the parable, the Pharisee thanks God because he is better than others. His prayer is nothing other than a praise of himself, an exaltation of his good qualities and contempt for others and for the tax collector. The tax collector does not even raise his eyes, but he beats his breast and says: “God, be merciful to me, a sinner!” He places himself in his own place, that which belongs to him before God.

- Luke 18, 14: The application. If Jesus would have allowed people to express their opinion and say which of the two went home justified, all would have answered: “the Pharisee!” Because at that time, this was the common opinion. Jesus thinks in a different way. For him, the one who returns home justified, in a good relationship with God, is not the Pharisee, but rather the tax collector. Jesus turns all things upside down. It is certain that the religious authority of that time was not pleased with the application which he makes of the parable.

- Jesus prays. Luke informs us, especially, about the life of prayer of Jesus. He presents Jesus in constant prayer. The following is a list of texts of Luke’s Gospel, in which Jesus appears in prayer: Lk 2, 46-50; 3. 21; 4, 1-12; 4, 16; 5, 16; 6, 12; 9, 16.18.28; 10, 21; 11, 1; 22, 32; 22, 7-14; 22, 40-46; 23, 34; 23, 46; 24, 30). In reading Luke’s Gospel you can find other texts which speak about the prayer of Jesus. Jesus lived in contact with the Father. To do the will of the Father was the breathing of his life (Jn 5, 19). Jesus prayed very much and, insisted so that people and his disciples would do the same, because from the union with God springs truth and the person is able to discover and find self, in all reality and humility . In Jesus prayer was intimately bound to concrete facts of life and to the decisions which he had to take. In order to be faithful to the Father’s project, he sought to remain alone with Him in order to listen to Him. Jesus prayed the Psalms. He did it like any other pious Jew and he knew them by heart. Jesus even succeeded in composing his own Psalm. It is the Our Father. His whole life was permanent prayer: “By himself the Son can do nothing; he can do only what he sees the Father doing!” (Jn 5, 19.30). To him can be applied what the Psalm says: “All I can do is pray!” (Ps 109, 4).

4) Personal questions

- Looking into the mirror of this parable, am I like the Pharisee or like the tax collector?

- There are persons who say that they do not know how to pray, but they speak with God all the time. Do you know any persons like this?

5) Concluding Prayer

Have mercy on me, O God, in your faithful love,
in your great tenderness wipe away my offences;
wash me clean from my guilt,
purify me from my sin. (Ps 51,1-2)

Lectio Divina: Sunday, March 30, 2014

*A blind man sees the light
Our eyes open when we live with Jesus
John 9:1-41*

1. Opening prayer

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

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

2. Reading

a) A key to the reading:

The text of the Gospel of the fourth Sunday of Lent invites us to meditate on the healing of a man born blind. It is a short but lively text. It is a concrete example of the way the Fourth Gospel reveals the deep hidden meaning of the events in Jesus' life. The story of the healing of the blind man helps us open our eyes to the picture of Jesus that we each carry within ourselves. We often think of a Jesus who looks like a glorious king, removed from the life of ordinary people! In the Gospels, Jesus is presented as a Servant of the poor, friend of sinners. The picture of the Messiah-King that the Pharisees had in mind, kept us from recognising Jesus the Messiah-Servant. As we read the Gospel, let us try to pay attention to two things: (i) the expert and free

way the blind man reacts to the provocations of the authorities, and (ii) the way the blind man himself opens his eyes concerning Jesus.

b) A division of the text as a help to the reading:

John 9:1-5: Blindness before the evil that exists in the world

John 9:6-7: The sign of the “One sent by God” who will provoke various reactions

John 9:8-13: The reaction of the neighbours

John 9:14-17: The reaction of the Pharisees

John 9:18-23: The reaction of the parents

John 9:24-34: The final judgement of the Pharisees

John 9:35-38: The final attitude of the man born blind

John 9:39-41: A closing reflection

c) Text:

1 As he went along, he saw a man who had been blind from birth. 2 His disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he should have been born blind?' 3 'Neither he nor his parents sinned,' Jesus answered, 'he was born blind so that the works of God might be revealed in him. 4 'As long as day lasts we must carry out the work of the one who sent me; the night will soon be here when no one can work. 5 As long as I am in the world I am the light of the world.'



6 Having said this, he spat on the ground, made a paste with the spittle, put this over the eyes of the blind man, 7 and said to him, 'Go and wash in the Pool of Siloam' (the name means 'one who has been sent'). So he went off and washed and came back able to see.

