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## Lectio Divina: Tuesday, September 1, 2015

### Ordinary Time

#### 1) Opening prayer

Almighty God,  
every good thing comes from you.  
Fill our hearts with love for you,  
increase our faith,  
and by your constant care  
protect the good you have given us.  
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,  
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

#### 2) Gospel Reading - Luke 4,31-37

Jesus went down to Capernaum, a town in Galilee, and taught them on the Sabbath. And his teaching made a deep impression on them because his word carried authority. In the synagogue there was a man possessed by the spirit of an unclean devil, and he shouted at the top of his voice, ‘Ha! What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are: the Holy One of God.’ But Jesus rebuked it, saying, ‘Be quiet! Come out of him!’ And the devil, throwing the man into the middle, went out of him without hurting him at all. Astonishment seized them and they were all saying to one another, ‘What is it in his words? He gives orders to unclean spirits with authority and power and they come out.’ And the news of him travelled all through the surrounding countryside.

#### 3) Reflection

- In today’s Gospel we can see the facts more closely: the admiration of the people because of the way Jesus taught and the cure of a man who was possessed by an unclean spirit. Not all the Evangelists give this account in the same way. For Luke, the first miracle is the peace with which Jesus liberates himself from the threat of death on the part of the people of Nazareth (Lk 4, 29-30) and the cure of the possessed man (Lk 4, 33-35). For Matthew, the first miracle is the cure of the sick and of the possessed (Mt 4, 23) or, more specifically, the cure of a leper (Mt 8, 1-4). For Mark, the miracle was the expulsion of the devil (Mk 1, 23-26). For John, the first miracle was Cana, where Jesus changed the water into wine (Jn 2, 1-11). Thus, in the way of narrating things, each Evangelist, accordingly, indicates which was the greatest concern of Jesus.
- Luke 4, 31: The change of Jesus toward Capernaum: “Jesus descends to Capernaum, a city in Galilee, and on Saturday he taught the people”. Matthew says that Jesus went to live in Capernaum (Mt 4, 13). He changed his residence. Capernaum was a small city on the crossroad between two important streets: the one coming from Asia Minor and was leading to Petra on the south of Transjordan, and the other one coming from the region of the two rivers: the Tigris and the Euphrates, and descended toward Egypt. The change toward Capernaum facilitated the contact with the people and the diffusion of the Good News.

- Luke 4, 32: Admiration of the people at the teaching of Jesus. The first thing that people perceive is that Jesus teaches in a different way. It is not so much the content that strikes them, but rather his way of teaching: “Jesus speaks with authority”. Mark adds that because of his different way of teaching; Jesus created a critical conscience among the people in regard to the religious authority of his time. The people perceived and compared: “He teaches with authority, unlike the Scribes” (Mk 1, 22.27). The Scribes taught quoting authority. Jesus does not quote any authority; rather he speaks starting from his experience of God and of his life.
- Luke 4, 33-35: Jesus fights against the power of evil. The first miracle is the expulsion of the devil. The power of evil took possession of persons, alienating them. Jesus restores the persons to be themselves again, giving them back the consciousness and liberty. He does this thanks to the force of his word: “Be quiet! Come out of him!” And on another occasion he says: “But if it is through the finger of God that I drive devils out, then the Kingdom of God has indeed caught you unawares” (Lk 11, 20). Today, also, many people live alienated from themselves, subjugated by the means of communication, by the propaganda of the government and of business. They live slaves of consumerism, oppressed by debts and threatened by creditors. People think that they do not live well if they do not have everything which the propaganda announces. It is not easy to expel this power which today, alienates many people, and return the persons to be themselves again.
- Luke 4, 36-37: The reaction of the people: he gives orders to the unclean spirits. Jesus not only has a diverse way of teaching the things of God, but another aspect which causes admiration in the people is his power over unclean spirits: “What is it in his words? He gives orders to unclean spirits with authority and power and they come out”. Jesus opens a new path so that the people can place themselves before God to pray and to receive the blessings promised to Abraham. Before, they had to purify themselves. There were many laws and norms which made the life of the people difficult and marginalized many persons who were considered impure. But now, purified by faith in Jesus, persons could once again place themselves before God and pray to him, without the need to have recourse to the complicated norms of purity which were frequently expensive.

#### **4) Personal questions**

- Jesus causes admiration and astonishment among the people. Does the way of acting of our community cause admiration among the people of the neighbourhood? What type of admiration?
- Jesus drives out the power of evil and restores the persons to be themselves again. Today many persons live alienated from everything and from all. How can we help them to recover and be themselves again?

#### **5) Concluding Prayer**

Yahweh is tenderness and pity,  
 slow to anger, full of faithful love.  
 Yahweh is generous to all,  
 his tenderness embraces all his creatures. (Ps 145,8-9)

**Lectio Divina: Wednesday, September 2, 2015**

**Ordinary Time**

#### **1) Opening prayer**

Almighty God,

every good thing comes from you.

Fill our hearts with love for you,

increase our faith,

and by your constant care

protect the good you have given us.

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

who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,

one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

## **2) Gospel Reading - Luke 4,38-44**

Leaving the synagogue Jesus went to Simon's house. Now Simon's mother-in-law was in the grip of a high fever and they asked him to do something for her. Standing over her he rebuked the fever and it left her. And she immediately got up and began to serve them.

At sunset all those who had friends suffering from diseases of one kind or another brought them to him, and laying his hands on each he cured them.

Devils too came out of many people, shouting, 'You are the Son of God.' But he warned them and would not allow them to speak because they knew that he was the Christ. When daylight came he left the house and made his way to a lonely place. The crowds went to look for him, and when they had caught up with him they wanted to prevent him leaving them, but he answered, 'I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns too, because that is what I was sent to do.' And he continued his proclamation in the synagogues of Judaea.

## **3) Reflection**

- The Gospel today narrates four different events: the cure of Peter's mother-in-law (Lk 4, 38-39), the cure of many sick people at night, after Saturday (Lk 4, 40-41), the prayer of Jesus in a deserted place (Lk 4, 42) and his insistence on the mission (Lk 4, 43-44). With small differences Luke follows and adapts the information taken from the Gospel of Mark.
- Luke 4, 38-39: *Jesus restores life for service.* After having participated in the celebration of Saturday, in the Synagogue, Jesus goes to Peter's house and cures his mother-in-law. The cure causes her to render service immediately, already standing. Having recovered her health and dignity, she places herself at the service of the people. Jesus not only cures, but he cures in such a way that the person places herself at the service of life.
- Luke 4, 40-41: *Jesus accepts and cures the marginalized.* At night, when the first stars appear in the sky, after Saturday is over, Jesus accepts and cures the sick and those possessed who the people bring to him. The sick and the possessed were the most marginalized persons at that time. They had no one to whom to go. They were at the mercy of public charity;

besides, religion considered them impure. They could not participate in the community. It was as if God rejected and excluded them. Jesus accepts and cures them, placing his hands on each one of them. Thus, it is clear in what the Good News of God consists and what he wants to do in the life of persons: to accept the marginalized and the excluded and to integrate them into the community, to live with others.

“Devils came out of many persons shouting: “You are the Son of God!” But he warned them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew that he was the Christ”. At that time the title Son of God did not have as yet the density and depth that it has for us today. Jesus did not allow the devils to speak. He did not want an easy propaganda dictated by spectacular expulsions.

- Luke 4, 42a: *To remain united to the Father by means of prayer.* “When daylight came he left the house and made his way to a lonely place. The crowds went to look for him, and when they had caught up with him they wanted to prevent him from leaving them”. Here we see Jesus praying. He has to make an enormous effort to have time available and a place suitable for prayer. He goes to a deserted place to be able to stay alone with God. Many times, the Gospels speak about Jesus’ prayer, in silence (Lk 3, 21-22; 4, 1-2.3-12; 5,15-16; 6,12; 9,18; 10,21; 5,16; 9,18; 11,1; 9, 28;23,34; Mt 14, 22-23; 26,38; Jn 11, 41-42; 17,1-26; Mk 1,35; Lk 3, 21-22). Through prayer, he maintains alive the conscience of his mission.

- Luke 4, 42b-44: *To maintain alive the conscience of one’s own mission and not think about the result.* Jesus becomes known. People follow him and they did not want him to leave them. Jesus does not respond to this petition and says: “I must proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom of God to the other towns too, because that is what I was sent to do”. Jesus was very clear about his mission. He does not stop at the result that he has already obtained, but he wishes to maintain very alive the awareness of his mission. It is the mission received from the Father which orientates him when he has to take a decision. I have been sent for this! And here in this text this conscience which is so alive springs as fruit of his prayer.

#### **4) Personal questions**

- Jesus spent much time in prayer and to be alone with the Father, and he looked for this time. Do I dedicate time for prayer and to be alone with God?
- Jesus had a clear conscience of his mission. And I, a Christian, am I conscious that I have a mission, or do I live without a mission?

#### **5) Concluding Prayer**

We are waiting for Yahweh;

he is our help and our shield,

for in him our heart rejoices,

in his holy name we trust. (Ps 33,20-21)

## Lectio Divina: Thursday, September 3, 2015

### Ordinary Time

#### 1) Opening prayer

Almighty God,  
every good thing comes from you.  
Fill our hearts with love for you,  
increase our faith,  
and by your constant care  
protect the good you have given us.  
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,  
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

#### 2) Gospel Reading - Luke 5,1-11

Now it happened that Jesus was standing one day by the Lake of Gennesaret, with the crowd pressing round him listening to the word of God, when he caught sight of two boats at the water's edge. The fishermen had got out of them and were washing their nets. He got into one of the boats - it was Simon's - and asked him to put out a little from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. When he had finished speaking he said to Simon, 'Put out into deep water and pay out your nets for a catch.' Simon replied, 'Master, we worked hard all night long and caught nothing, but if you say so, I will pay out the nets.' And when they had done this they netted such a huge number of fish that their nets began to tear, so they signalled to their companions in the other boat to come and help them; when these came, they filled both boats to sinking point. When Simon Peter saw this he fell at the knees of Jesus saying, 'Leave me, Lord; I am a sinful man.' For he and all his companions were completely awestruck at the catch they had made; so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were Simon's partners. But Jesus said to Simon, 'Do not be afraid; from now on it is people you will be catching.' Then, bringing their boats back to land they left everything and followed him.

#### 3) Reflection

- In today's Gospel we have the call of Jesus to Peter. The Gospel of Mark places the call of the first disciples after the beginning of the public ministry of Jesus (Mk 1, 16-20). Luke after that the fame of Jesus was already extended across the whole region (Lk 4, 14). Jesus had cured many people (Lk 4, 40) and had preached in the Synagogues of all the country (Lk 4, 44). The people looked for him and the crowds pushed him on all sides in order to hear the Word of God (Lk 5, 1). Luke makes more understandable the call. In the first place, Peter can listen to the words of Jesus to the people. And then he is a witness of the miraculous catch of fish. It is only after this double surprising experience that he understands the call of Jesus. Peter responds, he abandons everything and becomes a "fisherman of men".
- Luke 5, 1-3: Jesus teaches from the boat. People look for Jesus in order to listen to the Word of God. Many persons get together around Jesus, they make a throng around him. And Jesus seeks help from Simon Peter and from some of his companions who had just returned from fishing. He goes into the boat with them and responds to the expectation of the people, communicating to them the Word of God. Sitting down, Jesus takes the attitude of a Teacher and speaks from a fisherman's boat. The novelty consists in the fact that he teaches, not only in the Synagogue for a choice public but in any place, where there are people who wish to listen, even on the seashore.

- Luke 5, 4-5: “But if you say so, I will pay out the nets”. When he had finished speaking, he addresses himself to Simon and encourages him to fish again. In Simon’s response there is frustration, tiredness and discouragement: “Master, we worked hard all night long and caught nothing!” But trustful in Jesus’ word, they throw in the nets again and continue the struggle. The word of Jesus has greater force for them than the experience of frustration of that night!
- Luke 5, 6-7: The result is surprising. The catch is so abundant that the nets are about to tear and the boat begins to sink. Simon needs the help of John and of James who are in the other boat. Nobody is complete in himself, alone. One community has to help the other. The conflict among the communities, both at the time of Luke as well as today, should be overcome in order to attain a common objective, which is the mission. The experience of the force of the word of Jesus which transforms is the axis around which the differences are embraced and overcome.
- Luke 5, 8-11: “Be fishermen of men”. The experience of the closeness of God in Jesus makes Peter understand who he is: “Leave me Lord, I am a sinful man!” Before God we are all sinners. Peter and his companions are afraid and, at the same time, they feel attracted to Jesus. Jesus drives away fear: “Do not be afraid!” He calls Peter and commits him to the mission, ordering him to be a fisherman of men. Peter experiences, quite concretely, that the word of Jesus is like the word of God. It is capable to bring about what it affirms. In Jesus those rough and tough labourers will have an experience of power, of courage, of trust. And so then, “they will abandon everything and follow Jesus!” Up until now it was only Jesus who announced the Good News of the Kingdom. Now other persons will be called and involved in the mission. This way in which Jesus works, in ‘equipe’, in a team is also Good News for the people.
- The episode of the catch of fish along the lake indicates the attraction and the force of the Word of Jesus. He attracts people (Lk 5, 1). He urges Peter to offer his boat to Jesus to be able to speak (Lk 5, 3). The word of Jesus is so strong that it overcomes the resistance in Peter, it convinces him to throw the nets into the sea again and there is the miraculous catch (Lk 5, 4-6). It overcomes in him the will to leave Jesus and attracts him to become a “fisherman of men” (Lk 5, 10). This is the way the Word of God acts in us, up until now!

#### **4) Personal questions**

- Where and how does the miraculous catch of fish take place today; the one which takes place paying attention to the word of Jesus?
- And they leaving everything followed Jesus. What do I have to leave in order to follow Jesus?

#### **5) Concluding Prayer**

Who shall go up to the mountain of Yahweh?  
 Who shall take a stand in his holy place?  
 The clean of hands and pure of heart,  
 who does not swear an oath in order to deceive. (Ps 24,3-4)

## **Lectio Divina: Friday, September 4, 2015**

### **Ordinary Time**

#### **1) Opening prayer**

Almighty God,  
 every good thing comes from you.  
 Fill our hearts with love for you,  
 increase our faith,  
 and by your constant care

protect the good you have given us.

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

## **2) Gospel Reading - Luke 5,33-39**

The disciples said to Jesus, ‘John’s disciples are always fasting and saying prayers, and the disciples of the Pharisees, too, but yours go on eating and drinking.’

Jesus replied, ‘Surely you cannot make the bridegroom’s attendants fast while the bridegroom is still with them? But the time will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them; then, in those days, they will fast.’

He also told them a parable, ‘No one tears a piece from a new cloak to put it on an old cloak; otherwise, not only will the new one be torn, but the piece taken from the new will not match the old. ‘And nobody puts new wine in old wineskins; otherwise, the new wine will burst the skins and run to waste, and the skins will be ruined. No; new wine must be put in fresh skins. And nobody who has been drinking old wine wants new. “The old is good,” he says.’

## **3) Reflection**

- In today’s Gospel we witness closely a conflict between Jesus and the religious authority of the time, the Scribes and the Pharisees (Lk 5, 3). This time the conflict is concerning the practice of fasting. Luke narrates diverse conflicts concerning the religious practice of the time: forgiveness of sins (Lk 5, 21-25), to eat with sinners (Lk 5, 29-32), fasting (Lk 5, 33-36), and two conflicts on the observance of Saturday, the Sabbath (Lk 6, 1-5 and Lk 6, 6-11).

- Luke 5, 33: Jesus does not insist on the practice of fasting. The conflict here is concerning the practice of fasting. Fasting is a very ancient use, practiced by almost all religions. Jesus Himself followed it during forty days (Mt 4, 2). But he does not insist with the disciples that they do the same. He leaves them free. This is why, 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.

- Luke 5, 34-35: When the bridegroom is with them they are not obliged to fast. Jesus responds with a comparison. When the bridegroom is with the friends of the bridegroom, that is, during the wedding feast, they should not fast. Jesus considers himself the bridegroom. During the time when Jesus is with the disciples, it is the wedding feast. One day will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then if they wish they can fast. Jesus refers to his death. He knows and he is aware that if he wants to continue along this path of liberty, the authority will want to kill him.

Several times, in the Old Testament, God presents himself as the bridegroom of the people (Is 49, 15; 54, 5.8; 62, 4-5; Os 2, 16-25). In the New Testament, Jesus is considered the bridegroom of his people (Ep 5, 25). The Apocalypse speaks of the celebration of the marriage of the Lamb with his spouse, the Heavenly Jerusalem (Rv 19, 7-8; 21, 2.9).

- Luke 5, 36-39: New Wine in new skins! These words pronounced concerning the new piece of cloth on an old cloak and about new wine in old skins should be understood like a light which gives clarity on diverse conflicts, narrated by Luke, first and after the discussions concerning fasting. They clarify the attitude of Jesus concerning all the conflicts with the religious authority. Today, these would be conflicts such as: marriage between divorced persons, friendship with prostitutes and homosexuals, to receive communion without being married by the Church, not to go to Mass on Sunday, not to fast on Good Friday, etc.

A piece of new cloth is not sewed on an old cloak; because when it is washed the new piece of cloth shrinks and tears the old cloak more. Nobody puts new wine in old skins, because the new wine when it is fermented makes the old skins burst. New wine in new skins! The religion diffused by the religious authority was like an old cloak, like an old skin. It is not necessary to want to combine the novelty brought by Jesus with old customs or uses. Either

one or the other! The new wine which Jesus brings bursts the old skins. It is necessary to know how to separate both of these things. Very probably, Luke gives these words of Jesus to orientate the communities of the years 80. There was a group of Christian Jews who wanted to reduce the novelty of Jesus to the Judaism of the beginning. Jesus is not against what is “ancient”. But he does not want the ancient to be imposed on the new, preventing it from manifesting itself. It would be as if the Catholic Church reduced the message of Vatican Council II to the Church before the Council, like many persons today seem to want to do it.

#### **4) Personal questions**

- Which are the conflicts about religious practices which cause suffering to persons today and are the cause of much discussion and polemics? Which is the subjacent image of God in all these preconceptions, norms and prohibitions?
- How can we understand today the phrase of Jesus: “do not put a new piece of cloth on an old cloak? Which is the message which you can draw from this for your life and for the life of the community?

#### **5) Concluding Prayer**

Commit your destiny to Yahweh,  
be confident in him, and he will act,  
making your uprightness clear as daylight,  
and the justice of your cause as the noon. (Ps 37,5-6)

### **Lectio Divina: Saturday, September 5, 2015**

#### **Ordinary Time**

##### **1) Opening prayer**

Almighty God,  
every good thing comes from you.  
Fill our hearts with love for you,  
increase our faith,  
and by your constant care  
protect the good you have given us.  
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,  
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

##### **2) Gospel Reading - Luke 6,1-5**

It happened that one Sabbath Jesus was walking through the cornfields, and his disciples were picking ears of corn, rubbing them in their hands and eating them.

Some of the Pharisees said, ‘Why are you doing something that is forbidden on the Sabbath day?’

Jesus answered them, ‘So you have not read what David did when he and his followers were hungry- how he went into the house of God and took the loaves of the offering and ate them and gave them to his followers, loaves which the priests alone are allowed to eat?’

And he said to them, ‘The Son of man is master of the Sabbath.’

##### **3) Reflection**

- The Gospel today speaks about the conflict concerning the observance of the Sabbath – Saturday. The observance of the Sabbath was a central law, one of the Ten Commandments. This was a very ancient Law the value of which was stressed after the Exile. During the Exile, the people had to work seven days a week from morning until evening, without any conditions to meet and meditate on the Word of God, to pray together and to share faith, their

problems and their hopes. Therefore, there was an urgent need to stop at least one day a week to get together and encourage one another during the very difficult situation of the exile. Otherwise they would have lost their faith. It was then that faith was reborn and the observance of Saturday was re-established.

- Luke 6, 1-2: The cause of the conflict. On Saturday the disciples were walking across the cornfields and they were picking ears of corn. Matthew 12, 1 says that they were hungry (Mt 12, 1). The Pharisees invoke the Bible to say it was a transgression of the Law of Saturday: Why do you do this which is not permitted to do on Saturday?" (cf. Ex 20, 8-11).

- Luke 6, 3-4: The response of Jesus. Immediately Jesus responds recalling that David himself also did things which were prohibited, because he took the sacred bread from the Temple and gave it to the soldiers to eat because they were hungry (I S 21, 2-7). Jesus knew the Bible and referred to it to show that the arguments of others had no foundation. In Matthew, the response of Jesus is more complete. He not only recalls the story of David, but also quotes the Legislation which permits the priests to work on Saturday and he quotes Prophet Hosea: "Mercy is what pleases me, not sacrifice". He quotes a Biblical text or a historical text, a legislative text and a prophetic text (cf. Mt 12, 1-18). At that time there was no printed Bible as we have it today. In each community there was only one Bible, hand written, which remained in the Synagogue. If Jesus knew the Bible so well, it means that in the 30 years of his life in Nazareth he participated intensely in the life of the community, where every Saturday the Scriptures were read. We still lack very much to have the same familiarity with the Bible and the same participation in the community.

- Luke 6, 5: The conclusion for all of us. And Jesus ends with the following phrase: The Son of Man is Master of the Sabbath! The Lord of Saturday! Jesus, Son of Man, who lives in intimacy with God, discovers the sense of the Bible not from outside, from without, but from inside, that is, discovers the sense starting at the roots, beginning from his intimacy with the author of the Bible who is God himself. Because of this, he calls himself Master of Saturday. In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus revitalizes the law of Saturday saying: "Saturday was instituted for man and not man for Saturday".

#### **4) Personal questions**

- How do you spend Sunday, which is our "Sabbath"? Do you go to Mass because it is an obligation, in order to avoid sin or to be with God?
- Jesus knew the Bible almost by heart. What does the Bible represent for me?

#### **5) Concluding Prayer**

My mouth shall always praise Yahweh,  
let every creature bless his holy name  
for ever and ever. (Ps 145,21)

### **Lectio Divina: Sunday, September 6, 2015**

*The healing of the deaf and dumb.*

*Jesus gives back to the people the gift of speech.*

*Mark 7:31-37*

#### **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:

This Sunday's liturgy shows us Jesus healing a deaf and dumb person in the land of Decapolis and praised by the people thus: «He has done all things well; he even makes the deaf hear and the dumb speak!» This praise is inspired by some passages in Isaiah (Is 29:8-19; 35:5-6; 42:7) and shows that the people saw in Jesus the coming of the messianic times. Jesus himself had used this same expression in reply to the disciples of John: «Go back and tell John what you hear and see: the blind see again, and ... the deaf hear» (Mt 11,4-5).

The early Christians used the Bible to clarify and interpret the actions and attitudes of Jesus. They did this so as to express their faith that Jesus was the Messiah, the One who was to fulfil the promise, and so as to be able to understand better that which Jesus did and said during those few years that he spent in their midst in Palestine.

### b) A division of the text as an aid to the reading:

Mark 7:31:

a geographical description: Jesus is somewhere outside Judea.

Mark 7:32:

the man's condition: deaf and dumb.

Mark 7:33-34: Jesus' movements in healing the man.

Mark 7:35: the result of the healing action of Jesus.

Mark 7:36: the recommendation of silence is not obeyed.

Mark 7:37: the praise of the people.



### c) The text:

31 Then he returned from the region of Tyre, and went through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, through the region of the Decapolis. 32 And they brought to him a man who was deaf and had an impediment in his speech; and they besought him to lay his hand upon him. 33 And taking him aside from the multitude privately, he put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue; 34 and looking up to heaven, he sighed, and said to him, "Ephphatha," that is, "Be opened." 35 And his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke

plainly. 36 And he charged them to tell no one; but the more he charged them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. 37 And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, "He has done all things well; he even makes the deaf hear and the dumb speak."

### 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 is the attitude of Jesus towards the deaf and dumb person and towards the people? How do you understand the actions of Jesus: he places his finger in the man's ears and with his saliva touches the man's tongue, then, looking up to heaven, he sighs and says: «Ephphatha»?
- b) How can we understand Jesus' concern for taking the man away from the crowd?
- c) Why does Jesus forbid the spreading of the news? How do we understand the people's disobedience of Jesus' command?
- d) What other New Testament and Old Testament texts are connoted or form the basis of this text?

### 5. Further information on Mark's Gospel

Mark 7:31: *Jesus in the land of Decapolis*

The episode of the healing of the deaf and dumb man is little known. Mark does not state clearly where Jesus is. It is understood that he is somewhere outside Palestine, in the land of the pagans, across a region called Decapolis. *Decapolis* literally means *Ten Cities*. This was, in fact, a region of ten cities, southeast of Galilee, where people were pagan and influenced by Greek culture.

Mark 7:32: *They brought him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech.*

Even though he is not in his native land, Jesus is known as someone who heals the sick. Thus, the people bring him a deaf man who has difficulty with his speech. This is someone who cannot communicate with others. He reflects many who today live as a mass in large cities in complete solitude, without the possibility of any communication.

Mark 7:33-34: *A different kind of healing*

The manner of healing is different. The people thought that Jesus would simply place his hands on the sick person. But Jesus goes beyond their request and takes the man away from the crowd, places his finger in the man's ears and with his spittle touches the man's tongue, then looking up to heaven sighs deeply and says: «Ephphatha» which means "Be opened!" The finger in the ear recalls the magicians' exclamation in Egypt: "This is the finger of

God!”(Ex 8:15) and also the expression of the Psalmist: “You...opened my ear!” (Ps 40:7). The touching of the tongue with spittle gives back the faculty of speech. In those days, people thought that spittle had medicinal value. Looking up to heaven says that the healing is from God. The sigh is an attitude of supplication.

Mark 7:35: *The result of the healing*

All at once, the ears of the deaf man were opened, his tongue was loosed and the man began to speak correctly. Jesus desires that people might open their ears and loosen their tongues! Today too! In many places, because of an authoritarian attitude on the part of religious powers, people have been silenced and do not speak. It is very important that people regain the power of speech within the Church in order to express their experience of God and thus enrich all, including the clergy.

Mark 7:36: *Jesus does not want any publicity*

Jesus commands that no one tell of that which took place. However, there is an exaggerated importance attached to Mark’s Gospel’s prohibition to spread the news of the healing, as if Jesus had a secret that had to be kept. In fact, sometimes Jesus tells people not to spread news of a healing (Mk 1:44; 5:43; 7:36; 8:26). He asks for silence, but gets the opposite effect. The more he forbids, the more the Good News is spread (Mk 1:28.45; 3:7-8; 7:36-37). On the other hand, many times, in most cases, Jesus did not ask for silence concerning a miracle. Once he even asked for publicity (Mk 5:19).

Mark 7:37: *The praise of the people*

All were in admiration and said: «He has done all things well!» (Mk 7:37). This statement recalls the creation: “God saw all he had made, and indeed it was very good!” (Gen 1:31). In spite of the prohibition, those who had witnessed the healing began to proclaim that which they had seen, expressing the Good News in the brief form: “He has done all things well!” It is useless to prohibit them talking. The inner power of the Good News is such that it spreads itself! Whoever has experienced Jesus, has to tell others, whether s/he likes it or not!

## **ii) Information on the internal divisions of Mark’s Gospel**

**1st Key:** Mark’s Gospel *was written* to be read and listened to in *community*.

When one reads a book alone, one can always stop and go back so as to connect one thing with another. But when one is in community and someone else out in front is reading the Gospel, one cannot shout: “Stop! Read that again! I did not understand it well!” For a book to be listened to in community celebrations, it must be divided differently from other books meant for personal reading.

**2nd Key:** Mark’s Gospel is a *narrative*.

A narrative is like a river. Going down a river in a boat, one is not aware of divisions in the water. The river has no divisions. It is a single flow, from beginning to end. The divisions are made on the banks not in the river. For instance, one may say: “The beautiful part of the river that goes from that house on the bend up to the palm tree three bends down river”. But one

does not see any division in the water itself. Mark's narration flows like a river. Listeners come across divisions along its banks, that is, in the places where Jesus goes, in the people he meets, in the streets he walks down. These marginal indications help listeners not to get lost in the midst of so many words and actions of Jesus and concerning Jesus. The geographical setting helps the reader to walk along with Jesus, step by step, from Galilee to Jerusalem, from the lake to Calvary.

**3rd Key:** Mark's Gospel was written *in order to be read all in one go*.

That is how the Jews read the small books of the Old Testament. For instance, on the eve of Easter, they read the complete Cantic of Canticles. Some scholars are of the opinion that Mark's Gospel was written to be read in its entirety on the eve of Easter. Now, so that the listeners might not get tired, the reading had to have divisions, pauses. For, when a narrative is long, such as is Mark's Gospel, the reading needs to be interrupted from time to time. There must be some pauses. Otherwise, the listeners get lost. The author of the narrative provided for these pauses. These were marked by summaries between one long reading and the next. These summaries were like hinges that gathered what was read before and opened the way to what was to come. They allow the narrator to stop and start again without interrupting the flow of the narrative. They help the listeners to take their bearing within the river of the flowing narrative. Mark's Gospel has several of these pauses that allow us to discover and follow the course of the Good News of God that Jesus revealed and that Mark narrates. In all there are six longer blocks of readings, interspersed with summaries or hinges, where it is possible to take a small pause.

Base on these three keys, we now present a division of Mark's Gospel. Others divide this Gospel in different ways. Each way has its distinctive character and its value. The value of any division is that it opens several ways of going into the text, of helping us to discover something about the Good News of God and to discern the how Jesus opens a way for us to God and the neighbour.

Introduction: Mk 1:1-13: Beginning of the Good News

Preparing the proclamation

Summary: 1,14-15

1<sup>st</sup> reading: Mk 1:16-3,16: Growth of the Good News

Conflict appears

Summary: 3:7-12

2<sup>nd</sup> reading: Mk 3:13-6,6: Growth of the conflict

The Mystery appears

Summary: 6:7-13

3<sup>rd</sup> reading: Mk 6:14-8,21: Growth of the Mystery

Misunderstanding appears

Summary: 8:22-26

4th reading: Mc 8:27-10:45: Growth of the misunderstanding

The dark light of the Cross appears

Summary: 10:46-52

5<sup>th</sup> reading: Mk 11:1-13:32: Growth of the dark light of the Cross

Appearance of rupture and death

Summary: 13:33-37

6<sup>th</sup> reading: Mk 14:1-15:39: Growth of the rupture and death

Victory over death appears

Summary: 15:40-41

Conclusion: Mk 15:42-16:20: Growth of the victory over death

Reappearance of the Good News.

In this division the headings are important. They point to where the Spirit is blowing, to the *inspiration* that runs through the whole Gospel. When an artist feels inspired, he tries to express this inspiration in a work of art. The poem or image that is the result carries within it this inspiration. Inspiration is like the electric power that runs invisibly through the wires and lights the lamps in our houses. So also, inspiration runs invisibly in the words of the poem or in the form of the image to reveal and light up within us a light equal or almost equal to that which shone in the artist. That is why works of art attract us so much. The same occurs when we read and meditate the Gospel of Mark. The same Spirit or *Inspiration* that moved Mark to write his text remains present in the thread of the words of his Gospel. By our attentive and prayerful reading of his Gospel, this Spirit begins to act and operate within us. Thus, gradually, we discover the face of God revealed in Jesus and that Mark communicates to us in his book.

## **6. Psalm 131**

### **Filial surrender**

O Lord, my heart is not lifted up,

my eyes are not raised too high;

I do not occupy myself with things too

great and too marvellous for me.

But I have calmed and quieted my soul,  
like a child quieted at its mother's breast;  
like a child that is quieted is my soul.  
O Israel, hope in the Lord from this  
time forth and for evermore.

## **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, September 7, 2015**

### **Ordinary Time**

#### **1) Opening prayer**

God our Father,  
you redeem us  
and make us your children in Christ.  
Look upon us,  
give us true freedom  
and bring us to the inheritance you promised.  
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,  
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

#### **2) Gospel Reading - Luke 6,6-11**

On a Sabbath Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach, and a man was present, and his right hand was withered. The scribes and the Pharisees were watching him to see if he would cure somebody on the Sabbath, hoping to find something to charge him with. But he knew their thoughts; and he said to the man with the withered hand, 'Get up and stand out in the middle!'

And he came forward and stood there.

Then Jesus said to them, 'I put it to you: is it permitted on the Sabbath to do good, or to do evil; to save life, or to destroy it?' Then he looked round at them all and said to the man, 'Stretch out your hand.' He did so, and his hand was restored.

But they were furious and began to discuss the best way of dealing with Jesus.

#### **3) Reflection**

- Context: This passage presents Jesus who cures a man with a withered hand. Different from the context of chapters 3 and 4 in which Jesus is alone, now here he is surrounded by his disciples and the women who go around with him. Therefore, here we have Jesus always moving. In the first stages of this journey the reader finds different ways of listening to the Word of Jesus on the part of those who follow him and which, definitively, it could be

summarized in two experiences, which recall, in turn, two types of approaches: that of Peter (5,1-11) and that of the centurion (7,1-10). The first one encounters Jesus who invites him after the miraculous catch to become a fisherman of men; then he falls on his knees before Jesus: «Leave me, Lord, I am a sinful man” (5, 8). The second one does not have any direct communication with Jesus: he has heard people speak very well about Jesus and he sends his envoys to ask for the cure of one of his servants who is dying; he is asking for something not for himself, but for a person who was a favourite of his. The figure of Peter expresses the attitude of the one who, discovering himself a sinner, places all his acts under the influence of the Word of Jesus. The centurion, showing solicitude for the servant, learns to listen to God. Well, between these itineraries or attitudes which characterize the itinerant journey of Jesus, is placed the cure of the man who presents the withered hand. This event of the miracle takes place in a context of debate or controversy: the ears of corn picked on the Sabbath and on the act of curing on a Saturday, precisely the withered hand. Between the two discussions there is the crucial role played by the Word of Jesus: “The Son of man is master of the Sabbath” (6, 5). Continuing with this passage we ask ourselves which is the sense of this withered hand? It is a symbol of the salvation of man who is taken back to the original moment, that of creation. The right hand, then, expresses human acting. Jesus then, gives back to this day of the week, Saturday, the deepest significance: it is the day of joy, of the restoration and not of limitation. What Jesus shows is the Messianic Saturday and not the legalistic one: the cures that he does are signs of the Messianic times, of restoration, of the liberation of man.

- The dynamic of the miracle. Luke places before Jesus a man who has a withered hand, dry, paralyzed. Nobody is interested in asking for his cure and much less the one concerned. And just the same, the sickness was not only an individual problem but its effects have repercussion on the whole community. But in our account we do not have so much the problem of the sickness as that of the aspect that it was done on Saturday. Jesus is criticized because he cured on Saturday. The difference with the Pharisees is in the fact that they on Saturday do not act on the basis of the commandment of love which is the essence of the Law. Jesus, after having ordered man to get in the middle of the assembly, formulates a decisive question: “Is it permitted on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil?” The space for the answer is restricted: to cure or not to cure, or rather, to cure or to destroy (v.9). Let us imagine the difficulty of the Pharisees: it is excluded that evil can be done on Saturday or lead man to damnation, and even less to cure because help was permitted only in case of extreme need. The Pharisees feel provoked and this causes aggressiveness in them. But it is evident that the intention of Jesus in curing on Saturday is for the good of man and in the first place, for the one who is sick. This motivation of love invites us to reflect on our behaviour and to found it on that of Jesus who saves. Jesus is not only attentive to cure the sick person but is interested also in the cure of his enemies: to cure them from their distorted attitude in their observance of the Law; to observe Saturday without freeing their neighbour from their misery and sickness is not in accordance with the will of God. According to the Evangelist, the function of Saturday is to do good, to save, like Jesus has done during his earthly life.

#### **4) Personal questions**

- Do you feel involved in the words of Jesus: how do you commit yourself in your service to life? Do you know how to create the necessary conditions so that others may live better?
- Do you know how to place at the centre of your attention and of your commitment every person and all their requirements?

#### **5) Concluding Prayer**

Joy for all who take refuge in you,  
endless songs of gladness!  
You shelter them, they rejoice in you,

those who love your name. (Ps 5,11)

## Lectio Divina: Tuesday, September 8, 2015

### Ordinary Time

#### 1) Opening prayer

God our Father,  
you redeem us  
and make us your children in Christ.

Look upon us,  
give us true freedom  
and bring us to the inheritance you promised.

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

#### 2) Gospel Reading - Matthew 1,1-16.18-23

Roll of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, son of David, son of Abraham: Abraham fathered Isaac, Isaac fathered Jacob, Jacob fathered Judah and his brothers, Judah fathered Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar, Perez fathered Hezron, Hezron fathered Ram, Ram fathered Amminadab, Amminadab fathered Nahshon, Nahshon fathered Salmon, Salmon fathered Boaz, whose mother was Rahab, Boaz fathered Obed, whose mother was Ruth, Obed fathered Jesse; and Jesse fathered King David.

David fathered Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife, Solomon fathered Rehoboam, Rehoboam fathered Abijah, Abijah fathered Asa, Asa fathered Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat fathered Joram, Joram fathered Uzziah, Uzziah fathered Jotham, Jotham fathered Ahaz, Ahaz fathered Hezekiah, Hezekiah fathered Manasseh, Manasseh fathered Amon, Amon fathered Josiah; and Josiah fathered Jechoniah and his brothers. Then the deportation to Babylon took place.

After the deportation to Babylon: Jechoniah fathered Shealtiel, Shealtiel fathered Zerubbabel, Zerubbabel fathered Abiud, Abiud fathered Eliakim, Eliakim fathered Azor, Azor fathered Zadok, Zadok fathered Achim, Achim fathered Eliud, Eliud fathered Eleazar, Eleazar fathered Matthan, Matthan fathered Jacob; and Jacob fathered Joseph the husband of Mary; of her was born Jesus who is called 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'.

#### 3) Reflection

- Today, September 8th, Feast of the Nativity of Our Lady, the Gospel gives us the genealogy or Identity Card of Jesus. By means of the list of his ancestors, the Evangelist tells the communities who Jesus is and how God acts in a surprising way in order to fulfil his promise. On our identity card there is our name and the name of our parents. Some persons, to say who

they are, also recall the names of the grandparents. Others, are embarrassed of their ancestors, of their families, and hide behind appearances which deceive. The Identity Card of Jesus has many names. On the list of names there is a great novelty. At that time, the genealogy indicated only the name of the men. This is why, it surprises that Matthew also mentions five women among the ancestors of Jesus: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, the wife of Uriah and Mary. Why does he choose precisely these five women and not others? This is the question which the Gospel of Matthew leaves for us.

- Matthew 1, 1-17: The long list of names – the beginning and the end of the genealogy. At the beginning and at the end of the genealogy, Matthew clearly makes us understand which is the identity of Jesus: He is the Messiah, son of David and son of Abraham. As descendant of David, Jesus is the response of God to the expectations of the Jewish people (2 S 7, 12, and 16). As descendant of Abraham, he is source of blessings and of hope for all nations of the earth (Gn 12, 13). Therefore, in this way, both the Jews and the Pagans who formed part of the communities of Syria and of Palestine at the time of Matthew could see that their hope was fulfilled in Jesus. .

Drawing up the list of the ancestors of Jesus, Matthew adopts a plan of 3 X 14 generations (Mt 1, 17). Number two is the number of the divinity. Number 14 is two times 7, which is the number of perfection. At that time, it was something common to interpret or calculate God's action by using the numbers and the dates. By means of these symbolical calculations, Matthew reveals the presence of God throughout the generations and expresses the conviction of the communities who said that Jesus appeared at the time established by God. With his coming history reaches its fulfilment.

The message of the five women mentioned in the genealogy. Jesus is the response of God to the expectation both of the Jews and of the Pagans, but it is in a completely surprising way. In the stories of the four women of the Old Testament, mentioned in the genealogy, there is something abnormal. The four of them were foreigners, and they will conceive their sons outside the normal schema of the behaviour of that time and they do not keep the requirements of the laws of purity of the time of Jesus. Tamar, a Canaanite, widow, dresses as a prostitute of Jericho to oblige Judah to be faithful to her and to give her a son (Gn 38, 1-30). Rahab, a prostitute from Jericho, makes an alliance with the Israelites. She helped them to enter into the Promised Land and professed the faith in a God who liberates from the Exodus. (Gs 2, 1-21). Bathsheba, a Hittite, wife of Uriah, was seduced, abused and made pregnant by King David, who in addition to that, ordered her husband to be killed (2 S 11, 1-27). Ruth, a Moabite, a poor widow, chose to remain with Naomi and adhere to the people of God (Rt 1, 16-18). Advised by her mother-in-law Naomi, Ruth imitates Tamar and spends the night together with Boaz, obliging him to observe the law and to give her a son. From their relation Obed was born, the grandfather of King David (Rt 3, 1-15; 4, 13-17). These four women question the models of behaviour imposed by the Patriarchal society. And thus, their conventional initiative will give continuity to the descendants of Jesus and will bring salvation to all the people. Through them, God realizes his plan and sends the promised Messiah. Truly, God's way of acting surprises and makes one think! At the end the reader will ask: "And Mary? Is there something irregular in her? What is it? We get the response from the story of Saint Joseph which follows in (Mt 1, 18-23).

- Matthew 1, 18-23: Saint Joseph was just. What was irregular in Mary is that she became pregnant before living together with Joseph, her promised spouse, who was a just man. Jesus says: "If your justice is not greater than the justice of the Pharisees and the Scribes, you will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven". If Joseph had been just according to the justice of the Pharisees, he should have denounced Mary and she would have been stoned. Jesus would have died. Thanks to the true justice of Joseph, Jesus was able to be born.

#### **4) Personal questions**

- When I present myself to others, what do I say about myself and about my family?
- If the Evangelist mentions only these five women together with over forty men, no doubt, he wants to communicate a message, which is this message? What does all this tell us about the identity of Jesus? And what does this say about us?

#### **5) Concluding Prayer**

They shall speak of the glory of your kingship  
and tell of your might,  
making known your mighty deeds to the children of Adam,  
the glory and majesty of your kingship. (Ps 145,10-11)

### **Lectio Divina: Wednesday, September 9, 2015**

**Ordinary Time**

#### **1) Opening prayer**

God our Father,

you redeem us

and make us your children in Christ.