8 His neighbours and the people who used to see him before (for he was a beggar) said, 'Isn't this the man who used to sit and beg?' 9 Some said, 'Yes, it is the same one.' Others said, 'No, but he looks just like him.' The man himself said, 'Yes, I am the one.' 10 So they said to him, 'Then how is it that your eyes were opened?' 11 He answered, 'The man called Jesus made a paste, daubed my eyes with it and said to me, "Go off and wash at Siloam"; so I went, and when I washed I gained my sight.' 12 They asked, 'Where is he?' He answered, 'I don't know.' 13 They brought to the Pharisees the man who had been blind.

14 It had been a Sabbath day when Jesus made the paste and opened the man's eyes, 15 so when the Pharisees asked him how he had gained his sight, he said, 'He put a paste on my eyes, and I washed, and I can see.' 16 Then some of the Pharisees said, 'That man cannot be from God: he does not keep the Sabbath.' Others said, 'How can a sinner produce signs like this?' And there was division among them. 17 So they spoke to the blind man again, 'What have you to say about him yourself, now that he has opened your eyes?' The man answered, 'He is a prophet.'

18 However, the Jews would not believe that the man had been blind without first sending for the parents of the man who had gained his sight and 19 asking them, 'Is this man really the son of yours who you say was born blind? If so, how is it that he is now able to see?' 20 His parents answered, 'We know he is our son and we know he was born blind, 21 but how he can see, we don't know, nor who opened his eyes. Ask him. He is old enough: let him speak for himself.' 22 His parents spoke like this out of fear of the Jews, who had already agreed to ban from the synagogue anyone who should acknowledge Jesus as the Christ. 23 This was why his parents said, 'He is old enough; ask him.'

24 So the Jews sent for the man again and said to him, 'Give glory to God! We are satisfied that this man is a sinner.' 25 The man answered, 'Whether he is a sinner I don't know; all I know is that I was blind and now I can see.' 26 They said to him, 'What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?' 27 He replied, 'I have told you once and you wouldn't listen. Why do you want to hear it all again? Do you want to become his disciples yourselves?' 28 At this they hurled abuse at him, 'It is you who are his disciple, we are disciples of Moses: 29 we know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this man, we don't know where he comes from.' 30 The man replied, 'That is just what is so amazing! You don't know where he comes from and he has opened my eyes! 31 We know that God doesn't listen to sinners, but God does listen to people who are devout and do his will. 32 Ever since the world began it is unheard of for anyone to open the eyes of someone born blind; 33 if this man were not from God, he wouldn't have been able to do anything.' 34 They retorted, 'Are you trying to teach us, and you a sinner through and through ever since you were born!' And they ejected him.

35 Jesus heard they had ejected him, and when he found him he said to him, 'Do you believe in the Son of man?' 36 'Sir,' the man replied, 'tell me who he is so that I may believe in him.' 37 Jesus said, 'You have seen him; he is speaking to you.' 38 The man said, 'Lord, I believe,' and worshipped him.

39 Jesus said: It is for judgement that I have come into this world, so that those without sight may see and those with sight may become blind. 40 Hearing this, some

Pharisees who were present said to him, 'So we are blind, are we?' 41 Jesus replied: If you were blind, you would not be guilty, but since you say, 'We can see,' your guilt remains.

3. A moment of prayerful silence

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

4. Some questions

to help us in our personal reflection.

- a) What part of this text touched me most? Why?
- b) A popular saying goes: “None so blind as those who will not see!” How does this apply to the conversation between the blind man and the Pharisees?
- c) By what titles is Jesus hailed in the text? Who pronounces these? What do they mean?
- d) What title do I like best? Why? Or, what picture of Jesus do I carry in my mind and my heart? Where does this picture come from?
- e) How can I purify my eyes to see the true Jesus of the Gospels?

5. For those who wish to delve deeper into the text

a) The context within which the Gospel of John was written:

As we meditate on the story of the healing of the blind man, it is good to keep in mind the context of the Christian communities in Asia Minor towards the end of the first century for whom the Gospel of John was written and who identified with the blind man and his healing. Because of a legalistic view of the Law of God, they were blind from birth. But, as happened with the blind man, they too were able to see the presence of God in the person of Jesus of Nazareth and were converted. It was a painful process! In describing the steps and conflicts of the healing of the blind man, the author of the Fourth Gospel recalls the spiritual journey of the community, from the darkness of blindness to the full light of faith enlightened by Jesus.

b) A commentary on the text:

John 9:1-5: Blindness before the evil that exists in the world

When the disciples see the blind man, they ask: “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, for him to have been born blind?” In those days, a physical defect or sickness was thought to be a punishment from God. Associating physical defects with sin was the way the priests of the Old Testament kept their power over people’s consciences. Jesus helps his disciples to correct their ideas: “Neither he nor his parents sinned...he was born blind so that the works of God might be displayed in him!” *The works of*

God is the same as *Sign of God*. Thus, that which in those days was a sign of God's absence, is now a sign of his brilliant presence in our midst. Jesus says: "As long as the day lasts I must carry out the work of the one who sent me; the night will soon be here when no one can work. As long as I am in the world *I am the light of the world*." The **Day** of *signs* begins to manifest itself when Jesus, "on the third day" (Jn 2:1), makes present the "first sign" in Cana (Jn 2:11). But the day is about to end. The night is about to fall, because it is already "the seventh day", the Sabbath, and the healing of the blind man is now the sixth sign (Jn 9:14). The **Night** is the death of Jesus. The seventh sign will be the victory over death at the resurrection of Lazarus (Jn 11). In John's Gospel there are only seven signs, miracles, that announce the great sign, namely the Death and Resurrection of Jesus.

John 9:6-7. The sign of the "One sent by God" who will provoke various reactions

Jesus spits on the ground, forms mud with his saliva, puts the mud on the eyes of the blind man and tells him to wash in the pool of Siloam. The man goes and comes back healed. *This is the sign!* John comments saying that *Siloam* means *sent*. Jesus is the **One sent** by the Father who works the works of God, the signs of the Father. The sign of this 'sending' is that the blind man begins to see.

John 9:8-13: The first reaction: that of the neighbours

The blind man is well known. The neighbours have doubts: "Is this he?" And they ask: "How do your eyes come to be open?" The man who was blind testifies: "The **Man** called Jesus opened my eyes". The basis of our faith in Jesus is to accept that he is a human being like us. The neighbours ask: "Where is he?" - "I don't know!" They are not satisfied with the answer of the blind man and, to clarify matters, they bring the man before the Pharisees, the religious authorities.

John 9:14-17: The second reaction: that of the Pharisees

That day was a Sabbath and on the Sabbath it was forbidden to heal. When asked by the Pharisees, the man tells everything once more. Some Pharisees, blind in their observance of the law, say: "This man cannot be from God, he does not keep the Sabbath!" They could not admit that Jesus could be a sign of God because he healed the blind man on a Sabbath. But other Pharisees, faced by the sign, answer: "How could a sinner produce signs like this?" They were divided among themselves! So they asked the blind man: "What have you to say about him yourself, now that he has opened your eyes?" And he gives witness: "He is a **Prophet!**"

John 9:18-23: The third reaction: that of the parents

The Pharisees, now called the *Jews*, did not believe that he was blind. They thought that it was a matter of deception. So they called his parents and asked: "Is this man

really your son who you say was born blind? If so, how is it that he is now able to see?” Very carefully the parents reply: “We know he is our son and we know he was born blind, but we don’t know how it is that he can see now, or who opened his eyes. He is old enough: let him speak for himself!” The blindness of the Pharisees before the evidence of the healing produces fear among the people. And anyone who professed faith in Jesus **Messiah** was excluded from the synagogue. The conversation with the parents of the blind man reveals the truth, but the religious authorities will not accept it. Their blindness is greater because of the witness given, now they will not accept the law that says that the witness of two persons is valid (Jn 8:17).

John 9:24-34: The final judgement of the Pharisees concerning Jesus

They call the blind man again and say: “Give glory to God! For our part we know that this man is a sinner.” Here: “*give glory to God*” meant: “Ask pardon for the lie you just pronounced!” The blind man had said: “He is a prophet!” According to the Pharisees he should have said: “He is a sinner!” But the blind man is intelligent. He replies: “I don’t know if he is a sinner; I only know that I was blind and now I can see!” There are no arguments against this fact! Again the Pharisees ask: “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?” The blind man answers with a touch of irony: “I have told you once.... Do you want to become his disciples too?” Then they insulted him and said: “You can be his disciple, we know that God spoke to Moses, but for this man, we don’t know where he comes from”. Again with a touch of irony the blind man replies: “Now here is an astonishing thing! He has opened my eyes, and you don’t know where he comes from! If this man were not from God, he couldn’t do a thing”. Faced with the blindness of the Pharisees, the light of faith grows in the blind man. He does not accept the logic of the Pharisees and confesses that Jesus **comes from the Father**. This profession of faith costs him his expulsion from the synagogue. The same was happening in the communities of the end of the first century. Those who professed faith in Jesus had to break all family and community ties. This happens today: those who decide to be faithful to Jesus run the risk of being excluded.