Look upon us,

give us true freedom

and bring us to the inheritance you promised.

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

who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,

one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

#### **2) Gospel Reading - Luke 6,20-26**

Then fixing his eyes on his disciples Jesus said: How blessed are you who are poor: the kingdom of God is yours.

Blessed are you who are hungry now: you shall have your fill. Blessed are you who are weeping now: you shall laugh.

‘Blessed are you when people hate you, drive you out, abuse you, denounce your name as criminal, on account of the Son of man.

Rejoice when that day comes and dance for joy, look!-your reward will be great in heaven. This was the way their ancestors treated the prophets.

But alas for you who are rich: you are having your consolation now.

Alas for you who have plenty to eat now: you shall go hungry. Alas for you who are laughing now: you shall mourn and weep.

‘Alas for you when everyone speaks well of you! This was the way their ancestors treated the false prophets.

### 3) Reflection

- The Gospel today presents four blessings and four curses in Luke’s Gospel. There is a progressive revelation in the way in which Luke presents the teaching of Jesus. Up to 6, 16, he says many times, that Jesus taught the people, but he did not describe the content of the teaching (Lk 4, 15.31-32.44; 5, 1.3.15.17; 6, 6). Now, after having said that Jesus sees the crowd desirous to hear the Word of God, Luke presents the first great discourse which begins with the exclamation: “Blessed are you who are poor!” And “Alas for you, rich!” and then takes up all the rest of the chapter (Lk 6, 12-49). Some call this Discourse the “Discourse of the Plain” because, according to Luke, Jesus came down from the mountain and stopped in a place which was plain and there he pronounced his discourse. In Matthew’s Gospel, this same discourse is given on the mountain (Mt 5, 1) and is called “The Sermon on the Mountain”. In Matthew, in this discourse there are eight Beatitudes, which trace a program of life for the Christian communities of Jewish origin. In Luke, the sermon is shorter and more radical. It contains only four Beatitudes and four curses, directed to the Hellenistic communities, formed by rich and poor. This discourse of Jesus will be meditated on in the daily Gospel of the next days.
- Luke 6, 20: *Blessed are you, poor!* Looking at the disciples, Jesus declares: “Blessed are you who are poor, the Kingdom of Heaven is yours!” This declaration identifies the social category of the disciples. They are poor! And Jesus promises to them: “The Kingdom is yours!” It is not a promise made for the future. The verb is in the present. The Kingdom belongs to them already. They are blessed now. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus makes explicit the sense of this and says: “Blessed are the poor in spirit!” (Mt 5, 3). They are the poor who have the Spirit of Jesus; because there are some poor who have the mentality of the rich. The disciples of Jesus are poor and have the mentality of the poor. Like Jesus, they do not want to accumulate, but they assume their poverty and with him, they struggle for a more just life together, where there will be fraternity and sharing of goods, without any discrimination.
- Luke 6, 21-22: *Blessed are you, who now hunger and weep.* In the second and third Beatitude, Jesus says: “Blessed are who are hungry now, because you shall have your full! Blessed are you, who are weeping now, you shall laugh!” One part of the phrase is in the present and the other in the future. What we live and suffer now is not definitive; what is definitive is the Kingdom of God which we are constructing with the force of the Spirit of Jesus. To construct the Kingdom presupposes pain, suffering and persecution, but something is certain: the Kingdom will be attained, and you will have your fill and you will laugh!”
- Luke 6, 23: *Blessed are you when people hate you...!* The 4<sup>th</sup> Beatitude refers to the future: “Blessed are you when people hate you, drive you out on account of the Son of Man!” Rejoice when that day comes and dance for joy, look, your reward will be great in heaven. This was the way your ancestors treated the prophets!” With these words of Jesus, Luke

encourages the communities of his time, because they were persecuted. Suffering is not death rattle, but the pain of birth pangs. It is a source of hope! Persecution was a sign that the future that had been announced by Jesus was arriving, being reached. The communities were following the right path.

- Luke 6, 24-25: *Alas for you who are rich!* Alas for you who now have your fill and who laugh! After the four Beatitudes in favour of the poor and of the excluded, follow four threats or curses against the rich and those for whom everything goes well and are praised by everybody. The four threats have the same identical literary form as the four Beatitudes. The first one is expressed in the present. The second and the third one have a part in the present and another part in the future. And the fourth one refers completely to the future. These threats are found only in Luke's Gospel and not in that of Matthew. Luke is more radical in denouncing injustices.

Before Jesus, on the plains there are no rich people. There are only sick and poor people, who have come from all parts (Lk 6, 17-19). But Jesus says: "Alas for you the rich!" And this because Luke, in transmitting these words of Jesus, is thinking more of the communities of his time. In those communities there are rich and poor people, and there is discrimination of the poor on the part of the rich, the same discrimination which marked the structure of the Roman Empire (cf. Tg 5, 1-6; Rv 3, 17-19). Jesus criticizes the rich very hard and directly: You rich have already received consolation! You are already filled, but you are still hungry! Now you are laughing, but you will be afflicted and will weep! This is a sign that for Jesus poverty is not something fatal, nor the fruit of prejudices, but it is the fruit of unjust enrichment on the part of others.

- Luke 6, 26: *Alas for you when everyone speaks well of you, because this was the way their ancestors treated the false prophets!* This fourth threat refers to the sons of those who in the past praised the false prophets; because some authority of the Jews used its prestige and authority to criticize Jesus.

#### **4) Personal questions**

- Do we look at life and at persons with the same look of Jesus? What do you think in your heart: is a poor and hungry person truly happy? The stories which we see on Television and the propaganda of the market, what ideal of happiness do they present?

- In saying: "Blessed are the poor", did Jesus want to say that the poor have to continue to be poor?

#### **5) Concluding Prayer**

Upright in all that he does,

Yahweh acts only in faithful love.

He is close to all who call upon him,

all who call on him from the heart. (Ps 145,17-18)

## Lectio Divina: Thursday, September 10, 2015

### Ordinary Time

#### 1) Opening prayer

God our Father,  
you redeem us  
and make us your children in Christ.  
Look upon us,  
give us true freedom  
and bring us to the inheritance you promised.  
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,  
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

#### 2) Gospel Reading - Luke 6,27-38

Jesus said to his disciples: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who treat you badly.

To anyone who slaps you on one cheek, present the other cheek as well; to anyone who takes your cloak from you, do not refuse your tunic. Give to everyone who asks you, and do not ask for your property back from someone who takes it.

Treat others as you would like people to treat you. If you love those who love you, what credit can you expect? Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit can you expect? For even sinners do that much. And if you lend to those from whom you hope to get money back, what credit can you expect? Even sinners lend to sinners to get back the same amount.

Instead, love your enemies and do good to them, and lend without any hope of return. You will have a great reward, and you will be children of the Most High, for he himself is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. '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

- In today's Gospel we have the second part of the "Discourse of the Plain". In the first part (Lk 6, 20-26), Jesus addresses himself to the disciples (Lk 6, 20). In the second part (Lk 6, 27-49), he addresses himself "to you who listen to me", that is, the great crowds of poor and sick people, who had come from all parts (Lk 6, 17-19).

- Luke 6, 27-30: Love the enemies! The words that Jesus addresses to these people are demanding and difficult: to love the enemies, not to curse them, to present the other cheek to anyone who slaps you on one cheek, and do not protest or complain when somebody takes what is ours. Taken literally, these phrases seem to favour the rich who rob. But not even Jesus observes them literally. When the soldier struck him on the face, he did not offer the other cheek but rather reacted firmly: "If there is some offence in what I said, point it out, but if not why do you strike me?" (Jn 18, 22-23). Then, how are these words to be understood? The following verses help us to understand what Jesus wants to teach us.

- Luke 6, 31-36: The Golden Rule! to imitate God. Two phrases of Jesus help us to understand what he wants to teach. The first phrase is the so called Golden Rule: "Treat others as you would like people to treat you!" (Lk 6, 31). The second phrase is: "Be merciful as your Father in Heaven is merciful!" (Lk 6, 36). These two phrases indicate that Jesus does

not want simply to change the situation, because nothing would change. He wants to change the system. The novelty which he wants to construct comes from the new experience of God the Father, full of tenderness who accepts all! The words of threat against the rich cannot be the occasion of revenge on the part of the poor! Jesus demands the contrary attitude: "Love your enemies!" Love cannot depend on what I receive from others. True love should want the good of others, independently of what he or she does for me. Love should be creative, because that is how God's love is for us: "Be merciful, as your Heavenly Father is merciful!" Matthew says the same thing with other words: "Be perfect as your Father in Heaven is perfect" (Mt 5, 48). Never will anyone be able to say: Today I have been perfect as the Father in Heaven is perfect! I have been merciful as the Father in Heaven is merciful". We will always be below the measure which Jesus has placed before us.

In Luke's Gospel, the Golden Rule says: "Treat others as you would like people to treat you!" (Lk 6, 31). Matthew, in his Gospel, gives a different formulation: "Treat others as you would like others to treat you" And he adds: "That is the Law and the Prophets" (Mt 7, 12). Practically, all religions in the whole world have the same Golden Rule with a diverse formulation. This is a sign that a universal intuition or desire is expressed which comes from the bottom of the human heart.

- Luke 6, 37-38: "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". These are four advices: two in a negative form, do not judge and do not condemn; and two in positive form: to forgive and to give an abundant measure. When it says: "there will be gifts for you", Jesus refers to the treatment which God wants to have with us. But when our way of treating others is mean, God cannot use with us the abundant and overflowing measure that he would want to use.

Celebrate the visit of God. The Discourse of the Plains or the Sermon on the Mountain, from the beginning, leads the listeners to make a choice, to opt, in favour of the poor. In the Old Testament, several times, God placed people before this same choice, blessing or curse. People were given the freedom to choose: "Today I call heaven and earth to witness against you: I am offering you life or death, blessing or curse. Choose life, then, so that you and your descendants may live" (Dt 30,19). It is not God who condemns, but the people themselves according to the choice that they make between life and death, good or evil. These moments of choosing are moments of the visit of God to his people (Gn 21, 1; 50, 24-25); Ex 3, 16; 32, 34; Jr 20, 10; Ps 65, 10; Ps 80, 15; Ps 106, 4). Luke is the only Evangelist who uses this image of the visit of God (Lk 1, 68. 78; 7, 16; 19, 44; Ac 15, 16). For Luke it is the visit of God which places people before the choice between blessing or curse: "Blessed are you who are poor" and "Alas for you, the rich!" But people do not recognize the visit of God (Lk 19,44).

#### **4) Personal questions**

- Do we look at life and at persons with the same look of Jesus?
- What does it mean today "be merciful as your Heavenly Father is merciful"?

#### **5) Concluding Prayer**

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

## Lectio Divina: Friday, September 11, 2015

### Ordinary Time

#### 1) Opening prayer

God our Father,  
you redeem us  
and make us your children in Christ.  
Look upon us,  
give us true freedom  
and bring us to the inheritance you promised.  
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,  
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

#### 2) Gospel Reading - Luke 6,39-42

Jesus also told them a parable, ‘Can one blind person guide another? Surely both will fall into a pit? Disciple is not superior to teacher; but fully trained disciple will be like teacher. Why do you observe the splinter in your brother’s eye and never notice the great log in your own? How can you say to your brother, “Brother, let me take out that splinter in your eye,” when you cannot see the great log in your own? Hypocrite! Take the log out of your own eye first, and then you will see clearly enough to take out the splinter in your brother’s eye.

#### 3) Reflection

- Today’s Gospel gives us some passages of the discourse which Jesus pronounced on the plains after having spent the night in prayer (Lk 6, 12) and after he had called the twelve to be his apostles (Lk 6, 13-14). Many of the phrases in this discourse had already been pronounced on other occasions, but Luke, imitating Matthew, puts them together in this Discourse of the Plains.
- Luke 6, 39: The parable of the blind man who guides another blind man. Jesus tells a parable to the disciples: “Can a blind man guide another blind man? Will not both of them fall into a hole?” A parable of one line, quite similar to the warnings which, in Matthew’s Gospel, are addressed to the Pharisees: “Alas for you, blind guides!” (Mt 23, 16.17.19.24.26) Here in the context of the Gospel of Luke, this parable is addressed to the animators of the communities who consider themselves the masters of truth, superior to others. Because of this they are blind guides.
- Luke 6, 40: Disciple – Master. “The disciple is not greater than the teacher, but the well prepared disciple will be like the teacher” Jesus is the Master, not the professor. The professor in class teaches different subjects, but does not live with the pupils. The Master or Lord does not teach lessons, he lives with the pupils. His subject matter is himself, his life witness, his way of living the things that he teaches. Living together with the Master, the Lord has three aspects: (1) the Master is the model or example to be imitated (cf. Jn 13, 13-15). (2) The disciple not only contemplates and imitates, he commits himself to the same destiny of the Master, with his temptations (Lk 22, 28). His persecution (Mt 10, 24-25), his death (Jn 11, 16); (3) He not only imitates the model, he not only assumes the commitment, but arrives at identifying himself with him: “I live, but it is not I who live, but Christ lives in me!” (Ga 2, 20). This third aspect is the mystical dimension of the following of Jesus, fruit of the action of the Spirit.
- Luke 6,41-42: The splinter in the brother’s eye. “Why do you observe the splinter in your brother’s eye and never notice the great log in your own? How can you say to your brother: ‘Brother, let me take out that splinter in your eye, when you cannot see the great log in your

own? Hypocrite! Take the log out of your own eye first, and then you will see clearly enough to take out the splinter in your brother's eye". In the Sermon on the Mountain, Matthew treats the same theme and explains a bit better the parable of the splinter in the eye. Jesus asks for a creative attitude which will make us capable to go and encounter the others without judging them, without preconceptions and rationalizing, but accepting the brother (Mt 7, 1-5). This total openness toward others considering them as brothers/sisters will arise in us only when we are capable of relating with God with total trust as his children (Mt 7, 7-11).

#### **4) Personal questions**

- Splinter and log in the eye. How do I relate with others at home and in my family, in work and with my colleagues, in community and with the brothers and sisters?
- Master and disciple. How am I a disciple of Jesus?

#### **5) Concluding Prayer**

Lord, how blessed are those who live in your house;  
they shall praise you continually.

Blessed those who find their strength in you,  
whose hearts are set on pilgrimage. (Ps 84,4-5)

### **Lectio Divina: Saturday, September 12, 2015**

#### **Ordinary Time**

##### **1) Opening prayer**

God our Father,  
you redeem us  
and make us your children in Christ.

Look upon us,  
give us true freedom  
and bring us to the inheritance you promised.

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

##### **2) Gospel Reading - Luke 6,43-49**

Jesus said to his disciples: 'There is no sound tree that produces rotten fruit, nor again a rotten tree that produces sound fruit. Every tree can be told by its own fruit: people do not pick figs from thorns, nor gather grapes from brambles.

Good people draw what is good from the store of goodness in their hearts; bad people draw what is bad from the store of badness. For the words of the mouth flow out of what fills the heart. 'Why do you call me, "Lord, Lord" and not do what I say?

'Everyone who comes to me and listens to my words and acts on them—I will show you what such a person is like. Such a person is like the man who, when he built a house, dug, and dug deep, and laid the foundations on rock; when the river was in flood it bore down on that house but could not shake it, it was so well built. But someone who listens and does nothing is like the man who built a house on soil, with no foundations; as soon as the river bore down on it, it collapsed; and what a ruin that house became!'

##### **3) Reflection**

- In today's Gospel we have the last part of the Discourse of the Plains that is, the version which Luke presents in the Sermon on the Mountain of the Gospel of Matthew. And Luke puts together what follows:

• Luke 6, 43-45: The parable of the tree that bears good fruit. “There is no sound tree that produces rotten fruit, nor again a rotten tree that produces sound fruit. Every tree can be known by its own fruit: people do not pick figs from thorns, or gather grapes from brambles”. The letter of James the Apostle serves as a comment to this parable of Jesus: “Does any water supply give a flow of fresh water and salt water out of the same pipe? Can a fig tree yield olives, my brothers, or a vine yield figs? No more can sea water yield fresh water” (James 3, 11-12). A person who is well formed in the tradition of living together in community develops within self a good nature which leads him/her to do good. “The good of the treasure of his/her heart is brought out”, but the person who does not pay attention to his/her formation will have difficulty in producing good deeds. Rather, “from his/her evil treasure evil will come out evil, because the mouth speaks of the fullness of the heart”. Concerning the “good treasure of the heart” it is worthwhile to remember what the Book of Ecclesiasticus’ says on the heart, the source of good counsel: “Stick to the advice your own heart gives you, no one can be truer to you than that; since a person’s soul often gives a clearer warning than seven watchmen perched on a watchtower. And besides all this beg the Most High to guide your steps into the truth” (Si 37, 13-15).

• Luke 6, 46: It is not sufficient to say, Lord, Lord. What is important is not to say beautiful things about God, but rather to do the will of the Father and in this way be a revelation of his face and of his presence in the world.

• Luke 6, 47-49: To construct the house on rock. To listen and to put into practice, this is the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mountain. Many people sought security and religious power in the extraordinary heads (gifts) or in the observance. But true security does not come from power; it does not come from any of those things. It comes from God! And God becomes the source of security, when we seek to do his will. And in this way he will be the rock which will support us, in the difficult hours and in the storms.

God is the rock of our life. In the Book of Psalms, we frequently find the expression: “God is my rock, my fortress... My God, my Rock, my refuge, my shield, the force which saves me...” (Ps 18, 3). He is the defence and the force of those who believe in him and who seek justice (Ps 18, 21-24). The persons, who trust in this God, become, in turn, a rock for others. Thus the prophet Isaiah invites the people who were in exile: “Listen to me, you who pursue saving justice, you who seek Yahweh. Consider the rock from which you were hewn, the quarry from which you were dug. Consider Abraham your father and Sarah who gave you birth” (Is 51, 1-2). The prophet asks the people not to forget the past and to remember Abraham and Sarah who because of their faith in God became a rock, the beginning of the People of God. Looking toward this rock, the people should draw courage to fight and get out of the exile. And thus Matthew exhorts the communities to have as an incentive or encouragement this same rock (Mt 7, 24-25) and in this way be themselves rocks to strengthen their brothers in the faith. This is also the significance which Jesus gives to Peter: “You are Peter and on this Rock I will build my Church” (Mt 16, 18). This is the vocation of the first communities called to unite themselves to Jesus, the living Rock, so as to become themselves living rocks, listening and putting into practice the Word (P 2, 4-10; 2, 5; Ep 2,19-22).

#### **4) Personal questions**

- Which is the quality of my heart?
- Is my house built on rock?

#### **5) Concluding Prayer**

Lord, you created my inmost self,  
knit me together in my mother’s womb.  
For so many marvels I thank you; a wonder am I,

and all your works are wonders. (Ps 139,13-14)

## Lectio Divina: Sunday, September 13, 2015

*How to follow Jesus*

*Care of the Disciples, healing of the Blind*

*Mark 8, 27-35*

### 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 this 24<sup>th</sup> Sunday of ordinary time presents the first announcement of the Passion and death of Jesus, to the Disciples, Peter trying to eliminate the Cross and the teaching of Jesus concerning the consequences of the Cross for those who wish to be His Disciples. Peter does not understand the proposal of Jesus concerning the Cross and suffering. He accepted Jesus as Messiah, not as a suffering Messiah. Peter was conditioned by the propaganda of the Government of that time which spoke of the Messiah only in terms of a glorious King. Peter seemed to be blind. He could not see anything and wished that Jesus could be like him, Peter desired and imagined. Today we all believe in Jesus. But all of us do not understand him in the same way. Who is Jesus for me? Today, which is the most common image of Jesus that people have? Today, is there a propaganda that tries to interfere in our way of seeing Jesus? Who am I for Jesus?

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

Mark 8, 27-28: The question of Jesus concerning the opinion of the people and the response of the Disciples

Mark 8, 29-30: The question of Jesus and the opinion of his Disciples

Mark 8, 31-32<sup>a</sup>: The first announcement of the Passion and death

Mark 8, 32b-33: The conversation between Jesus and Peter

Mark 8, 34-35: The conditions to follow Jesus

### c) The text:

27 Jesus and his disciples left for the villages round Caesarea Philippi. On the way he put this question to his disciples, 'Who do people say I am?' 28 And they told him, 'John the Baptist, others Elijah, others again, one of the prophets.' 29 'But you,' he asked them, 'who do you say I am?' Peter spoke up and said to him, 'You are the Christ.' 30 And he gave them strict orders not to tell anyone about him.

31 Then he began to teach them that the Son of man was destined to suffer grievously, and to be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and to be put to death, and after three days to rise again; 32 and he said all this quite openly. Then, taking him aside, Peter tried to rebuke him. 33 But, turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said to him, 'Get behind me, Satan! You are thinking not as God thinks, but as human beings do.' 34 He called the people and his disciples to him and said, 'If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross and follow me. 35 Anyone who wants to save his life will lose it; but anyone who loses his life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.'



### 3. A moment of prayerful silence

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

### 4. Some questions

to help us in our personal reflection.

- a) Which point in this text pleased you the most or what struck you the most? Why?
- b) Which is the opinion of the people and of Peter on Jesus? Why do Peter and the people think in this way?
- c) Which is the relationship between the healing of the blind man, described before (Mk 8, 22-26) and the conversation of Jesus with Peter and the other Disciples?
- d) What does Jesus ask from those who want to follow him?
- e) What prevents us today from recognizing and assuming the project of Jesus?

### 5. For those who wish to deepen more on the theme

#### a) Context of yesterday and of today:

- i) In the text of Mark 8, 27 the long instruction of Jesus to his Disciples begins, and this goes on until the passage of Mark 10, 45. At the beginning of this instruction as well as at the end

of it, Mark places the healing of the blind man: Mark 8, 22-26 and Mark 10, 46-52. At the beginning the healing of the blind man was not easy and Jesus had to heal him in two stages. The healing of the blindness of the Disciples was also difficult. Jesus had to give them a long explanation concerning the significance of the Cross in order to help them to see the reality, because it was the cross which brought about the blindness in them. At the end, the healing of the blind man Bartimaeus is the fruit of faith in Jesus. It suggests the ideal of the Disciple: to believe in Jesus and to accept Him as He is, and not as I want or imagine.

ii) In the year 70, when Mark wrote, the situation of the communities was not easy. There was much suffering, many were the crosses. Six years before, in 64, Nero, the emperor had decreed the first great persecution, killing many Christians. In the year 70, in Palestine, Jerusalem, was about to be destroyed by the Romans. In other countries, a great tension between the converted Jews and the non converted was beginning. The greatest difficulty was the Cross of Jesus. The Jews thought that a Crucified person could not be the Messiah greatly expected by the people, because the Law affirmed that anyone who had been crucified had to be considered as cursed by God (Dt 21, 22-23).

### **b) Commentary on the text:**

Mark 8, 22.26: *Healing of the blind man*

They bring him a blind man, and ask Jesus to cure him. Jesus cures him, but in a different way. First, he takes him out of the village, then he puts some saliva on his eyes, imposes the hands and asks him: *Do you see anything?* And the man answers: *I see men, because I see like trees that walk!* He saw only in part. He sees trees and interchanges them for people, and the people for trees! It is only in the second time that Jesus heals the blind man and forbids him to go back to the village. Jesus did not want an easy propaganda! This description of the healing of the blind man is an introduction to the instruction which will be given to the Disciples, because in reality, Peter and the other Disciples were blind!. And the blindness of the Disciples is cured by Jesus, even though not in the first time. They accepted Jesus as Messiah, but only as a glorious Messiah. They only noticed one part! They did not want the commitment of the Cross! They interchanged trees for persons!

Mark 8, 27-30. *TO SEE: the discovery of reality*

Jesus asks: "Whom do people say that I am?" They answer indicating the diverse opinions of the people: "John the Baptist", "Elijah or one of the prophets". After having heard the opinions of others, Jesus asks: "And you, whom do you say that I am?" Peter answers: "You are the Christ, the Messiah!" That is: "The Lord is the one whom the people are expecting!" Jesus agrees with Peter, but forbids to speak about this with the people. Why does Jesus forbid them this? Then, everyone was waiting for the coming of the Messiah, but each one in his own way, according to the class and the social position which he had: some expected him to come as *King*, others as *Priest, Doctor, Warrior, Judge or Prophet!* Nobody seemed to wait for the Messiah as *Servant*, as announced by Isaiah (Is 42, 1-9).

Mark 8, 31-33. *TO JUDGE: clarification of the situation: first announcement of the Passion*

Jesus begins to teach that he is the Messiah *Servant* announced by Isaiah, and will be taken prisoner and be killed during the exercise of his mission of justice (Is 49, 4-9; 53, 1-12). Peter is filled with fear, he takes Jesus aside and tries to rebuke him.

And Jesus responds to Peter: “Get behind me, Satan! You are thinking not as God thinks, but as human beings do!” Peter thought he had given the right answer. And, in fact he says the just word: “You are the Christ!” But he does not give this word the right significance. Peter does not understand Jesus. He is like the blind man of Bethsaida. He interchanged the people with the trees! Jesus’ answer was very hard. He calls Peter Satan! Satan is a Hebrew word which means *accuser*, the one who withdraws others from the path of God. Jesus does not allow anyone to draw him away from his mission. Literally, Jesus says: “Get behind me!” That is, Peter has to go behind Jesus, has to **follow** Jesus and accept the way or direction which Jesus indicates. Peter wanted to be the first one and to indicate the direction. He wanted a Messiah according to his measure and according to his desire.

Mark 8, 34-37. *TO ACT: conditions to follow*

Jesus draws conclusions which are still valid today: *He who wants to follow me, let him take up his cross and follow me!* At that time, the cross was the death sentence which the Roman Empire imposed to the marginalized. To take up the cross and to carry it following Jesus meant, then, to accept to be marginalized by the unjust system which legitimised injustice. It indicated a radical and total rupture. As Saint Paul says in the Letter to the Galatians: “But as for me, it is out of the question that I should boast at all, except of the Cross of Our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom the world has been *crucified* to me, and I to the world” (Gal 6, 14). The Cross is not fatalism, nor 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 Jesus is Father and that, therefore, all have to be accepted and treated as brothers and sisters. Because of this revolutionary announcement, he was persecuted and he was not afraid to surrender his life. *There is no proof of a greater love than to give one’s life for the brother.*

### **c) Extending the information:**

#### **The instruction of Jesus to the Disciples**

Between the two healings of the blind men (Mk 8, 22-26 and Mark 10, 46-52), is found the long instruction of Jesus to his Disciples, to help them to understand the significance of the Cross and its consequences for life (Mark 8, 27 to 10, 45). It seems to be a document, a certain type of catechism, made by Jesus himself. It speaks about the cross in the life of the Disciple. It is a type of a schema of instruction:

Mk 8, 22-26: Healing of a blind man

Mk 8, 27-38: 1<sup>st</sup> announcement of the Passion

Mk 9, 1-29: Instruction on the Messiah Servant

Mk 9, 30-37: 2<sup>nd</sup> Announcement of the Passion

Mk 9, 38 to 10, 31: Instructions on conversation

Mk 10, 32-45: 3<sup>rd</sup> Announcement of the Passion

Mk 10, 46-52: Healing of a blind man.

As we can see, the instruction is formed by three announcements of the Passion. The first one is in Mark 8, 27-38, the second one in Mark 9, 30-37 and the third one in Mark 10, 32-45. Between the first one and the second one, there are a series of instructions to help them to understand that Jesus is the Messiah *Servant* (Mk 9, 1-29). Between the second and the third one, a series of instructions which clarify the conversion which has to take place in the life of those who accept Jesus as Messiah *Servant* (Mk 9, 38 to 10, 31).

The background of the whole instruction is the *road* from Galilee to Jerusalem, from the lake to the cross. Jesus is on the way toward Jerusalem, where he will be put to death. From the beginning and up to the end of this instruction, Mark informs that Jesus is on the way toward Jerusalem (Mk 8, 27; 9, 30.33; 10, 1, 17.32), where he will find the cross.

In each one of these three announcements, Jesus speaks about his Passion, Death and Resurrection as part of the project of Jesus: “The Son of man *has* to suffer grievously, and to be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and to be put to death, and after three days to rise again” (Mk 8, 31; 9, 31; 10, 33). The expression *has* indicates that the cross had already been announced in the prophecies (cfr. Lk 24, 26).

Each one of these three announcements of the Passion is accompanied by gestures or words of misunderstanding on the part of the Disciples. In the first one, Peter does not want the cross and criticises Jesus (Mk 8, 32). In the second one, the Disciples do not understand Jesus, they are afraid and wish to be greater (Mk 9, 32-34). In the third one, they are afraid, they are apprehensive (Mk 10, 32), and they seek promotions (Mk 10, 35-37). And this because in the communities for which Mark writes his Gospel there were many persons like Peter: they did not want the cross! They were like the Disciples: they did not understand the cross, they were afraid and wanted to be the greatest; they lived in fear and desired promotions. Each one of these three announcements gives them a word of orientation on the part of Jesus, criticising the lack of understanding of the Disciples and teaching how their behaviour should be. Thus, in the first announcement, Jesus demands from those who wish to follow him to carry the cross behind him, to lose their life out of love for him and for his Gospel, not to be ashamed of him and of his word (Mk 8, 34-38). In the second one he demands: to become the servant of all, to receive the children, the little ones, as if they were Jesus himself (Mk 9, 35-37). In the third one he demands: to drink the cup that he will drink, not to imitate the powerful who exploit the others, but to imitate the Son of Man who has not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life for the redemption of many (Mk 10, 35-45).

The total understanding of the following of Jesus is not obtained from the theoretical instruction, but from the practical commitment, *walking* with him along the way of **service**, from Galilee to Jerusalem. Those who insist in maintaining the idea of Peter, that is, of the glorious Messiah without the cross, will not understand and will not succeed in assuming an attitude of the true disciple. They will continue to be blind, interchanging people for trees (Mk 8, 24). Because without the cross it is impossible to understand who Jesus is and what it means *to follow Jesus*.

The road of the following is the way of dedication, of abandonment, of service, of availability, of acceptance of conflict, knowing that there will be the resurrection. The cross is not an accident on the way, but forms part of the road. Because in the world, organized beginning with egoism, love and service can exist only in the crucified! The one who gives his life in the service of others, disturbs those who live attached to privileges and he suffers.

## **6. Prayer of Psalm 25 (24)**

**Show me Lord, your ways!**

Adoration I offer, Yahweh,

to you, my God.

But in my trust in you do not put me to shame,

let not my enemies gloat over me.

Calling to you, none shall ever be put to shame,

but shame is theirs who groundlessly break faith.

Direct me in your ways,

Yahweh, and teach me your paths.

Encourage me to walk in your truth

and teach me since you are the God who saves me.

For my hope is in you all day long

-- such is your generosity, Yahweh.

Goodness and faithful love have been yours for ever, Yahweh,

do not forget them.

Hold not my youthful sins against me,

but remember me as your faithful love dictates.

Integrity and generosity are marks of Yahweh

for he brings sinners back to the path.

Judiciously he guides the humble,

instructing the poor in his way.

Kindness unfailing and constancy mark all Yahweh's paths,

for those who keep his covenant and his decrees.

Let my sin, great though it is, be forgiven,

Yahweh, for the sake of your name.

Men who respect Yahweh, what of them?

He teaches them the way they must choose.

Neighbours to happiness will they live,

and their children inherit the land.

Only those who fear Yahweh have his secret

and his covenant, for their understanding.

Permanently my eyes are on Yahweh,

for he will free my feet from the snare.

Quick, turn to me, pity me,

alone and wretched as I am!

Relieve the distress of my heart,

bring me out of my constraint.

Spake a glance for my misery and pain,

take all my sins away.

Take note how countless are my enemies,

how violent their hatred for me.

Unless you guard me and rescue me I shall be put to shame,

for you are my refuge.

Virtue and integrity be my protection,

for my hope, Yahweh, is in you.

Ransom Israel, O God,

from all its troubles.

## **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: Monday, September 14, 2015

*Anyone who believes in Jesus has eternal life.*

### Opening prayer

Oh Father who wanted to save man  
by the Cross of Christ, your Son,  
grant to us who have known on earth  
his mystery of love,  
to enjoy in Heaven the fruits of his redemption.  
We ask this through Christ our Lord.

### 1. LECTIO

#### Reading:

Jesus said to Nicodemus: 'No one has gone up to heaven except the one who came down from heaven, the Son of man; as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so must the Son of man be lifted up so that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.

For this is how God loved the world: he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. For God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but so that through him the world might be saved.

### 2. MEDITATIO

#### a) Key for the reading:

The text proposed to us by the Liturgy has been taken from the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. It should not surprise us that the passage chosen for this celebration forms part of the fourth Gospel, because, it is precisely this Gospel which presents the mystery of the cross of the Lord, as the exaltation. This is clear from the beginning of the Gospel: "as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so must the Son of man be lifted up" (Jn 3, 14; Dn 7, 13). John explains the mystery of the Incarnate Word in the paradoxical movement of the descent-ascent (Jn 1, 14.18; 3, 13). In fact, it is this mystery which offers the key for the reading in order to understand the evolution of the identity and of the mission of the *passus et gloriosus* of Jesus Christ, and that we may well say that this is not only valid for the text of John. The Letter to the Ephesians, for example, uses this paradoxical movement to explain the mystery of Christ: "Now, when it says, 'he went up', it must mean that he had gone down to the deepest levels of the earth" (Ef 4, 9).

Jesus is the Son of God who becoming Son of man (Jn 3,13) makes known to us the mysteries of God (Jn 1, 18). He alone can do this, in so far as he alone has seen the Father (Jn 6, 46). We can say that the mystery of the Word who descends from Heaven responds to the yearning of the prophets: who will go up to heaven to reveal this mystery to us? (cf. Dt 30, 12; Pr 30, 4). The fourth Gospel is over full of references to the mystery of he who "is from Heaven" (1 Co 15, 47). The following are some quotations or references: Jn 6, 33. 38.51. 62; 8, 42; 16, 28-30; 17, 5.



The exaltation of Jesus is precisely in his descent to come to us, up to death, and the death on the Cross, on which he was lifted up like the serpent in the desert, which, “anybody... who looked at it would survive” (Nm 21,7-9; Zc 12,10). John reminds us in the scene of the death of Jesus of Christ being lifted up: “They will look to the one whom they have pierced” (Jn 19, 37). In the context of the fourth Gospel, to turn and look means, “to know”, “to understand”, “to see”.

Frequently, in John’s Gospel, Jesus speaks about his being lifted up: “When you have lifted up the Son of man, then you will know that I am He” (Jn 8,28); “when I am lifted up from the earth, I shall draw all peoples to myself. By these words he indicated the kind of death he would die” (Jn 12, 32-33). In the Synoptics also Jesus announces to his disciples the mystery of his condemnation to death on the cross (see Mt 20, 27-29; Mk 10, 32-34; Lk 18, 31-33). In fact, Christ had “to suffer all that to enter into his glory” (Lk 24, 26).

This mystery reveals the great love which God has for us. He is the Son given to us, “so that anyone who believes in him will not be lost, but will have eternal life”, this Son whom we have rejected and crucified. But precisely in this rejection on our part, God has manifested himself to us his fidelity and his love which does not stop before the hardness of our heart. And even in spite of our rejection and our contempt he gives us salvation (cf. Acts 4, 27-28), remaining firm in fulfilling his plan of mercy: God, in fact, has not sent his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world may be saved through him”.

#### **b) A few questions:**

- i) What struck you in the Gospel?
- ii) What does the exaltation of Christ and of his cross mean for you?
- iii) What consequences does this paradoxical movement of descent-ascent imply in the living out of faith?

### **3. ORATIO**

#### **Psalm 77 (1-2, 34-38)**

My people, listen to my teaching,  
pay attention to what I say.  
I will speak to you in poetry,  
unfold the mysteries of the past.  
Whenever he slaughtered them,  
they began to seek him,  
they turned back and looked eagerly for him,  
recalling that God was their rock,  
God the Most High, their redeemer.  
They tried to hoodwink him with their mouths,  
their tongues were deceitful towards him;  
their hearts were not loyal to him,  
they were not faithful to his covenant.  
But in his compassion he forgave their guilt  
instead of killing them,  
time and again repressing his anger  
instead of rousing his full wrath.

### **4. CONTEMPLATIO**

"Jesus Christ as Lord,  
to the glory of God the Father." (Phil 2,11)

# Lectio Divina: Tuesday, September 15, 2015

## Ordinary Time

### John 19,25-27

#### 1) Opening prayer

Almighty God,  
our creator and guide,  
may we serve you with all our hearts  
and know your forgiveness in our lives.  
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,  
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

#### 2) Gospel Reading - John 19,25-27

Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala.

Seeing his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing near her, Jesus said to his mother, 'Woman, this is your son.' Then to the disciple he said, 'This is your mother.' And from that hour the disciple took her into his home.

#### 3) Reflection

- Today, feast of Our Sorrowful Mother, the Gospel of the day presents the passage in which Mary, the Mother of Jesus and the Beloved Disciple, meet at Calvary before the Cross. The Mother of Jesus appears two times in the Gospel of John: 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). These two episodes, only present in John's Gospel, have a very profound value. The Gospel of John compared to the other three Gospels, is like an X-Ray of the other three, while the other three are only a photograph of what has taken place. The X rays of faith help to discover in the events dimensions which the human eye does not succeed to perceive. The Gospel of John, besides describing the facts, reveals the symbolical dimension which exists in them. Thus, in both cases, at Cana and at the foot of the Cross, the Mother of Jesus represents symbolically the Old Testament waiting for the New Testament to arrive, and in the two cases, she contributes to the arrival of the New Testament. Mary appears like the step between what existed before and that which will arrive afterwards. At Cana she symbolizes the Old Testament; she perceives the limits of the Old Testament and takes the initiative so that the New one arrives. She tells her Son: "They have no wine!" (Jn 2, 3). And in Calvary? Let us see:

- John 19, 25: The women and the Beloved Disciple, together at the foot of the Cross. This is what the Gospel says: "Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala". The "photograph" shows the mother together with the Son, standing up. A strong woman, who does not allow herself to be discouraged. "Stabat Mater Dolorosa!" Hers is a silent presence which supports the Son in his gift of self up until death, and the death on the cross (Ph 2, 8). But the "X-Ray" of faith shows how the passage from the Old Testament to the New Testament takes place. Like it happened in Cana, the Mother of Jesus represents the Old Testament, the new humanity which is formed beginning from the lived experience of the Gospel of the Kingdom. At the end of the first century, some Christians thought that the Old Testament was no longer necessary. In fact, at the beginning of the second century, Marciones rejected all the Old Testament and remained with only a

part of the New Testament. This is why many wanted to know which was the will of Jesus regarding this.

- John 19, 26-28: The Testament or the Will of Jesus. The words of Jesus are significant. Seeing his Mother, and at her side the beloved Disciple, Jesus says: “Woman, this is your son”. Then he says to the disciple: “This is your mother”. The Old and the New Testament must walk together. The request of Jesus, the beloved Disciple, the son, the New Testament, receives the mother in his house. In the house of the Beloved Disciple, in the Christian community, the full sense of the Old Testament is discovered. The New Testament cannot be understood without the Old one, neither is the Old one complete without the New one. Saint Agustin said: “Novum in vetere latet, Vetus in Novo patet”. (The New one is hidden in the Old one. The Old one blooms in the New one). The New one without the Old one would be a building without a foundation. And the Old one without the New one would be like a fruit tree which could not bear fruit.

- Mary in the New Testament. The New Testament speaks very little about Mary and she says even less. Mary is the Mother of silence. The Bible only keeps seven words of Mary. Each one of those is like a window which allows one to see inside Mary’s house and to discover how her relationship with God was. The key to understand all this is given by Luke: “Blessed are those who receive the word of God and put it into practice” (Lk 11, 27-28).

1st Word: “How can this come about, since I have no knowledge of man?” (Lk 1, 34).

2nd Word: “You see before you the Lord’s servant; let it happen to me as you have said”. (Lk 1, 38).

3rd Word: “My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour (Lk 1, 46-55).

4th Word: “My child why have you done this to us? Your father and I were worried looking for you” (Lk 2, 48).

5th Word: “They have no wine!” (Jn 2, 3.)

6th Word: “Do whatever he tells you!” (Jn 2, 5).

7th Word: The silence at the foot of the Cross, more eloquent than one thousand words! (Jn 19, 25-27).

#### **4) Personal questions**

- Mary at the foot of the Cross. A strong and silent woman. How is my devotion to Mary, the Mother of Jesus?

- In the Pieta of Michelangelo, Mary seems to be very young, younger than the crucified Son, and she must have been about fifty years old. Asked why he had sculptured the face of Mary as a young girl, Michelangelo replied: the persons who are passionate for God never age!” Passionate for God! Is that passion for God in me?

#### **5) Concluding Prayer**

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

Safe in your presence you hide them,  
far from human plotting. (Ps 31,19-20)

## **Lectio Divina: Wednesday, September 16, 2015**

### **1) Opening prayer**

Almighty God,

our creator and guide,  
may we serve you with all our hearts  
and know your forgiveness in our lives.

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

## 2) Gospel Reading - Luke 7,31-35

Jesus said: ‘What comparison, then, can I find for the people of this generation? What are they like? They are like children shouting to one another while they sit in the market place: We played the pipes for you, and you wouldn’t dance; we sang dirges, and you wouldn’t cry.

‘For John the Baptist has come, not eating bread, not drinking wine, and you say, “He is possessed.” The Son of man has come, eating and drinking, and you say, “Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.” Yet wisdom is justified by all her children.’