John 9:35-38: The attitude of faith of the blind man towards Jesus

Jesus does not abandon those who are persecuted for his sake. When Jesus hears of the expulsion and meets the man again, he helps him to take a further step by inviting him to take on his faith and asks: “Do you believe in the *Son of Man*?” He replies: “Sir...tell me who he is that I may believe in him?” Jesus said to him: “You are looking at him; he is speaking to you”. The blind man exclaims: “**Lord**, I believe!” And he worships Jesus. The faith attitude of the blind man before Jesus is one of absolute trust and total acceptance. He accepts everything from Jesus. It is this faith

that sustained the Christian communities of Asia towards the end of the first century, and that sustains us today.

John 9:39-41: A final reflection

The blind man who could not see, ends up seeing better than the Pharisees. The communities of Asia Minor who were once blind, discover the light. The Pharisees who thought that they saw well are more blind than the man born blind. Bound by an ancient observance, they lie when they say they can see. None more blind than those who will not see!

c) A broader view:

- The Names and Titles given to Jesus

Throughout the story of the healing of the blind man, the Evangelist registers various titles, adjectives and names given to Jesus by a host of people, the disciples, the Evangelist himself, the blind man, the Pharisees and Jesus himself. This way of describing the events in the life of Jesus was part of the catechesis of the time. It was a way of helping people to clarify their own ideas concerning Jesus and to identify themselves in his regard. Here are some of the names, adjectives and titles. The list shows the growth of the blind man in faith and how his vision becomes clear.

- * Rabbì (master) (Jn. 9:1): the disciples
- * Light of the world (Jn 9:5): Jesus
- * The One sent (Jn 9:7): the Evangelist
- * Man (Jn 9:11): the healed man
- * Jesus: (Jn 9:11): the healed man
- * Does not come from God (Jn 9:16): some Pharisees
- * Prophet (Jn 9:17): the healed man
- * Christ (Jn 9:22): the people
- * Sinner (Jn 9:24): some Pharisees
- * We do know where he comes from (Jn 9:31): the healed man
- * Religious (Jn 9:31): the healed man
- * Does the will of God (Jn 9:31): the healed man
- * Son of man (Jn 9:35): Jesus
- * Lord (Jn 9:36): the healed man
- * Lord, I believe! (Jn 9:30): the healed man

- The Name: "I AM"

To reveal the deep meaning of the healing of the blind man, the Fourth Gospel records the words of Jesus: "*I am the light of the world*" (Jn 9:5). In several places, in answer to questions people put to Jesus, the Gospel repeats this same statement "I AM":

- * I am the bread of life (Jn 6:34-48)
- * I am the living bread come down from heaven (Jn 6:51)
- * I am the light of the world (Jn 8:12; 9:5)
- * I am the gate (Jn 10: 7.9)
- * I am the good shepherd (Jn 10:11,25)
- * I am the resurrection and the life (Jn 11:25)
- * I am the way, the truth and the life (Jn 14:6)
- * I am the vine (Jn 15:1)
- * I am king (Jn 18:37)
- * I am (Jn 8:24.27.58)

This self revelation of Jesus reaches its peak in his conversation with the Jews, when Jesus says: "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He" (Jn 8:27). The name I am is the same as Yahweh, the name God took in Exodus, an expression of his liberating presence between Jesus and the Father (Ex 3:15). The repeated affirmation I AM reveals the deep identity between Jesus and the Father. The face of God shines in Jesus of Nazareth: "To have seen me is to have seen the Father!" (Jn 14:9)

6. Prayer: Psalm 117 (116)

A resume of the Bible in one prayer

Alleluia! Praise Yahweh,
all nations, extol him, all peoples,
for his faithful love is strong
and his constancy never-ending.

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, March 31, 2014

Lent Time

1) Opening prayer

Lord our God, almighty Father,
you want us not to turn to the past
to regret it and to mourn over it
but to hope in the future,
in the new earth and the new heaven.
Give us a firm faith
in your Son Jesus Christ,
that notwithstanding the shortcomings of our time
we may have faith in the future,
which you want us to build up
with your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

2) Gospel Reading - John 4, 43-54.

When the two days were over Jesus left for Galilee. He himself had declared that a prophet is not honoured in his own home town. On his arrival the Galileans received him well, having seen all that he had done at Jerusalem during the festival which they too had attended.

He went again to Cana in Galilee, where he had changed the water into wine. And there was a royal official whose son was ill at Capernaum; hearing that Jesus had arrived in Galilee from Judaea, he went and asked him to come and cure his son, as he was at the point of death. Jesus said to him, 'Unless you see signs and portents you will not believe!' 'Sir,' answered the official, 'come down before my child dies.' 'Go home,' said Jesus, 'your son will live.' The man believed what Jesus had said and went on his way home; and while he was still on the way his servants met him with the news that his boy was alive. He asked them when the boy had begun to recover. They replied, 'The fever left him yesterday at the seventh hour.' The father realised that this was exactly the time when Jesus had said, 'Your son will live'; and he and all his household believed. This new sign, the second, Jesus performed on his return from Judaea to Galilee.

3) Reflection

- Jesus had left Galilee, and directed himself toward Judah, in order to arrive to Jerusalem on the occasion of the festival (Jn 4, 45) and, passing through Samaria, he was returning again toward Galilee (Jn 4, 3-4). The observant Jews were forbidden to pass through Samaria, and they could not even speak with the Samaritans (Jn 4, 9). Jesus did not care about these norms which prevented friendship and dialogue. He remained several days in Samaria and many people were converted (Jn 4, 40). After that, he decided to return to Galilee.
- John 4, 43-46^a: The return toward Galilee. Even though Jesus knew that the people of Galilee had a certain reservation toward him, he wished to return to his own home town. Probably, John refers to how badly Jesus was received, accepted in Nazareth of Galilee. Jesus himself had declared that “No prophet is honoured in his own home town” (Lk 4, 24). But now, before the evidence of what he had done in Jerusalem, the Galileans change their opinion and received him well. Jesus then returns to Cana where he had worked the first “sign” (Jn 2,11).
- John 4, 46b-47: The petition of the court official. It is the case of a pagan. A short time before, in Samaria, Jesus had spoken with a Samaritan woman, an heretic person according to the Jews, to whom Jesus revealed his condition of Messiah (Jn 4, 26). And now, in Galilee, he receives a pagan, the official of the king, who was seeking help for his sick son. Jesus does not limit himself to help those of his race only, nor those of his own religion. He is ecumenical and receives all.
- John 4, 48: The answer of Jesus to the court official. The official wanted Jesus to go with him to his house to cure his son. Jesus answered: “Unless you see signs and portents you will not believe!” A harsh and strange answer. Why does Jesus answer in this way? What was wrong with the petition of the official? What did Jesus want to attain through this response? Jesus wants to teach how our faith should be. The official would believe only if Jesus went with him to his house. He wanted to see Jesus curing. In general, this is the attitude that we all have. We are not aware of the deficiency of our faith.
- John 4, 49-50: The official repeats his petition and Jesus repeats the response. In spite of the answer of Jesus, the man does not keep silence and repeats the same petition: “Sir, come down before my child dies!” Jesus continues to keep his stand. He does not respond to the petition and does not go with the man to his house and repeats the same response, but formulated in a different way: “Go home! Your son will live!” Both in the first as well as in the second response, Jesus asks for faith, much faith. He asks that the official believes that his son has already been cured. And the true miracle takes place! Without seeing any sign, nor any portent, the man

believes in Jesus' word and returns home. It should not have been easy. This is the true miracle of faith; to believe without any other guarantee, except the Word of Jesus. The ideal is to believe in the word of Jesus, even without seeing (cf. Jn 20, 29).

- John 4, 51-53: The result of faith in the word of Jesus. When the man was on the way to his home, his servants saw him and ran to meet him to tell him that his son had been cured, that he was alive. He asked them when the boy had begun to recover and discovered that it was exactly the time when Jesus had said: "Your son will live!" He was confirmed in his faith.

- John 4, 54: A summary presented by John, the Evangelist. John ends by saying: "This new sign, the second, Jesus preformed". John prefers to speak of sign and not of miracle. The word sign recalls something which I see with my eyes, but which only faith can make me discover its profound sense. Faith is like an X-Ray: it makes one discover that which the naked eye cannot see.

4) Personal questions

- How do you live your faith? Do you have faith in God's word or do you only believe in miracles and in sensitive, perceptible experiences?
- Jesus accepts heretics and foreigners. And I, how do I relate with persons?

5) Concluding Prayer

Make music for Yahweh,
all you who are faithful to him,
praise his unforgettable holiness.
His anger lasts but a moment,
his favour through life;
In the evening come tears,
but with dawn cries of joy. (Ps 30,4-5)