## 3) Reflection

- In today’s Gospel we see the novelty of the Good News which opens its way and thus persons who are attached to ancient forms of faith feel lost and do not understand anything more of God’s action. In order to hide their lack of openness and of understanding they defend and seek childish pretexts to justify their attitude of lack of acceptance. Jesus reacts with a parable to denounce the incoherence of his enemies: “You are similar to children who do not know what they want”.
- Luke 7, 31: *To whom, then, shall I compare you?* Jesus is struck by the reaction of the people and say: “What comparison, then, can I find for the people of this generation? What are they like?” When something is evident and the persons, out of ignorance or because of bad will, do not perceive things and do not want to perceive them, it is good to find an evident comparison which will reveal their incoherence and the ill will. And Jesus is a Master in finding comparisons which speak for themselves.
- Luke 7, 32: *Like children without judgment.* The comparison which Jesus finds is this one. You are like “those children, shouting to one another while they sit in the market place: we played the pipes for you, and you would not dance; we sang dirges and you would not cry!” Spoiled children, all over the world, have the same reaction. They complain when others do not do and act as they say. The reason for Jesus’ complaint is the arbitrary way with which people in the past reacted before John the Baptist and how they react now before Jesus.
- Luke 7, 33-34: *Their opinion on John and on Jesus.* “For John the Baptist has come, not eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say: he is possessed. The Son of man has come eating and drinking, and you say: look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners”. Jesus was a disciple of John the Baptist; he believed in him and was baptized by

him. On the occasion of this Baptism in the Jordan, he had the revelation of the Father regarding his mission as Messiah-Servant (Mk 1, 10). At the same time, Jesus stressed the difference between him and John. John was more severe, more ascetical, did not eat nor drink. He remained in the desert and threatened the people with the punishment of the Last Judgment (Lk 3, 7-9). Because of this, people said that he was possessed. Jesus was more welcoming; he ate and drank like everybody else. He went through the towns and entered the houses of the people; he accepted the tax collectors and the prostitutes. This is why they said that he was a glutton and a drunkard. Even considering his words regarding “the men of this generation” (Lk 7, 31), in a general way, probably, Jesus had in mind the opinion of the religious authority who did not believe in Jesus (Mk 11,29-33).

- Luke 7, 35: *The obvious conclusion to which Jesus arrives.* And Jesus ends drawing this conclusion: “Yet, wisdom is justified by all her children”. The lack of seriousness and of coherence is clearly seen in the opinion given on Jesus and on John. The bad will is so evident that it needs no proof. That recalls the response of Job to his friends who believe that they are wise: “Will no one teach you to be quiet! - the only wisdom that becomes you!” (Job 13, 5).

#### **4) Personal questions**

- When I express my opinion on others, am I like the Pharisees and the Scribes who gave their opinion on Jesus and John? They expressed only their preconceptions and said nothing on the persons whom they judged.

- Do you know any groups in the Church who would merit the parable of Jesus?

#### **5) Concluding Prayer**

How blessed the nation whose God is Yahweh,

the people he has chosen as his heritage.

From heaven Yahweh looks down,

he sees all the children of Adam. (Ps 33,12-13)

## **Lectio Divina: Thursday, September 17, 2015**

### **Ordinary Time**

#### **1) Opening prayer**

Almighty God,  
our creator and guide,  
may we serve you with all our hearts  
and know your forgiveness in our lives.  
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,  
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

## 2) Gospel Reading - Luke 7,36-50

One of the Pharisees invited Jesus to a meal. When he arrived at the Pharisee's house and took his place at table, suddenly a woman came in, who had a bad name in the town. She had heard he was dining with the Pharisee and had brought with her an alabaster jar of ointment. She waited behind him at his feet, weeping, and her tears fell on his feet, and she wiped them away with her hair; then she covered his feet with kisses and anointed them with the ointment.

When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, 'If this man were a prophet, he would know who this woman is and what sort of person it is who is touching him and what a bad name she has.'

Then Jesus took him up and said, 'Simon, I have something to say to you.' He replied, 'Say on, Master.' 'There was once a creditor who had two men in his debt; one owed him five hundred denarii, the other fifty. They were unable to pay, so he let them both off. Which of them will love him more?'

Simon answered, 'The one who was let off more, I suppose.' Jesus said, 'You are right.'

Then he turned to the woman and said to Simon, 'You see this woman? I came into your house, and you poured no water over my feet, but she has poured out her tears over my feet and wiped them away with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but she has been covering my feet with kisses ever since I came in. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. For this reason I tell you that her sins, many as they are, have been forgiven her, because she has shown such great love. It is someone who is forgiven little who shows little love.'

Then he said to her, 'Your sins are forgiven.'

Those who were with him at table began to say to themselves, 'Who is this man, that even forgives sins?'

But he said to the woman, 'Your faith has saved you; go in peace.'

## 3) Reflection

- Today's Gospel presents the episode of the woman with the perfume who was accepted by Jesus during a feast in house of Simon the Pharisee. One of the aspects of the novelty of the Good News of Jesus is the surprising attitude of Jesus toward women. At the time of the New Testament women lived marginalized. In the Synagogue they could not participate in the public life and they could not be witnesses. Many women, though, resisted this exclusion. From the time of Ezra, the marginalization of women had been increasing on the part of the religious authority (Ezr 9, 1 to 10, 44), and the resistance of women against their exclusion, also increased, as we can see in the stories of Judith, Esther, Ruth, Noemi, Suzanne, and the Sulamite and others. This resistance found echo and acceptance in Jesus. In the episode of the woman with the perfume there is inconformity which springs up and the resistance of the women in the life of every day and the acceptance of Jesus.

- Luke 7, 36-38: The situation which breaks out the debate. Three completely different persons meet with one another: Jesus, Simon, the Pharisee, a practicing Jew, and the woman, whom they said that she was a sinner. Jesus is in the house of Simon who has invited him to dinner with him. The woman enters, and she places herself at the feet of Jesus, and begins to cry bathing Jesus' feet with her tears, and dries them with her loose hair. She kisses his feet and anoints them with perfume. To get the hair loose in public was a gesture of independence. Jesus does not draw back, nor does he send the woman away, rather he accepts her gesture.

- Luke 7, 39-40: The reaction of the Pharisee and the response of Jesus. Jesus was accepting a person, who, according to the custom of the time, could not be accepted, because she was a sinner. The Pharisee, observing everything, criticizes Jesus and condemns the woman: "If this

man were a prophet, he would know who this woman is and what sort of person it is who is touching him and what a bad name she has". Jesus uses a parable to respond to the provocation of the Pharisee.

- Luke 7, 41-43: The parable of the two debtors. One owed 500 denarii, the other 50. Neither one was able to pay, both of them were forgiven. Which of them will love their master more? Response of the Pharisee: "The one who was let off more, I suppose!" The parable presupposes that both, the Pharisee and the woman, had received some favour from Jesus. In the attitude that both take before Jesus they indicate how much they appreciate the favour received. The Pharisee shows his love, his gratitude, by inviting Jesus to eat with him. The woman shows her love, her gratitude, by her tears, the kisses and the perfume.
- Luke 7, 44-47: The message of Jesus for the Pharisee. After having received the response of the Pharisee, Jesus applies the parable. Even if he was in the house of the Pharisee, invited by him, Jesus does not lose the freedom to speak and to act. He defends the woman against the criticism of the practicing Jew. The message of Jesus for the Pharisees of all times is this one: "The one who is forgiven little, loves little!" A Pharisee thinks that he is not a sinner because he observes the law in everything. The personal assurance that I, a Pharisee, create for myself many times, in the observance of the Law of God and of the Church, prevents me from experiencing the gratuity of the love of God. What is important is not the observance of the law in itself, but the love with which I observe the law. And using the symbols of the love of the woman, Jesus responds to the Pharisee who considered himself to be in peace with God: "you poured no water over my feet; you gave me no kiss, you did not anoint my head with perfumed oil! Simon, in spite of the banquet that you have offered me, you have loved very little!"
- Luke 7, 48-50: The word of Jesus to the woman. Jesus declares that the woman is forgiven and then adds: "Your faith has saved you, go in peace!" Here we have the novelty of the attitude of Jesus. He does not condemn but he accepts. It is faith which helps the woman to encounter herself and to encounter God. In the relationship with Jesus, a new force springs up in her and makes her be born again.

#### **4) Personal questions**

- Where, when and how are women despised or rejected by the Pharisee of today?
- The woman certainly would not have done what she did if she was not absolutely certain that Jesus would accept her. Do the marginalized and migrant persons have the same certainty today?

#### **5) Concluding Prayer**

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

### **Lectio Divina: Friday, September 18, 2015**

#### **Ordinary Time**

##### **1) Opening prayer**

Almighty God,  
our creator and guide,  
may we serve you with all our hearts  
and know your forgiveness in our lives.  
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,  
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

## 2) Gospel Reading - Luke 8,1-3

Now it happened that Jesus made his way through towns and villages preaching and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God.

With him went the Twelve, as well as certain women who had been cured of evil spirits and ailments: Mary surnamed the Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, Joanna the wife of Herod's steward Chuza, Susanna, and many others who provided for them out of their own resources.

## 3) Reflection

- In today's Gospel we have the continuation of yesterday's episode which spoke about the surprising attitude of Jesus with regard to women, when he defends the woman, who was known in the town as a sinner, against the criticism of the Pharisee. Now at the beginning of chapter 8, Luke describes Jesus who goes through the villages and towns of Galilee and the novelty is that he was not only accompanied by the disciples, but also by the women disciples.

- Luke 8, 1: The Twelve who follow Jesus. In one phrase alone, Luke describes the situation: Jesus goes through towns and villages preaching and proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom of God and the Twelve are with him. The expression "to follow Jesus" (cf. Mk 1, 18; 15, 41) indicates the condition of the disciple who follows the Master, twenty-four hours a day, trying to imitate his example and to participate in his destiny.

- Luke 8, 2-3: The women follow Jesus. What surprises is that at the side of the men there are also women "together with Jesus". Luke places both the men and the women disciples at the same level because all of them follow Jesus. Luke has also kept some of the names of some of these women disciples: Mary Magdalene, born in the town of Magdala. She had been cured, and delivered from seven demons; Joanna, the wife of Chuza, steward of Herod Antipa, who was Governor of Galilee; Suzanne and several others. It is said that they "served Jesus with their own goods" Jesus allows a group of women "to follow" him (Lk 8, 2-3; 23, 49; Mk 15, 41). The Gospel of Mark when speaking about the women at the moment of Jesus' death says: "There were some women who were observing at a distance and among them Mary of Magdala, Mary, the mother of James the younger and Joses, and Salome, who followed him and served him when he was still in Galilee, and many others who had gone up with him to Jerusalem (Mk 15, 40-41). Mark defines their attitude with three words: to follow, to serve, to go up to Jerusalem. The first Christians did not draw up a list of these women disciples who followed Jesus as they had done with the twelve disciples. But in the pages of the Gospel of Luke the name of seven of these women disciples are mentioned: Mary Magdalene, Joanna, wife of Chuza, Suzanne (Lk 8, 3), Martha and Mary (Lk 10, 38), Mary, the mother of James (Lk 24, 10) and Anna, the prophetess (Lk 2, 36), who was eighty-four years old. Number eighty-four is seven times twelve: the perfect age! The later Ecclesiastical tradition does not value this fact about the discipleship of women with the same importance with which it values the following of Jesus on the part of men. It is a sin!

The Gospel of Luke has always been considered as the Gospel of women. In fact, Luke is the Evangelist who presents the largest number of episodes in which he underlines the relationship of Jesus with the women, and the novelty is not only in the presence of the women around Jesus, but also and, above all, in the attitude of Jesus in relation to them. Jesus touches them and allows them to touch him without fear of being contaminated (Lk 7, 39; 8, 44-45.54). This was different from the teachers of that time, Jesus accepts women who follow him and who are his disciples (Lk 8, 2-3; 10, 39). The liberating force of God, which acts in Jesus, allows women to raise and to assume their dignity (Lk 13, 13). Jesus is sensitive to the suffering of the widow and is in solidarity with her sorrow (Lk 7, 13). The work of the woman who prepares the meal is considered by Jesus like a sign of the Kingdom (Lk 13, 20-

21). The insistent widow who struggles for her rights is considered the model of prayer (Lk 18, 1-8), and the poor widow who shares the little that she has with others is the model of dedication and donation (Lk 21, 1-4). At a time when the witness of women is not accepted as something valid, Jesus accepts women and considers them witnesses of his death (Lk 23, 49), of his burial (Lk 22, 55-56) and of his resurrection (Lk 24, 1-11. 22-24).

#### **4) Personal questions**

- How is woman considered in your community, in your country, in your Church?
- Compare the attitude of our Church with the attitude of Jesus.

#### **5) Concluding Prayer**

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. (Ps 139,23-24)

### **Lectio Divina: Saturday, September 19, 2015**

#### **Ordinary Time**

##### **1) Opening prayer**

Almighty God,  
our creator and guide,  
may we serve you with all our hearts  
and know your forgiveness in our lives.  
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,  
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

##### **2) Gospel Reading - Luke 8,4-15**

With a large crowd gathering and people from every town finding their way to Jesus, he told this parable: 'A sower went out to sow his seed. Now as he sowed, some fell on the edge of the path and was trampled on; and the birds of the air ate it up. Some seed fell on rock, and when it came up it withered away, having no moisture. Some seed fell in the middle of thorns and the thorns grew with it and choked it. And some seed fell into good soil and grew and produced its crop a hundredfold.' Saying this he cried, 'Anyone who has ears for listening should listen!'

His disciples asked him what this parable might mean, and he said, 'To you is granted to understand the secrets of the kingdom of God; for the rest it remains in parables, so that they may look but not perceive, listen but not understand.

'This, then, is what the parable means: the seed is the word of God. Those on the edge of the path are people who have heard it, and then the devil comes and carries away the word from their hearts in case they should believe and be saved.

Those on the rock are people who, when they first hear it, welcome the word with joy. But these have no root; they believe for a while, and in time of trial they give up.

As for the part that fell into thorns, this is people who have heard, but as they go on their way they are choked by the worries and riches and pleasures of life and never produce any crops.

As for the part in the rich soil, this is people with a noble and generous heart who have heard the word and take it to themselves and yield a harvest through their perseverance.

##### **3) Reflection**

- In today's Gospel, we will meditate on the parable of the seed. Jesus had a very popular word to teach by means of parables. A parable is a comparison which uses the visible things

of life that are known to explain the invisible and unknown things of the Kingdom of God. Jesus had an enormous capacity to find very simple images to compare the things of God with the things of life which people knew and experienced in their daily struggle to survive. This presupposes two things: to be within the things of life, and to be within the things of God, of the Kingdom of God. For example, the people of Galilee understood all about seeds, of land, of rain, of the sun, of salt of flowers, of the harvest, of fishing, etc. Now, there are exactly these known things that Jesus uses in the parables to explain the mystery of the Kingdom. The farmer who listens says: "The seed in the ground, I know what this means. Jesus says that this has something to do with the Kingdom of God. What could this ever be?" It is possible to imagine the long conversations with the people! The parable enters into the heart of the people and urges them to listen to nature and to think about life.

- When he finishes telling the parable, Jesus does not explain it, but he usually says: "Who has ears to hear, let him hear" This means: "This is: You have heard and so now try to understand!" From time to time he would explain to the disciples: People like this way of teaching, because Jesus believed in the personal capacity to discover the sense of the parables. The experience which people had of life was for him a means to discover the presence of the mystery of God in their life and to have courage not to be discouraged along the way.

- Luke 8, 4: The crowds follow Jesus. Luke says: a large crowd got around him and people from all the towns ran to him from all the towns. So then he tells them this parable. Mark describes how Jesus told the parable. There were so many people that he, in order not to fall, went into a boat and sitting down he taught the people who were on the seashore (Mk 4, 1).

- Luke 8, 5-8°: The parable of the seed is a mirror of the life of the farmers. At that time, it was not easy to live from agriculture. The ground was full of rocks; there was little rain, much sun. Besides, many times, people, to shorten the way, passed through the fields and stepped on the plants (Mk 2, 23). But in spite of that, every year the farmer sowed and planted, trusting in the force of the seed, in the generosity of nature.

- Luke 8, 8b: Anyone who has ears to hear let him hear! At the end, Jesus says: "Anyone who has ears to hear, let him hear!" The way to be able to understand the parable is to search: "Try to understand!" The parable does not say everything immediately, but moves the person to think. It does it in such a way that the person discovers the message beginning from the experience which the person has of the seed. It urges the person to be creative and to participate. It is not a doctrine which is presented ready to be taught and decorated. The parable is not water in a bottle, it is the source.

- Luke 8, 9-10: Jesus explains the parable to the disciples. At home, alone with Jesus, the disciples want to know the meaning of the parable. Jesus responds by means of a difficult and mysterious phrase. He says to the Disciples: "To you is granted to understand the secrets of the Kingdom of God, for the rest it remains in parables so that "they may look but not perceive, listen but not understand". This phrase gives rise to a question in the heart of the people: What is the purpose of a parable? Is it to clarify or to hide things? Did Jesus use the parables in order that people continue in their ignorance and would not convert themselves? Certainly not! In another place it is said that Jesus used the parables "according to what they could understand" (Mk 4, 33). The parable reveals and hides at the same time" It reveals for those who are "inside, within" who accept Jesus Messiah Servant. It hides for those who insist in seeing in him the Messiah the glorious King. These understand the images of the parable, but do not understand its meaning.

- Luke 8, 11-15: The explanation of the parable, in its diverse parts. One by one, Jesus explains the parts of the parable, the seed, and the earth up to the harvest time. Some scholars think that this explanation was added afterwards; that it would not be from Jesus', but from one of the communities. This is possible! It does not matter! Because in the bud of the

parable there is the flower of the explanation. Buds and flowers, both of them have the same origin, that is, Jesus. This is why we also can continue to reflect and to discover other beautiful things in the parable. Once, a person in a community asked: “Jesus says that we have to be salt. For what does salt serve?” The persons gave their opinion starting from the experience which each one had regarding salt! And they applied all this to the life of the community and discovered that to be salt is difficult and demanding. The parable functioned well! The same thing can be applied to the seeds. All have a certain experience.

#### **4) Personal questions**

- The seed falls in four different places: on the road side, among the rocks, among the thorns and in the good earth. What does each one of these four places mean? What type of earth am I? Sometimes, people are rock; other times thistles; other roadside, other times good ground. Normally, what are we in our community?
- Which are the fruits which the Word of God is producing in our life and in our community?

#### **5) Concluding Prayer**

Your kingship is a kingship for ever,  
your reign lasts from age to age.  
Yahweh is trustworthy in all his words,  
and upright in all his deeds. (Ps 145,12-13)

### **Lectio Divina: Sunday, September 20, 2015**

*The greatest in the Kingdom  
Mark 9:30-41*

#### **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 for the liturgy of this Sunday presents us with the second foretelling of the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus. As in the first foretelling (Mk 8:31-33), the disciples are scared and overcome by fear. They do not understand anything about the cross, because they are not capable of understanding nor of accepting a Messiah who becomes the servant of his brethren. They still dream of a glorious messiah (Mt 16:21-22). There is a great discrepancy among the disciples. While Jesus proclaims his Passion and Death, they discuss who will be the greatest among them (Mk 9:34). Jesus wishes to serve, they only think of

ruling! Ambition makes them want to take a place next to Jesus. What is it that stands out in my life: competitiveness and the desire to rule or the desire to serve and encourage others?

Jesus' reaction to the demands of the disciples helps us understand a little concerning the fraternal pedagogy used by him to form his disciples. It shows us how he helped them to overcome "the leaven of the Pharisees and of Herod" (Mk 8:15). Such leaven has deep roots. It springs up again and again! But Jesus does not give up! He constantly fights against and criticises the wrong kind of "leaven". Today too we have a leaven of the dominant ideology: the spread of the neo-liberal system, of commerce, of consumerism, of novels, of games, all deeply influencing our way of thinking and acting. Today too we have the leaven of the dominant ideology. Like the disciples of Jesus, we too are not always capable of keeping up a critical attitude towards the invasion of this leaven. Jesus' attitude of formator continues to help us.

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

Mark 9:30-32: the proclamation of the Passion

Mark 9:33-37: a discussion on who is the greatest

Mark 9:38-40: the use of the name of Jesus

Mark 9:41: the reward for a cup of water

**c) The text:**

30 They went on from there and passed through Galilee. And he would not have any one know it; 31 for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, "The Son of man will be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him; and when he is killed, after three days he will rise." 32 But they did not understand the saying, and they were afraid to ask him.

33 And they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, "What were you discussing on the way?" 34 But they were silent; for on the way they had discussed with one another who was the greatest. 35 And he sat down and called the twelve; and he said to them, "If any one would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all." 36 And he took a child, and put him in the midst of them; and taking him in his arms, he said to them, 37 "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me; and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me."



38 John said to him, "Teacher, we saw a man casting out demons in your name, and we forbade him, because he was not following us." 39 But Jesus said, "Do not forbid him; for no one who does a mighty work in my name will be able soon after to speak evil of me. 40 For he that is not against us is for us. 41 For truly, I say to you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ, will by no means lose his reward.

### 3. A moment of prayerful silence

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

### 4. Some questions

to help us in our personal reflection.

- a) Which words pleased you most or drew your attention?
- b) What attitude did the disciples take in each of the passages: vv 30-32; vv 33-37; vv 38-40? Is it the same attitude in the three passages?
- c) What is Jesus' teaching in each episode?
- d) What does the phrase "Anyone who is not against us is for us" mean for us today?

### 5. A key to the reading

for those who wish to go deeper into the text.

#### a) Comment

Mark 9:30-32: *The proclamation of the Cross.*

Jesus was going across Galilee, but he did not want the people to know this, because he was concerned with the formation of his disciples. He talks to them about "The Son of Man" who must be handed over. Jesus draws his teaching from the prophecies. In the formation of his disciples he uses the Bible. The disciples listen, but they do not understand. Yet they do not ask for explanations. Perhaps they are afraid to show their ignorance!

Mark 9:33-34: *A competitive mentality.*

When they return home, Jesus asks: *What were you arguing about on the road?* They do not reply. It is the silence of those who feel guilty, *because they had been arguing which of them was the greatest.* The "leaven" of competitiveness and prestige, which characterised the society of the Roman Empire, had infiltrated among the small community still in its beginnings! Here we see the contrast! While Jesus is thinking of being the Messiah-Servant, they were thinking about which of them was the greatest. Jesus tries to descend while they try to ascend!

Mark 9:35-37: *To serve and not to rule.*

Jesus' reply is a resume of the witness he had given from the very beginning: *If anyone wants to be first, he must make himself last of all and servant of all!* And the last gains nothing. He is a useless servant (cf. Lk 17:10). The use of power is not to ascend or rule, but to descend and serve. This is the point that Jesus stresses most and on which he bases his witness (cf. Mk 10:45; Mt 20:28; Jn 13:1-16).

Jesus takes a little child. Someone who only thinks of ascending and ruling has no time for the little ones, for children. But Jesus turns everything upside down! He says: *Anyone who welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and anyone who welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me!* He identifies himself with the children. Anyone who welcomes the little ones in the name of Jesus welcomes God himself!

Mark 9:38-40: *A restricted mentality.*

Someone who did not belong to the community was using the name of Jesus to cast out devils. John, the disciple, sees him and stops him: *Because he was not one of us we tried to stop him.* John stops a good action in the name of the community. He thought he owned Jesus and wanted to stop others from using Jesus' name to do good. This was the restricted and old mentality of the "Elect, the separate People!" Jesus replies: *You must not stop him! Anyone who is not against us is for us!* (Mk 9:40). What is important for Jesus is not whether the person is or is not part of the community, but whether the person does or does not do the good deeds that the community should be doing.

Mark 9:41: *A cup of water deserves a reward.*

Here we have an inserted phrase used by Jesus: *If anyone gives you a cup of water to drink just because you belong to Christ, then I tell you solemnly, he will most certainly not lose his reward.* Let us consider two thoughts: 1) *If anyone gives you a cup of water:* Jesus is on the way to Jerusalem to give his life. The gesture of a grand gift! But he does not despise small gestures of gifts in daily life: a cup of water, a welcome, a word, so many other gestures. Even the smallest gesture is appreciated. 2) *Just because you belong to Christ:* Jesus identifies himself with us who wish to belong to him. This means that for him we are of great worth.

## **b) Further explanations in order to better understand the text**

### **• Jesus, the "Son of Man"**

This is Jesus' favourite name. It appears quite frequently in the Gospel of Mark (Mk 2:10-28; 8:31-38; 9:9-12.31; 10:33-45; 13:26; 14:21.41.62). This title comes from the Old Testament. In the book of Ezekiel, he presents the human condition of the prophet (Ez 3:1.10.17; 4:1 etc.). In the book of Daniel, the same title appears in an apocalyptic vision (Dn 7:1-28), where Daniel describes the empires of the Babylonians, the Medians, the Persians and the Greeks. In the prophet's vision, these four empires appear as "monstrous animals" (cf. Dn 7:3-8). They are beastly empires, brutal, inhuman, that persecute and kill (Dn 7:21-25). In the prophet's vision, after two inhuman reigns the Kingdom of God appears in the form not of an animal but that of a human figure, *the Son of man*. It is a kingdom with the appearance of people, a human kingdom, that promotes life and that humanises (Dn 7:13-14).

In Daniel's prophecy, the figure of *the Son of Man* represents, not an individual, but as he says, the "*people of the Saints of the Most High*" (Dn 7:27; cf Dn 7:18). It is the people of God that will not allow itself to be cheated or manipulated by the dominant ideology of the beastly empires. The mission of the *Son of Man*, that is, of the people of God, consists in realising the Kingdom of God as a *human* kingdom. A kingdom that does not destroy life, but rather builds it up! It humanises people.

When Jesus presents himself to his disciples as the *Son of Man*, he assumes as his the mission that is the mission of the whole People of God. It is as though he were saying to them and to us: “Come with me! This mission is not only mine, but of all of us! Together, let us accomplish the mission that God has entrusted to us: to build the human and humanising Kingdom of his dream! Let us do what he did and lived throughout his life, above all, in the last three years of his life. Pope Leo the Great used to say: “Jesus was so human, so human, as only God can be!” The more human it is, the more divine it becomes. The more we are “son of man” so much more will we be “son of God”. Everything that makes people less human draws people away from God, even in religious life, even in Carmelite life! This is what Jesus condemned and he placed the good of the human person above the law and the Sabbath (Mk 2:27).

### • Jesus, the Formator

“To follow” was a term that was part of the system of education at that time. It was used to indicate the relationship between disciple and master. The relationship between disciple and master is different from that of teacher and student. Students follow the lessons of the teacher on some particular subject. Disciples “follow” the master and live with him all the time.

It is during this period of “living together” for three years that the disciples will receive their formation. A formation in the “following of Jesus” was not just the passing on of some decorative truths, but the communication of a new experience of God and of the life that shone from Jesus for the disciples. The very community that grew around Jesus was the expression of this new experience. This formation led people to see things differently, to different attitudes. It created in them a new awareness concerning the mission and respect for self. It made them take the side of the excluded. It produced a “conversion”, the consequence of having accepted the Good News (Mk 1:15).

Jesus is the axle, the centre, the model, the point of reference of the community. He shows the road to follow, he is “the way, the truth and the life” (Jn 14:6). His attitude is proof and an exposition of the Kingdom: he makes the love of the Father transparent and incarnates and reveals it (Mk 6:31; Mt 10:30; Lk 15:11-32). Jesus is a “meaningful person” for them, who will leave on them a permanent mark. Many small gestures mirror this witness of life that Jesus gave by his presence in the life of the disciples. It was his way of giving human form to the experience he had of the Father. In this way of being and sharing, of relating to people, of leading the people and of listening to those who came to him, Jesus is seen:

\* as the person of peace, who inspires and reconciles: “Peace be with you!” (Jn. 20:19; Mt 10:26-33; Mt 18:22; Jn 20:23; Mt 16:19; Mt 18:18);

\* as a free person and one who liberates, who awakens freedom and liberation: “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath” (Mk 2:27; 2:18-23);

\* as a person of prayer, whom we see praying at all important moments of his life and who inspires others to prayer: “Lord, teach us to pray!” (Lk 11:1-4; Lk 4:1-13; 6:12-13; Jn 11:41-42; Mt 11:25; Jn 17:1-26; Lk 23:46; Mk 15:34);

\* as a loving person who arouses reactions full of love (Lk 7:37-38; 8:2-3; Jn 21:15-17; Mk 14:3-9; Jn 13:1);

\*as a welcoming person who is always present in the lives of the disciples and who welcomes them when they come back from the mission (Lk 10:7);

\* as a realistic and observing person who arouses the attention of the disciples in matters of life by teaching them in Parables (Lk 8:4-8);

\* as a caring person always paying attention to the disciples (Jn 21:9), who looks after their rest and who wishes to stay with them so that they may rest (Mk 6:31);

\* as someone preoccupied with the situation even to forgetting that his tiredness and his rest when he sees people who are looking for him (Mt 9:36-38);

\* as a friend who shares everything, even the secrets of his Father (Jn 15:15);

\* as an understanding person who accepts the disciples just as they are, even when they flee from him, in spite of their denial and their betrayal of him, without ever breaking with them (Mk 14:27-28; Jn 6:67);

\* as a committed person who defends his friends when they are criticised by their adversaries (Mk 2:18-19; 7:5-13);

\* as a wise person who knows the fragility of human beings, knows what happens in the heart of a person, and thus insists on vigilance and teaches them to pray (Lk 11:1-13; Mt 6:5-15).

In a word, Jesus shows himself to be a human person, very human, so human as only God can know to be human! Son of Man.

## **6. Psalm 30 (29)**

### **Thanksgiving after some mortal danger**

I will extol thee, O Lord,

for thou hast drawn me up,

and hast not let my foes rejoice over me.

O Lord my God, I cried to thee for help,

and thou hast healed me.

O Lord, thou hast brought up my soul from Sheol,

restored me to life from among those gone down to the Pit.

Sing praises to the Lord, O you his saints,

and give thanks to his holy name.

For his anger is but for a moment,

and his favour is for a lifetime.

Weeping may tarry for the night,

but joy comes with the morning.

As for me, I said in my prosperity,

"I shall never be moved."

By thy favour, O Lord,

thou hadst established me as a strong mountain;

thou didst hide thy face, I was dismayed.

To thee, O Lord,

I cried; and to the Lord I made supplication:

"What profit is there in my death,

if I go down to the Pit?

Will the dust praise thee?

Will it tell of thy faithfulness?

Hear, O Lord, and be gracious to me!

O Lord, be thou my helper!"

Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing;

thou hast loosed my sackcloth and girded me with gladness,

that my soul may praise thee and not be silent.

O Lord my God, I will give thanks to thee for ever.

## **7. Final Prayer**

Lord Jesus, we thank for the word that has enabled us to understand better the will of the Father. May your Spirit enlighten our actions and grant us the strength to practice that which your Word has revealed to us. May we, like Mary, your mother, not only listen to but also 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, September 21, 2015

**St. Matthew, the Evangelist**  
**Ordinary Time**

### **1) Opening prayer**

Father,  
you call your children  
to walk in the light of Christ.  
Free us from darkness  
and keep us in the radiance of your truth.  
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,  
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

### **2) Gospel Reading - Matthew 9,9-13**



As Jesus was walking on from there he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax office, and he said to him, 'Follow me.' And he got up and followed him.

Now while he was at table in the house it happened that a number of tax collectors and sinners came to sit at the table with Jesus and his disciples.

When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, 'Why does your master eat with tax collectors and sinners?'

When he heard this he replied, 'It is not the healthy who need the doctor, but the sick. Go and learn the meaning of the words: Mercy is what pleases me, not sacrifice. And indeed I came to call not the upright, but sinners.'

### **3) Reflection**

- The Sermon on the Mountain takes chapters 5, 6 and 7 of the Gospel of Matthew. The purpose of the narrative part of chapters 8 and 9 is to show how Jesus put into practice what he had just taught. In the Sermon on the Mountain, he teaches acceptance (Mt 5, 23-25. 38-42.43). Now he puts it into practice accepting the lepers (Mt 8, 1-4), the foreigners (Mt 8, 5-13), the women (Mt 8, 14-15), the sick (Mt 8, 16-17), the possessed (Mt 8, 28-34), the paralytics (Mt 9, 1-8), the tax collectors (Mt 9, 9-13), the unclean persons (Mt 9, 20-22), etc. Jesus breaks the norms and the customs which excluded and divided persons, that is with the fear and the lack of faith (Mt 8, 23-27) the laws on purity (9, 14-17), and he clearly says which are the requirements for those who want to follow him. They should have the courage

to abandon many things (Mt 8, 18-22). In the same way in the attitudes and in the practice of Jesus we see in what the Kingdom and the perfect observance of the Law of God consists.

- Matthew 9, 9: The call to follow Jesus. The first persons called to follow Jesus are four fishermen, all Jewish (Mt 4, 18-22). Now Jesus calls a tax collector, considered a sinner and treated as an unclean person by the community of the most observant of the Pharisees. In the other Gospels, this tax collector is called Levi. Here, his name is Matthew, which means gift of God or given by God. The communities, instead of excluding the tax collector and of considering him unclean, should consider him a Gift of God for the community, because his presence makes the community become a sign of salvation for all! Like the first four who were called, in the same way also Matthew, the tax collector, leaves everything that he has and follows Jesus. The following of Jesus requires breaking away from many things. Matthew leaves the tax office, his source of revenue and follows Jesus!

- Matthew 9, 10: Jesus sits at table with sinners and tax collectors. At that time the Jews lived separated from the tax collectors and sinners and they did not eat with them at the same table. The Christian Jews should break away from this isolation and sit at table with the tax collectors and with the unclean, according to the teaching given by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mountain, the expression of the universal love of God the Father (Mt 5, 44-48). The mission of the communities was that of offering a place to those who did not have it. But this new law was not accepted by all. In some communities persons coming from paganism, even if they were Christians, were not accepted around the same table (cf. Ac 10, 28; 11, 3; Ga 2, 12). The text of today's Gospel shows us Jesus who sits at table with tax collectors and sinners in the same house, around the same table.

- Matthew 9, 11: The question of the Pharisees. Jews were forbidden to sit at table with the tax collectors and with sinners, but Jesus does not follow this prohibition. Rather he becomes a friend to them. The Pharisees seeing the attitude of Jesus, ask the disciples: "Why does your master eat with tax collectors and sinners?" This question may be interpreted as an expression of their desire to know why Jesus acts in that way. Others interpret the question like a criticism of Jesus' behaviour, because for over five hundred years, from the time of the slavery in Babylon until the time of Jesus, the Jews had observed the laws of purity. This secular observance became a strong sign of identity. At the same time it was a factor of their separation in the midst of other peoples. Thus, because of the laws on purity, they could not nor did they succeed to sit around the same table to eat with tax collectors. To eat with tax collectors meant to get contaminated, to become unclean. The precepts of legal purity were rigorously observed, in Palestine as well as in the Jewish communities of the Diaspora. At the time of Jesus, there were more than five hundred precepts to keep purity. In the years 70's, at the time when Matthew wrote, this conflict was very actual.

- Matthew 9, 12-13: "Mercy is what pleases me, not sacrifice. Jesus hears the question of the Pharisees to the disciples and he answers with two clarifications: the first one is taken from common sense: "It is not the healthy who need the doctor, but the sick". The second one is taken from the Bible: "Go and learn the meaning of the words: Mercy is what pleases me, not sacrifice". Through these clarifications, Jesus makes explicit and clarifies his mission among the people: "I have not come to call the upright but sinners". Jesus denies the criticism of the Pharisees; he does not accept their arguments, because they came from a false idea of the Law of God. He himself invokes the Bible: "Mercy is what pleases me, not sacrifice". For Jesus, mercy is more important than legal purity. He refers to the prophetic tradition to say that mercy has greater value for God than all sacrifices (Ho 6, 6; Is 1, 10-17). God has profound mercy, and is moved before the failures of his people (Ho 11, 8-9).

#### **4) Personal questions**

- Today, in our society, who is marginalized and excluded? Why? In our community, do we have preconceptions or prejudices? Which? Which is the challenge which the words of Jesus present to our community?
- Jesus asks the people to read and to understand the Old Testament which says: “Mercy is what pleases me and not sacrifice”. What does Jesus want to tell us with this today?

#### **5) Concluding Prayer**

Blessed are those who observe his instructions,  
Blessed are those who observe his instructions,  
who seek him with all their hearts,  
and, doing no evil, who walk in his ways. (Ps 119,2-3)

### **Lectio Divina: Tuesday, September 22, 2015**

#### **1) Opening prayer**

Father,

guide us, as you guide creation

according to your law of love.

May we love one another

and come to perfection

in the eternal life prepared for us.

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

who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,

one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

#### **2) Gospel Reading - Luke 8,19-21**

Jesus' mother and his brothers came looking for him, but they could not get to him because of the crowd.

He was told, ‘Your mother and brothers are standing outside and want to see you.’ But he said in answer, ‘My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and put it into practice.’

#### **3) Reflection**

- The Gospel today presents the episode in which the relatives of Jesus and also his Mother want to speak with him, but Jesus does not pay attention to them. Jesus had problems with his family. Sometimes the family helps one to live the Gospel and to participate in the

community. Other times, the family prevents this. This is what happened to Jesus and this is what happens to us.

- Luke 8, 19-20: The family looks for Jesus. The relatives reach the house where Jesus was staying. Probably, they had come from Nazareth. From there to Capernaum the distance is about 40 kilometres. His Mother was with them. Probably, they did not enter because there were many people, but they sent somebody to tell him: “Your Mother and your brothers are outside and want to see you”. According to the Gospel of Mark, the relatives do not want to see Jesus, they want to take him back home (Mk 3, 32). They thought that Jesus had lost his head (Mk 3, 21). Probably, they were afraid, because according to what history says, the Romans watched very closely all that he did, in one way or other, with the people (cf. Ac 5, 36-39). In Nazareth, up on the mountains he would have been safer than in Capernaum.

- Luke 8, 21: The response of Jesus. The reaction of Jesus is clear: “My mother and my brothers are those who listen to the Word of God and put it into practice”. In Mark the reaction of Jesus is more concrete. Mark says: Looking around at those who were sitting there he said: “Look, my mother and my brothers! Anyone who does the will of God, he is my brother, sister and mother (Mk 3, 34-35). Jesus extends his family! He does not permit the family to draw him away from the mission: neither the family (Jn 7, 3-6), nor Peter (Mk 8, 33), nor the disciples (Mk 1, 36-38), nor Herod (Lk 13, 32), nor anybody else (Jn 10, 18).

- It is the Word of God which creates a new family around Jesus: “My mother and my brothers are those who listen to the Word of God, and put it into practice.” A good commentary on this episode is what the Gospel of John says in the Prologue: “He was in the world that had come into being through him and the world did not recognize him. He came to his own and his own people did not accept him”. But to those who did accept him he gave them power to become children of God: to those who believed in his name, who were born not from human stock or human desire, or human will, but from God himself. And the Word became flesh, he lived among us; and we saw his glory, the glory that he has from the Father as only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth. (Jn 1, 10-14). The family, the relatives, do not understand Jesus (Jn 7, 3-5; Mk 3, 21), they do not form part of the new family. Only those who receive the Word, that is, who believe in Jesus, form part of the new family. These are born of God and form part of God’s Family.

- The situation of the family at the time of Jesus. In the time of Jesus, the political social and economic moment or the religious ideology, everything conspired in favour of weakening the central values of the clan, of the community. The concern for the problems of the family prevented persons from being united in the community. Rather, in order that the Kingdom of God could manifest itself anew, in the community life of the people, persons had to go beyond, to pass the narrow limits of the small family and open themselves to the large family, toward the Community. Jesus gives the example. When his own family tried to take hold of him, Jesus reacted and extended the family (Mk 3, 33-35). He created the Community.

- The brothers and the sisters of Jesus. The expression “brothers and sisters of Jesus” causes much polemics among Catholics and Protestants. Basing themselves on this and on other texts, the Protestants say that Jesus had more brothers and sisters and that Mary had more sons! The Catholics say that Mary did not have other sons. What should we think about this? In the first place, both positions: that of the Catholics as well as that of the Protestants, start from the arguments drawn from the Bible and from the Traditions of their respective Churches. Because of this, it is not convenient to discuss on this question with only

intellectual arguments. Because here it is a question of the convictions that they have and which have to do with faith and sentiments. The intellectual argument alone does not succeed in changing a conviction of the heart! Rather, it irritates and draws away! And even if I do not agree with the opinion of the other person, I must respect it. In the second place, instead of discussing about texts, both we Catholics and the Protestants, we should unite together to fight in defence of life, created by God, a life totally disfigured by poverty, injustice, by the lack of faith. We should recall some phrase of Jesus: "I have come so that they may have life and life in abundance" (Jn 10, 10). "So that all may be one so that the world will believe that it was you who sent me" (Jn 17, 21). "Do not prevent them! Anyone who is not against us is for us" (Mk 9, 39.40).

#### **4) Personal questions**

- Does your family help or make it difficult for you to participate in the Christian community?
- How do you assume your commitment in the Christian community without prejudice for the family or for the community?

#### **5) Concluding Prayer**

Teach me, Yahweh, the way of your will,

and I will observe it.

Give me understanding and I will observe your Law,

and keep it wholeheartedly. (Ps 119,33-34)

## **Lectio Divina: Wednesday, September 23, 2015**

### **Ordinary Time**

#### **1) Opening prayer**

Father,  
guide us, as you guide creation  
according to your law of love.

May we love one another  
and come to perfection  
in the eternal life prepared for us.

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

#### **2) Gospel Reading - Luke 9,1-6**

Jesus called the Twelve together and gave them power and authority over all devils and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal.

He said to them, 'Take nothing for the journey: neither staff, nor haversack, nor bread, nor money; and do not have a spare tunic. Whatever house you enter, stay there; and when you

leave let your departure be from there. As for those who do not welcome you, when you leave their town shake the dust from your feet as evidence against them.’

So they set out and went from village to village proclaiming the good news and healing everywhere.

### **3) Reflection**

- Today’s Gospel describes the mission which the Twelve received from Jesus. Later, Luke speaks about the mission of the seventy-two disciples (Lk 10, 1-12). The two Gospels complete one another and reveal the mission of the Church.

- Luke 9, 1-2: The sending out of the Twelve on mission. “Jesus called the Twelve together and gave them power and authority over all devils and to cure diseases. And he sent them out to proclaim the Kingdom of God and to heal”. In calling the Twelve, Jesus intensifies the announcement of the Good News. The objective of the mission is simple and clear: they received the power and authority to cast out devils, to cure the sick and to announce the Kingdom of God. Just as people were admired, astonished seeing Jesus’ authority over the unclean spirits, and seeing his way of announcing the Good News (Lk 4, 32.36), the same thing should happen with the preaching of the twelve apostles.

- Luke 9, 3-5. The instructions for the Mission. Jesus sends them out with the following recommendations: “Take nothing for the journey, neither staff, nor haversack, nor bread, nor money and do not have a spare tunic”. Do not go from one house to another, but “Whatever house you enter stay there; and when you leave let your departure be from there”. “As for those who do not welcome you, when you leave their town shake the dust from your feet as evidence against them”. As you will see these recommendations, which seem strange to us, have a very important significance.

- Luke 9, 6. The execution of the Mission. They go. It is the beginning of a new stage. Now, not only Jesus, but the whole group goes to announce the Good News to the people. If the preaching of Jesus caused conflict, now, with the preaching of the whole group, there will be a greater conflict.

- The four fundamental points of the mission. At the time of Jesus, there were diverse Movements of renewal: the Essenes, the Pharisees, and the Zealots. They also were seeking a new way to live in community and they had their own missionaries (cf. Mt 23, 15). But, they, when they went on mission, they were advised: to carry a staff, and a haversack to put in it their food. They did not trust the food which was literally not “pure”. Contrary to the other missionaries, the disciples of Jesus received diverse recommendations which help us to understand the fundamental points of the mission, to announce the Good News:

- a) They should take nothing (Lk 9, 3; 10, 4). That means that Jesus obliges them to trust in the hospitality; because one who goes with nothing, goes because he trusts in the people and thinks that he will be welcomed, received. With this attitude they criticize the laws of exclusion taught by the official religion and they show, by means of a new practice, that they had other criteria in the community.

- b) They should remain in the first house where they enter, until they leave the place (Lk 9, 4; 10, 7). That is, they should live together in a stable way and not go from one house to another. They should work with all and live from what they receive in exchange “because the labourer deserves his wages” (Lk 10, 7). In other words, they should participate in the life and work of the people, and the people will receive them in their community and will share with them house and food. That means that they have to trust in sharing. This explains the severity of the criticism against those who reject the message: shake off the dust from the feet, as a protest against them (Lk 10, 10-12), because they are not rejecting anything new but rather their past.

c) They should cure the sick and drive out the devils (Lk 9, 1; 10, 9; Mt 10, 8). That is, they should carry out the function of “defenders” (goêl) and accept in the clan, in the community, the excluded. With this attitude they criticize the situation of disintegration of community life of the clan and they indicate concrete openings. The expulsion of the devils is a sign of the coming of the Kingdom of God (Lk 11,20).

d) They should eat what the people give them (Lk 10, 8). They could not live separated having their own food, but they should accept the communion with others, eat with others. That means that in the contact with the people, they should not be afraid of losing the purity as it had been taught to them. With this attitude they criticize the laws of purity which were in force and indicate, by means of the new practice, that they possess another access to purity, that is, intimacy with God.

These were the four fundamental points of community living which should characterize the attitude of the missionaries who announce the Good News in the name of Jesus: hospitality, sharing, communion and acceptance of the excluded (defender, goêl). If there is a response to these four requirements, then it is possible to cry out all over to the four corners of the world: “The Kingdom has arrived!” (cf. Lk 10,1-12; 9, 1-6; Mk 6, 7-13; Mt 10, 6-16). And the Kingdom of God which Jesus has revealed to us is not a doctrine, nor a catechism, nor a law. The Kingdom of God comes and becomes present when persons, motivated by their faith in Jesus, decide to live together in community to give witness and to reveal, in this way, to all, that God is Father and Mother and that we, the human beings, are brothers and sisters. Jesus wanted the local community to be a new expression of the Covenant of the Kingdom, of the love of God the Father, who makes us all brothers and sisters.

#### **4) Personal questions**

- Has participation in the community helped you to accept and to trust persons, especially the simpler and poorer?
- Which is the point of the mission of the Apostles which for us today has greater importance? Why?

#### **5) Concluding Prayer**

Lord, set me free from taunts and contempt  
since I observe your instructions.  
Though princes sit plotting against me,  
your servant keeps pondering your will. (Ps 119,22-23)

### **Lectio Divina: Thursday, September 24, 2015**

#### **Ordinary Time**

##### **1) Opening prayer**

Father,  
guide us, as you guide creation  
according to your law of love.  
May we love one another  
and come to perfection  
in the eternal life prepared for us.  
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,  
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

## 2) Gospel Reading - Luke 9,7-9

Herod the tetrarch had heard about all that was going on; and he was puzzled, because some people were saying that John had risen from the dead, others that Elijah had reappeared, still others that one of the ancient prophets had come back to life.

But Herod said, 'John? I beheaded him. So who is this I hear such reports about?' And he was anxious to see him.

## 3) Reflection

- Today's Gospel presents a reaction from Herod listening to the preaching of Jesus. Herod does not know how to place himself before Jesus. He had killed John the Baptist and now he wants to see Jesus close to him. It is always threatening.

- Luke 9, 7-8: Who is Jesus? The text begins with the exposition of the opinion of the people and of Herod on Jesus. Some associated Jesus to John the Baptist and to Elijah. Others identified him with a Prophet, that is, with a person who speaks in the name of God, who has the courage to denounce injustices of those in power and who knows how to give hope to the little ones. He is the Prophet announced in the Old Testament like a new Moses (Dt 18, 15). These are the same opinions that Jesus received from the disciples when he asked them: "Who do people say I am?" (Lk 9, 18). Persons tried to understand Jesus starting from things that they knew, thought and expected. They tried to set him against the background of the familiar criteria of the Old Testament with its prophecies and hopes, and of the Tradition of the Ancients with their laws. But these were insufficient criteria; Jesus could not enter into them, he was much bigger!

- Luke 9, 9: Herod wants to see Jesus. But Herod said: "John, I beheaded him; so who is this of whom I hear such things?" "And he was anxious to see him". Herod, a superstitious man without scruples, recognizes that he was the murderer of John the Baptist. Now, he wants to see Jesus. Luke suggests thus that the threats begin to appear on the horizon of the preaching of Jesus. Herod had no fear to kill John. He will not be afraid to kill Jesus. On the other side, Jesus does not fear Herod. When they tell him that Herod wanted to take him to kill him, he sent someone to tell him: "You may go and give that fox this message: Look, today and tomorrow I drive out devils and heal, and on the third day I attain my end." (Lk 13, 32). Herod has no power over Jesus. When at the hour of the passion, Pilate sends Jesus to be judged by Herod, Jesus does not respond anything (Lk 23, 9). Herod does not deserve a response.

- From father to son. Some times the three Herods, who lived during that time are confused, then the three appear in the New Testament with the same name: a) Herod, called the Great, governed over the whole of Palestine from 37 before Christ. He appears at the birth of Jesus (Mt 2, 1). He kills the new-born babies of Bethlehem (Mt 2, 16). b) Herod, called Antipas, governed in Galilee from the year 4 to 39 after Christ. He appears at the death of Jesus (Lk 23, 7). He killed John the Baptist (Mk 6, 14-29). c) Herod, called Agrippa, governed all over Palestine from the year 41 to 44 after Christ. He appears in the Acts of the Apostles (Ac 12, 1.20). He killed the Apostle James (Ac 12, 2).

When Jesus was about four years old, King Herod, the one who killed the new-born babies of Bethlehem died (Mt 2, 16). His territory was divided among his sons, Archelaus, would govern Judea. He was less intelligent than his father, but more violent. When he assumed the power, approximately 3000 persons were massacred on the square of the Temple! The Gospel of Matthew says that Mary and Joseph, when they learnt that Archelaus had taken over the government of Galilee, were afraid and returned on the road and went to Nazareth, in Galilee, which was governed by another son of Herod, called Herod Antipas (Lk 3, 1). This Antipas governed over 40 years. During the thirty-three years of Jesus there was no change of government in Galilee.

Herod, the Great, the father of Herod Antipas, had constructed the city of Caesarea Maritime, inaugurated in the year 15 before Christ. It was the new port to get out the products of the region. They had to compete with the large port of Tyron in the North and, thus, help to develop trade and business in Samaria and in Galilee. Because of this, from the time of Herod the Great, the agricultural production in Galilee began to orientate itself no longer according to the needs of the families, as before, but according to the demands of the market. This process of change in the economy continued during all the time of the government of Herod Antipas, another forty years, and found in him an efficient organizer. All these governors were 'servants of power'. In fact, the one who commanded in Palestine, from the year 63 before Christ, was Rome, the Empire.

#### **4) Personal questions**

- It is well always to ask ourselves: Who is Jesus for me?
- Herod wants to see Jesus. His was a superstitious and morbid curiosity. Others want to see Jesus because they seek a sense for their life. And I, what motivation do I have which moves me to see and encounter Jesus?

#### **5) Concluding Prayer**

Each morning fill us with your faithful love,  
we shall sing and be happy all our days;  
let our joy be as long as the time that you afflicted us,  
the years when we experienced disaster. (Ps 90,14-15)

### **Lectio Divina: Friday, September 25, 2015**

#### **Ordinary Time**

##### **1) Opening prayer**

Father,  
guide us, as you guide creation  
according to your law of love.  
May we love one another  
and come to perfection  
in the eternal life prepared for us.  
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,  
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

##### **2) Gospel Reading - Luke 9,18-22**

Now it happened that Jesus was praying alone, and his disciples came to him and he put this question to them, 'Who do the crowds say I am?'

And they answered, 'Some say John the Baptist; others Elijah; others again one of the ancient prophets come back to life.'

'But you,' he said to them, 'who do you say I am?' It was Peter who spoke up. 'The Christ of God,' he said.

But he gave them strict orders and charged them not to say this to anyone. 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.'

##### **3) Reflection**

- The Gospel today follows the same theme as that of Yesterday: the opinion of the people on Jesus. Yesterday, beginning with Herod, today it is Jesus who asks what do people think, the

public opinion and the Apostles respond giving the same opinion which was given yesterday. Immediately follows the first announcement of the Passion, death and Resurrection of Jesus.

- Luke 9, 18: The question of Jesus after his prayer. “One day, while Jesus was praying alone, his disciples came to him and he put this question to them: “Who do the crowds say I am?” In Luke’s Gospel, on several important and decisive occasions, Jesus is presented in prayer: in his Baptism when he assumes his mission (Lk 3, 21); in the 40 days in the desert, when, he overcame the temptations presented by the devil Lk 4, 1-13); the night before choosing the twelve apostles (Lk 6, 12); in the Transfiguration, when, with Moses and Elijah he spoke about his passion in Jerusalem (Lc 9, 29); in the Garden when he suffers his agony (Lk 22, 39-46); on the Cross, when he asks pardon for the soldier (Lk 23, 34) and when he commits his spirit to God (Lk 23, 46).
- Luke 9, 19: The opinion of the people on Jesus. “They answered: “For some John the Baptist; others Elijah, but others think that you are one of the ancient prophets who has risen from the dead”. Like Herod, many thought that John the Baptist had risen in Jesus. It was a common belief that the prophet Elijah had to return (Mt 17, 10-13; Mk 9, 11-12; Mt 3, 23-24; Eccl 48, 10). And all nourished the hope of the coming of the Prophet promised by Moses (Dt 18,15). This was an insufficient response.
- Luke 9, 20: The question of Jesus to the disciples. After having heard the opinion of others, Jesus asks: “And you, who do you say I am?” Peter answers: “The Messiah of God!” Peter recognizes that Jesus is the one whom the people are waiting for and that he comes to fulfil the promise. Luke omits the reaction of Peter who tries to dissuade Jesus to follow the way of the cross and omits also the harsh criticism of Jesus to Peter (Mk 8, 32-33; Mt 16, 22-23).
- Luke 9, 21: The prohibition to reveal that Jesus is the Messiah of God. “Then Jesus gave them strict orders and charged them not to say this to anyone”. It was forbidden to them to reveal to the people that Jesus is the Messiah of God. Why does Jesus prohibit this? At that time, as we have already seen, everybody was expecting the coming of the Messiah, but, each one in his own way: some expected a king, others a priest, others a doctor, a warrior, a judge or a prophet! Nobody seemed to expect the Messiah Servant, announced by Isaiah (Is 42, 1-9). Anyone who insists in maintaining Peter’s idea, that is, of a glorious Messiah, without the cross, understands nothing and will never be able to assume the attitude of a true disciple. He will continue to be blind, exchanging people for trees (cf. Mk 8, 24). Because without the cross it is impossible to understand who Jesus is and what it means to follow Jesus. Because of this, Jesus insists again on the Cross and makes the second announcement of his passion, death and resurrection.
- Luke 9, 22: The second announcement of the Passion. And Jesus adds: “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”. The full understanding of the following of Jesus is not obtained through theoretical instruction, but through practical commitment, walking together with him along the road of service, from Galilee up to Jerusalem. The road of the following is the road of the gift of self, of abandonment, of service, of availability, of acceptance of conflict, knowing that there will be a resurrection. The cross is not an accident on the way; it forms part of our way. This because in the organized world starting from egoism, love and service can exist only if they are crucified! Anyone who makes of his life a service to others disturbs those who live attached to privileges, and suffers.

#### **4) Personal questions**

- We all believe in Jesus. But there are some who understand him in one way and others in another way. Today, which is the more common Jesus in the way of thinking of people?

- How does propaganda interfere in my way of seeing Jesus? What do I do so as not to allow myself to be drawn by the propaganda? What prevents us today from recognizing and assuming the project of Jesus?

## **5) Concluding Prayer**

Blessed be Yahweh, my rock,  
 who trains my hands for war and my fingers for battle,  
 my faithful love, my bastion, my citadel, my Saviour;  
 I shelter behind him. (Ps 144,1-2)

## **Lectio Divina: Saturday, September 26, 2015**

### **Ordinary Time**

#### **1) Opening prayer**

Father,  
 guide us, as you guide creation  
 according to your law of love.  
 May we love one another  
 and come to perfection  
 in the eternal life prepared for us.  
 We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,  
 who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,  
 one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

#### **2) Gospel Reading - Luke 9,43b-45**

Everyone was awestruck by the greatness of God. But while everyone was full of admiration for all he did, he said to his disciples, 'For your part, you must have these words constantly in mind: The Son of man is going to be delivered into the power of men.'  
 But they did not understand what he said; it was hidden from them so that they should not see the meaning of it, and they were afraid to ask him about it.

#### **3) Reflection**

- The Gospel today presents the second announcement of the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus. The disciples do not understand the words about the cross, because they are neither capable to understand a Messiah who becomes the servant of his brothers. They continue to dream about a glorious Messiah.
- Luke 9, 43b-44: The contrast. "Everyone was full of admiration for all he did". Jesus said to his disciples "For your part you must have these words constantly in mind: The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the power of men". The contrast is very big. On one side, the vibration and admiration of the people for everything that Jesus said and did. Jesus seems to correspond to all that people dream, believe and expect. On the other side, the affirmation of Jesus that he will be put to death and delivered in the hands of men, that is, the opinion of the authority on Jesus is totally contrary to the opinion of the people.
- Luke 9, 45: The announcement of the Cross. "But they did not understand what he said; for them it was so mysterious, that they did not understand the sense and were afraid to ask questions concerning this argument". The disciples listened to him but they did not understand the words about the cross. But even in this way, they do not ask for any clarification. They are afraid to show their ignorance!
- The title Son of Man. This name appears quite frequently in the Gospels: 12 times in John, 13 in Mark, 28 in Luke, 30 in Matthew. In all, it appears 83 times in the four Gospels. This is the name which pleased Jesus the most. This title comes from the Old Testament. In the Book of Ezekiel, is indicated the very human condition of the prophet (Ez 3, 1.4.10. 17; 4, 1 etc.).

In the Book of Daniel, the same title appears in the apocalyptic vision (Dn 7, 1-28), in which Daniel describes the empires of the Babylonians, of the Medes, of the Persians and of the Greeks. In the vision of the prophet, these four empires have the appearance of “monstrous animals” (cf. Dn 7, 3-8). They are animal empires which are brutal, inhuman, which persecute, dehumanize and kill (Dn 7, 21.25). In the vision of the prophet, after the anti-human kingdoms, the Kingdom of God appears which has the appearance, not of an animal, but rather of a human person, Son of Man. That is, a Kingdom with the appearance of people, a human kingdom, which promotes life, it humanizes (Dn 7, 13-14). In the prophecy of Daniel the Son of Man represents, not an individual, but rather, as he himself says, the “people of the Saints of the Most High” (Dn 7, 27; cf. Dn 7, 18). It is the People of God who do not allow themselves to be dehumanized nor deceived or manipulated by the dominating ideology of the animal empires. The Mission of the Son of Man, that is, of the People of God, consists in realizing the Kingdom of God like a human kingdom. That is, a Kingdom which promotes life, which humanizes persons.

Presenting himself as Son of Man to the disciples, Jesus makes his own this mission which is the mission of all the People of God. It is as if he would say to them and to all of us: “Come with me! This mission is not only mine, but it belongs to all of us! Let us go together to carry out the mission which God has entrusted to us, and thus realize the human and humanizing Kingdom which he dreamt!” And he did this during all his life, especially during the last three years. Pope Leo the Great said: “Jesus was so human, but so human, like only God can be human”. The more human he was, the more divine he was. The more he is “Son of Man” the more he is “Son of God!” Everything which dehumanizes persons draws away from God. That was condemned by God, who has placed the good of the human person above all the laws, above the Sabbath or Saturday (Mk 2, 27). At the moment when he was condemned to death by the religious tribunal of the Synedrium, Jesus assumes this title. When he was asked if he was “the Son of God” (Mk 14, 61), he answered that he is the “Son of Man”: “I am. And you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Almighty” (Mk 14, 62). Because of this affirmation he was declared, by the authority, guilty deserving death. He himself knew it because he had said: “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mk 10, 45).

#### **4) Personal questions**

- How do you combine in your life, suffering and faith in God?
- In the time of Jesus there was contrast: people thought and expected or hoped in a certain way; the religious authority thought and expected or hoped in a different way. Today, this same contrast exists.

#### **5) Concluding Prayer**

For ever, Yahweh,  
your word is planted firm in heaven.  
Your constancy endures from age to age;  
you established the earth and it stands firm. (Ps 119,89-90)

### **Lectio Divina: Sunday, September 27, 2015**

*Welcoming the little ones and the marginalized*

*No one owns Jesus*

*Mark 9:38-43.47-48*

## 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 text of the 26<sup>th</sup> Sunday of ordinary time recounts part of a long instruction that Jesus addressed to his disciples (Mc 8,22 a 10,52). (See the commentary on the Gospel of 24<sup>th</sup> Sunday). This Gospel especially sets down three conditions necessary for the conversion of someone who wishes to follow him: (i) it corrects the wrong idea of those who think they own Jesus (Mk 9:38-40); (ii) it insists on welcoming little ones (Mk 9:41-42) and (iii) it demands a radical commitment to the Gospel (Mk 9:43-48).

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

Mark 9:38-40: Jesus corrects the closed mentality of John the Apostle.

Mark 9:41: Anyone who offers a cup of water to one of Jesus' disciples will be rewarded.

Mark 9:42: Avoid scandalizing little ones.

Mark 9:43-48: A radical commitment to the Gospel.

### c) Text:

38 John said to him, 'Master, we saw someone who is not one of us driving out devils in your name, and because he was not one of us we tried to stop him.' 39 But Jesus said, 'You must not stop him; no one who works a miracle in my name could soon afterwards speak evil of me. 40 Anyone who is not against us is for us.

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



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

43 And if your hand should be your downfall, cut it off; it is better for you to enter into life crippled, than to have two hands and go to hell, into the fire that never be put out. 44 45 And if your foot should be your downfall, cut it off; it is better for you enter into life lame, than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. 46 47 And if your eye should be your downfall, tear it out; it is better for you to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell 48 where their worm will never die nor their fire be put out. 49 For everyone will be salted with fire. 50 Salt is a good thing, but if salt has become insipid, how can you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves and be at peace with one another.'

### **3. 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 pleased or struck you most in this text? Why?
- b) What does Jesus' statement mean for us today when he says: "Anyone who is not against us is for us"?
- c) What does the "cup of water" mentioned by Jesus mean for us today?
- d) Who were the "little ones"? What does "anyone who is the downfall of one of these little ones" mean" (v. 42)?
- e) "Millstone around his neck", "Cut the hand or foot", "Tear out the eye": Can these statements be taken literally? What is Jesus saying through these statements?
- f) In our society and community, who are the little ones and the marginalized? How do we welcome them and what is the quality of our welcome?

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

#### **a) Yesterdays' and today's context:**

- As we said above, this Sunday's Gospel presents three important requirements for the conversion of anyone who wishes to be Jesus' disciple: (i) Not to have a closed mentality like that of John the disciple who thought he owned Jesus, but to be open and ecumenical, able to recognise good in others, even though they may belong to another religion. (ii) To overcome the mentality of those who considered themselves superior to others and who, thus, despised the little ones and the poor and drew apart from the community. According to Jesus, such a person deserves to have a millstone tied round his neck and to be thrown into the depths of the sea. (iii) Jesus asks us not to let routine enter our living out of the Gospel, but that we may be able to break the ties that prevent us from living it fully.

- These three pointers are very real for us today. Many members of the Catholic Church tend to be anti-ecumenical and have a closed mentality as if we Christians are better than others. In today's world, dominated by a neo-liberal system, many despise the little ones and everywhere poverty, hunger, refugees and those abandoned are on the increase. We Christians are often not committed to live the Gospel. If we, millions of Christians, were to really live the Gospel, the world would be a different place.

**b) A commentary on the text:**

Mark 9:38-40: *A closed mentality.*

One who did not belong to the community, used Jesus' name to drive out devils. John, the disciple, sees this and forbids it: *Because he was not one of us, we tried to stop him.* In the name of the community, John tries to stop someone else from doing good! He thought that to be a good disciple he had to monopolize Jesus and, thus, wanted to stop others from using the name of Jesus in doing good. This was the closed and old mind of the "Chosen people, a people set apart!" Jesus replies: *You must not stop him! Anyone who is not against us is for us!* (Mk 9:40). For Jesus, what is important is not whether the person is or is not a member of the community, but whether this person does or does not do the good that the community should be doing. Jesus had an ecumenical mind.

Mark 9:41: *Anyone who offers a cup of water will be rewarded.*

One of Jesus' sayings was inserted here: *If anyone gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ, then in truth I tell you, he will most certainly not lose his reward.* Two thoughts to comment on this saying: i) "If anyone gives you a cup of water": Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem to give his life. The sign of a great offering! But he does not forget little offerings in daily life: a cup of water, a sign of welcome, an act of charity, and so many other signs to show our love. Anyone who despises the brick will never build a house! ii) "Because you belong to Christ": Jesus identifies himself with us who wish to belong to him. This means that, for him, we are of great worth. Thus we must always ask ourselves: "Who is Jesus for me?" and also ask ourselves: "Who am I for Jesus?" This verse gives us an answer that is encouraging and full of hope.

Mark 9:42: *A scandal to little ones.*

A *scandal* is something that makes a person deviate from the straight path. *To scandalize little ones* is to cause little ones to deviate from the path and lose faith in God. Anyone who does so, is condemned to be: "thrown into the sea with a great millstone hung round his neck!" Why such harshness? Because Jesus identifies himself with the little ones (Mt 25:40.45). Anyone who hurts them, hurts Jesus! Today, in many places, the little ones, the poor, leave the Catholic Church and go to other churches. They can no longer believe in the Church! Why? Before we point the finger at the other churches, it is good to ask ourselves: why do they leave our house? If they leave it is because they do not feel at home with us. There must be something missing in us. How far are we to blame? Do we deserve the millstone around our necks?

Mark 9:43-48: *Cutting off the hand and foot.*

Jesus tells us to cut the hand or foot, to pluck out the eye, if these are the cause of scandal. He says: “It is better for you to enter into life crippled (maimed, with one eye), than to have two hands (feet, eyes) and go to hell”. These sayings cannot be taken literally. They are saying that we must be radical in our choice for God and for the Gospel. The expression, “*Gehenna (hell), where their worm will never die nor their fire be put out*”, is an image that depicts the situation of one without God. *Gehenna* was the name of a valley near Jerusalem, where the rubbish of the city was thrown and where there was a constant fire to burn the rubbish. This malodorous place was used by the people to symbolize the situation of one who had no part in the Kingdom of God.

### **c) Further information:**

#### **Jesus welcomes and defends the little ones**

Many times, Jesus insists on welcoming little ones. “Anyone who welcomes a little child such as this in my name, welcomes me” (Mk 9:37). “If anyone gives so much as a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, then in truth I tell you, he will most certainly not go without his reward” (Mt 10:42). He asks that we do not despise the little ones (Mt 18:10). At the final judgment, the just will be welcomed because they gave food to “one of the least of these brothers of mine” (Mt 25:40).

If Jesus insists so much on welcoming little ones, it is because many little ones were not made welcome! In fact, women and children did not count (Mt 14:21; 15:38), they were despised (Mt 18:10) and bound to silence (Mt 21:15-16). Even the apostles forbade them to go near Jesus (Mt 19:13; Mk 10:13-14). In the name of God’s law, badly interpreted by the religious authorities, many good people were excluded. Rather than welcoming the excluded, the law was used to legitimise exclusion.

In the Gospels, the expression “little ones” (in Greek *elachistoi*, *mikroi* or *nepioi*), sometimes means “children”, at other times it means those excluded from society. It is not easy to distinguish. Sometimes what is “little” in the Gospel, means “children” because *children* belonged to the category of “little ones”, of the excluded. Also, it is not easy to distinguish between what comes from the time of Jesus and what from the time of the communities for whom the Gospels were written. In any case, what is clear is the context of exclusion in practice at the time, and the image that the first communities had of Jesus: Jesus places himself on the side of the little ones and defends them. What Jesus does in defence of the life of children, of little ones, is striking:

- *Welcomes and forbids scandalizing them.* One of Jesus’ hardest sayings is against those who give *scandal* to little ones, that is, who by their attitude deprive children of their faith in God. For such as these, it would be better to have a millstone tied round their necks and be thrown into the sea (Mk 9:42; Lk 17:2; Mt 18:6).

- *Welcomes and touches.* When children come to Jesus to get his blessing, the apostles are upset and want to send them away. According to the customs of those days, mothers and little children lived practically in a permanent state of legal impurity. To touch them meant incurring impurity! But Jesus corrects the disciples and welcomes the mothers and children. He embraces the children. “Let the little children come to me, do not stop them!” (Mk 10:13-16; Mt 19:13-15).

- *Identifies with the little ones.* Jesus embraces the children and identifies with them. Anyone who welcomes them “welcomes me” (Mk 9:37). “In so far as you did this to one of the least of my brothers, you did it to me” (Mt 25:40).
- *Asks the disciples to become like children.* Jesus wants the disciples to become like children who receive the Kingdom like children. Otherwise it is not possible to enter the Kingdom (Mk 10:15; Mt 18:3; Lk 9:46-48). He says that children are the teachers of adults! This was not normal. We want to do the opposite.
- *Defends their right to shout.* When Jesus enters the city of Jerusalem, it is the children who shout the loudest: “Hosanna to the son of David!” (Mt 21:15). Children were criticised by the chief priests and Scribes, but Jesus defends them and even quotes Scripture in their defence (Mt 21:16).
- *Is grateful for the Kingdom present in little ones.* Jesus greatly rejoices when he realizes that the little ones understand the matters concerning the Kingdom that he proclaimed to the people. “Father, I thank you!” (Mt 11:25-26) Jesus sees that the little ones understand the things concerning the Kingdom better than the doctors!
- *Welcomes and heals.* Jesus welcomes, heals or raises from the dead many children and young people: Jairus’ twelve-year-old daughter (Mk 5:41-42), the Canaanites’ daughter (Mk 7:29-30), the widow from Naim’s son (Lk 7: 14-15), the epileptic child (Mk 9:25-26), the Centurion’s son (Lk 7:9-10), the public servant’s son (Jn 4:50), the child with five loaves and two fishes (Jn 6:9).

## **6. Praying Psalm 34 (33)**

### **A poor man shares his faith with us**

I will bless Yahweh at all times,

his praise continually on my lips.

I will praise Yahweh from my heart;

let the humble hear and rejoice.

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.

Fix your gaze on Yahweh and your face will grow bright,

you will never hang your head in shame.

A pauper calls out and Yahweh hears,

saves him from all his troubles.

The angel of Yahweh encamps around

those who fear him, and rescues them.

Taste and see that Yahweh is good.

How blessed are those who take refuge in him.

Fear Yahweh, you his holy ones;

those who fear him lack for nothing. Young lions may go needy and hungry,

but those who seek Yahweh lack nothing good.

Come, my children, listen to me,

I will teach you the fear of Yahweh.

Who among you delights in life,

longs for time to enjoy prosperity?

Guard your tongue from evil,

your lips from any breath of deceit.

Turn away from evil and do good,

seek peace and pursue it.

The eyes of Yahweh are on the upright,

his ear turned to their cry.

But Yahweh's face is set against those who do evil,

to cut off the memory of them from the earth.

They cry in anguish and Yahweh hears,

and rescues them from all their troubles.

Yahweh is near to the broken-hearted,

he helps those whose spirit is crushed.

Though hardships without number beset the upright,

Yahweh brings rescue from them all.

Yahweh takes care of all their bones,

not one of them will be broken.

But to the wicked evil brings death,

those who hate the upright will pay the penalty.

Yahweh ransoms the lives of those who serve him,

and there will be no penalty for those who take refuge in him.

## **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: Monday, September 28, 2015**

*Ordinary Time*

### **1) Opening prayer**

Father,

you show your almighty power  
in your mercy and forgiveness.

Continue to fill us with your gifts of love.

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

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

### **2) Gospel Reading - Luke 9,46-50**

An argument started between the disciples about which of them was the greatest. Jesus knew what thoughts were going through their minds, and he took a little child whom he set by his side and then he said to them, 'Anyone who welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me; and anyone who welcomes me, welcomes the one who sent me. The least among you all is the one who is the greatest.'

John spoke up. 'Master,' he said, 'we saw someone driving out devils in your name, and because he is not with us we tried to stop him.' But Jesus said to him, 'You must not stop him: anyone who is not against you is for you.'

### **3) Reflection**

- The text enlightens us. If previously Luke had presented the convergence of the men around Jesus to recognize him in faith, to attend to listen to him and to be present to his cures, now, a new stage is opened in his public itinerary. The person of Jesus does not monopolize the

attention of the crowds any more but he is presented as the one who slowly is being drawn away from his own to go toward the Father. Such an itinerary foresees his journey to Jerusalem. And while he is about to undertake that journey, Jesus reveals to them the destiny that is awaiting him (9, 22). Then he is transfigured before them to indicate the starting point of his “Exodus” toward Jerusalem. But immediately after the light that he experiences in the transfiguration, Jesus once again announces his Passion leaving the disciples uncertain and disturbed. The words of Jesus on the event of his Passion, “The Son of man is going to be delivered into the power of men”, but they did not understand (9, 45) and they were afraid to ask him (9, 45).

- Jesus takes a child. The enigma of Jesus being delivered broke out a great dispute among the disciples to decide to whom the first place would belong. Without being asked his opinion, Jesus, who being God knew how to read hearts, intervenes with a symbolical gesture. To begin he takes a child and places him at his side. Such a gesture is an indication of election, of privilege that is extended at the moment that one becomes a Christian (10, 21-22). So that this gesture will be understood, not uncertain, Jesus gives a word of explanation: the “greatness” of the child is not stressed but his inclination to “acceptance”. The Lord considers “great” anyone who like a child knows how to accept God and his messengers. Salvation presents two aspects: the election on the part of God which is symbolized by the gesture of Jesus who accepts the child: and the acceptance of the one who has sent him, the Father of Jesus (the Son) and of every man. The child embodies Jesus, and both together in their smallness and suffering, realize God’s presence (Bovon). But the two aspects of salvation are indicative also of faith: in the gift of election the passive element emerges; in service, the active one; two pillars of the Christian existence. To accept God or Christ in faith has the consequence of total acceptance of the little ones on the part of the believer or of the community. “To be great” about which the disciples were discussing is not a reality of something beyond, but it refers to the present moment and is expressed in the ‘diaconia’ of service. Lived love and faith carry out two functions: we are accepted by Christ (takes the child); but also we have the particular gift of receiving him (“anyone who accepts the child, accepts him, the Father”, v. 48). A brief dialogue follows between Jesus and John (vv. 49-50). This last disciple is considered among the intimate ones of Jesus. The exorcist who does not belong to those who are intimate with Jesus is entrusted the same role that is given to the disciples. He is an exorcist who, on the one side is external to the group, but on the other, he is inside the group because he has understood the Christological origin of divine force that guides him (“in your name”). The teaching of Jesus is clear: a Christian group should not place obstacles to the missionary activity of other groups. There are no Christians who are “greater” than others, but one is “great” in being and in becoming Christians. And then missionary activity has to be in the service of God and not to increase one’s own fame or renown. That clause on the power of the name of Jesus is of crucial importance: it is a reference to the liberty of the Holy Spirit, whose presence is certainly within the Church, but it can extend beyond the instituted or official ministries.

#### **4) Personal questions**

- You, as a believer, baptized, how do you live success and suffering?
- What type of “greatness” do you live in your service to life, to persons? Are you capable of transforming competition into cooperation?

#### **5) Concluding Prayer**

I praise your name Lord 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: Tuesday, September 29, 2015

Ordinary Time

**John 1,47-51**

### 1) Opening prayer

Father,  
you show your almighty power  
in your mercy and forgiveness.  
Continue to fill us with your gifts of love.  
Help us to hurry towards the eternal life your promise  
and come to share in the joys of your kingdom.  
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,  
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

### 2) Gospel Reading - John 1,47-51

When Jesus saw Nathanael coming he said of him, ‘There, truly, is an Israelite in whom there is no deception.’

Nathanael asked, ‘How do you know me?’ Jesus replied, ‘Before Philip came to call you, I saw you under the fig tree.’

Nathanael answered, ‘Rabbi, you are the Son of God, you are the king of Israel.’

Jesus replied, ‘You believe that just because I said: I saw you under the fig tree. You are going to see greater things than that.’ And then he added, ‘In all truth I tell you, you will see heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending over the Son of man.’

### 3) Reflection

- Today’s Gospel presents the dialogue between Jesus and Nathanael in which the following phrase appears: “In all truth I tell you, you will see heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending over the Son of man“. This phrase helps to clarify something concerning the archangels.

- John 1, 47-49: The conversation between Jesus and Nathanael. Philip took Nathanael to Jesus (Jn 1, 45-46). Nathanael had exclaimed: “Can anything good come from Nazareth?” Nathanael was from Cana, which was close to Nazareth. Seeing Nathanael, Jesus said: “There, truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deception!” And he affirms that he knew him already when he was under the fig tree. How could Nathanael be an “authentic Israelite”, if he did not accept Jesus as Messiah? Nathanael “was under the fig tree”. The fig tree was the symbol of Israel (cf. Mq 4, 4; Zc 3, 10; 1K 5,5). “To be under the fig tree” was the same as being faithful to the project of the God of Israel. The authentic Israelite is the one who knows how to detach himself from his own ideas when he perceives that these are not in agreement with God’s project. The Israelite who is not ready to converse is neither authentic nor honest. Nathanael is authentic. He expected the Messiah according to the official teaching of that time, according to which the Messiah came from Bethlehem in Judea. The Messiah could not come from Nazareth in Galilee (Jn 7, 41-42.52). This is why Nathanael resists himself to accept Jesus as Messiah. But the encounter with Jesus helps him to become aware that God’s project is not always as persons imagine it or desire that it be. Nathanael recognizes his own deception, he changes idea, accepts Jesus as Messiah and confesses: “Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel!”

- The diversity of the call. The Gospels of Mark, Matthew and Luke present the call of the first disciples in quite a brief way: Jesus walks along the seashore, and he calls Peter and Andrew. Then he calls John and James (Mk 1, 16-20). The Gospel of John has a different

way of describing the beginning of the first community which was formed around Jesus. John does it by narrating very concrete stories. One is struck by the variety of the calls and of the encounters of persons among themselves and with Jesus. Thus John teaches what is necessary to do to begin a community. It is by means of contacts and personal invitations, and it is like that even today! Jesus calls some directly (Jn 1, 43). Others indirectly (Jn 1, 41-42). One day he called two disciples of John the Baptist (Jn 1, 39). The following day he called Philip who, in turn, called Nathanael (Jn 1, 45). No call is repeated because every person is diverse. People will never forget the important calls which have marked their life. One even remembers the hour and the day (Jn 1, 39).

- John 1, 50-51: The angels of God who descend and ascend on the Son of Man. The confession of Nathanael is only at the beginning. Anyone who is faithful, will see heaven open and the angels who go up and descend on the Son of Man. They will experience that Jesus is the new bond of union between God and us, human beings. It is the realization of the dream of Jacob (Gn 28, 10-22).

- The angels who go up and descend the ladder. The three Archangels: Gabriel, Raphael, and Michael. Gabriel explained to Prophet Daniel the meaning of the vision (Dn 8, 16; 9, 21). The angel Gabriel also took God's message to Elizabeth (Lk 1, 19) and to Mary, the Mother of Jesus (Lk 1, 26). His name means "God is strong". Raphael appears in the Book of Tobit. He accompanies Tobias, the son of Tobit and of Anna, throughout the trip and protects him from all danger. He helps Tobias to liberate Sara from the evil spirit and to cure Tobit, his father, from his blindness. His name means "God heals". Michael helped the Prophet Daniel in his struggles and difficulties (Dn 10, 13.21; 12, 1). The letter of Jude says that Michael disputed with the devil over the body of Moses (Jude 1, 9). It was Michael who obtained victory over Satan, throwing him out of Heaven and throwing him into hell (RV 12, 7). His name means: "Who is like God!" The word 'angel' means messenger. He takes a message from God. In the Bible, the entire nature could be the messenger of God himself, when it turns its face on us and reveals God's love for us (Ps 104, 4). The angel can be God himself, when he turns his face on us and reveals his loving presence to us.

#### **4) Personal questions**

- Have you already had some encounter which has marked your whole life? How have you discovered there the call of God?
- Have you been interested, some times, like Philip, to call another person to participate in the community?

#### **5) Concluding Prayer**

I thank you, Yahweh, with all my heart,  
for you have listened to the cry I uttered.  
In the presence of angels I sing to you,  
I bow down before your holy Temple. (Ps 138,1-2)

### **Lectio Divina: Wednesday, September 30, 2015**

*Ordinary Time*

#### **1) Opening prayer**

Father,

you show your almighty power

in your mercy and forgiveness.

Continue to fill us with your gifts of love.

Help us to hurry towards the eternal life your promise

and come to share in the joys of your kingdom.

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

who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,

one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

## **2) Gospel Reading - Luke 9, 57-62**

As they travelled along they met a man on the road who said to Jesus, 'I will follow you wherever you go.'

Jesus answered, 'Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head.'

Another to whom he said, 'Follow me,' replied, 'Let me go and bury my father first.'

But he answered, 'Leave the dead to bury their dead; your duty is to go and spread the news of the kingdom of God.'

Another said, 'I will follow you, sir, but first let me go and say good -- bye to my people at home.'

Jesus said to him, 'Once the hand is laid on the plough, no one who looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.'

## **3) Reflection**

- In today's Gospel the long and hard journey of Jesus continues from the periphery of Galilee toward the capital city. Leaving Galilee, Jesus enters in Samaria and continues toward Jerusalem. But not all understand him. Many abandon him, because the demands are enormous. But others get close to him and present themselves to follow Jesus. At the beginning of his pastoral activity in Galilee, Jesus had called three: Peter, James and John (Lk 5, 8-11). Here also, in Samaria there are three persons who present themselves or who are called. In the responses of Jesus there are the requirements or conditions in order to be able to be his disciples.

- Luke 9, 56-58: *The first one of the three new disciples. At that time, as they travelled along, they met a man who said to Jesus, "I will follow you wherever you go". Jesus answered: "Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head". To this first person who wants to be his disciple, Jesus asks him to divest himself*

of everything: he has nowhere to lay his head; much less should he seek a false security where to lay the thoughts of his head.

- Luke 9, 59-60: *The second one of the three new disciples. To another one he says "Follow me". And he replied, "Let me go and bury my father first". Jesus replied: "Leave the dead to bury their dead; your duty is to go and spread the news of the Kingdom of God"*. To this second person called by Jesus to follow Him, he asks him to leave the dead bury the dead. It is a question of a popular saying used to say: leave aside the things of the past. Do not lose time with what happened and look ahead. After having discovered the new life in Jesus, the disciple should not lose time with what has happened.

- Luke 9, 61-62: *The third one of the three new disciples. "Another said: I will follow you, Sir, but first let me go and say good-bye to my people at home". But Jesus replied: once the hand is laid on the plough, no one who looks back is fit for the Kingdom of God"*. To this third person called to be a disciple, Jesus asks to break the family bonds of union. On another occasion he had said: Anyone who loves his father and his mother more than me cannot be my disciple (Lk 14, 26; Mt 10, 37). Jesus is more demanding than the Prophet Elijah who allowed Elisha to greet and take leave from his parents (1 K 19, 19-21). This also means to break the nationalistic bonds of race and the patriarchal family structure.

- These are three fundamental requirements as necessary conditions for those who want to be the disciples of Jesus: (a) to abandon material goods, (b) not to be attached to personal goods lived and accumulated in the past (c) to break away from the family bonds. In reality, nobody, even wishing it, can break neither the family bonds, nor break away from things lived in the past. What is asked is to know how to re-integrate everything (material goods, personal life and family life) in a new way around the new axis which is Jesus and the Good News of God which he has brought to us.

- Jesus himself, lived and became aware of what he was asking to his followers. With his decision to go up to Jerusalem Jesus reveals his project. His journey toward Jerusalem (Lk 9, 51 a 19, 27) is represented as the undertaking (Lk 9, 51), the exodus (Lk 9, 31) or the crossing (Lk 17, 11). Arriving in Jerusalem Jesus fulfils the exodus, the undertaking or the definitive crossing from this world toward the Father (Jn 13, 1). Only a truly free person can do this, because such an exodus presupposes to dedicate one's whole life for the brothers (Lk 23, 44-46; 24, 51). This is the exodus, the crossing, the undertaking of which the communities should become aware in order to be able to carry on Jesus' project.

#### **4) Personal questions**

- Compare each one of these three requirements with your life.
- Which are the problems that arise in your life as a consequence of the decision which you have taken to follow Jesus?

#### **5) Concluding prayer**

Yahweh, you examine me and know me,

you know when I sit,

when I rise,

you understand my thoughts from afar. (Ps 139,1-2)