



Lectio Divina

English | September, 2024 | ocarm.org



LECTIO DIVINA SEPTEMBER 2024

LECTIO DIVINA SEPTEMBER 2024	2
Sunday, September 1, 2024	2
Monday, September 2, 2024	8
Tuesday, September 3, 2024	11
Wednesday, September 4, 2024	13
Thursday, September 5, 2024	15
Friday, September 6, 2024	17
Saturday, September 7, 2024	19
Sunday, September 8, 2024	21
Monday, September 9, 2024	26
Tuesday, September 10, 2024	28
Wednesday, September 11, 2024	31
Thursday, September 12, 2024	33
Friday, September 13, 2024	36
Saturday, September 14, 2024	38
Sunday, September 15, 2024	40
Monday, September 16, 2024	46
Tuesday, September 17, 2024	48
Wednesday, September 18, 2021	50
Thursday, September 19, 2024	52
Friday, September 20, 2024	55
Saturday, September 21, 2024	57
Sunday, September 22, 2024	59
Monday, September 23, 2024	65
Tuesday, September 24, 2024	67
Wednesday, September 25, 2024	69
Thursday, September 26, 2024	72
Friday, September 27, 2024	74
Saturday, September 28, 2024	76
Sunday, September 29, 2024	78
Monday, September 30, 2024	84

1

¹ *St. Albert of Jerusalem, Bishop and Lawgiver of Carmel* (<https://ocarm.org/en/item/218-st-albert-of-jerusalem-bishop-and-lawgiver-of-carmel>).

Sunday, September 1, 2024

22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

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

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

Gospel Reading - Mark 7: 1-8, 14-15, 21-23

A Key to the Reading:

- The Gospel of the 22nd Sunday of Ordinary Time describes the religious customs of Jesus' time, speaks of the Pharisees who taught the people these practices and customs and of Jesus' teaching concerning this matter. Many of these practices and customs had lost their meaning and made peoples' lives difficult. The Pharisees saw sin in everything and threatened with punishment in hell! For instance, to eat without washing one's hands was considered a sin. But these practices and customs continued to be passed down and taught from fear or from superstition. Do you know of any present religious practice that has lost its meaning, but which is still being taught? In our reading of the text we shall try to look at Jesus' attitude concerning what he says about the Pharisees and what he teaches concerning the religious practices taught by the Pharisees.
- The text of this Sunday's liturgy presents some verses and leaves out other verses to shorten the text and make it more understandable. For the sake of completeness, we use the whole text and offer comments also on the verses omitted from the liturgy. The parts omitted in the liturgy are in italics.

A Division of the Text to Help with the Reading:

- Mark 7: 1-2: The attack of the Pharisees and the freedom of the disciples
- Mark 7: 3-4: Mark's explanation of the Tradition of the Elders
- Mark 7: 5: The Scribes and Pharisees criticize the behavior of the disciples of Jesus
- Mark 7: 6-8: Jesus' strong reply concerning the incoherence of the Pharisees
- Mark 7: 9-13: A concrete example of how the Pharisees empty God's commandment of any meaning

- Mark 7: 14-16: Jesus' explanation to the people: a new way to God
- Mark 7: 17-23: Jesus' explanation to his disciples

Text:

¹ The Pharisees and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered round him, ² and they noticed that some of his disciples were eating with unclean hands, that is, without washing them. ³ For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, keep the tradition of the elders and never eat without washing their arms as far as the elbow; ⁴ and on returning from the marketplace they never eat without first sprinkling themselves. There are also many other observances which have been handed down to them to keep, concerning the washing of cups and pots and bronze dishes. ⁵ So the Pharisees and scribes asked him, 'Why do your disciples not respect the tradition of the elders but eat their food with unclean hands?' ⁶ He answered, 'How rightly Isaiah prophesied about you hypocrites in the passage of scripture: This people honors me only with lip-service, while their hearts are far from me. ⁷ Their reverence of me is worthless; the lessons they teach are nothing but human commandments. ⁸ You put aside the commandment of God to observe human traditions.' ⁹ And he said to them, '*How ingeniously you get round the commandment of God in order to preserve your own tradition!* ¹⁰ For Moses said: Honor your father and your mother, and, Anyone who curses father or mother must be put to death. ¹¹ But you say, "If a man says to his father or mother: Anything I have that I might have used to help you is *Korban* (that is, dedicated to God), ¹² then he is forbidden from that moment to do anything for his father or mother. ¹³ In this way you make God's word ineffective for the sake of your tradition which you have handed down. And you do many other things like this.' ¹⁴ He called the people to him again and said, 'Listen to me, all of you, and understand. ¹⁵ Nothing that goes into someone from outside can make that person unclean; it is the things that come out of someone that make that person unclean. ¹⁶ Anyone who has ears for listening should listen!' ¹⁷ When he had gone into the house, away from the crowd, his disciples questioned him about the parable. ¹⁸ He said to them, 'Even you -- don't you understand? Can't you see that nothing that goes into someone from outside can make that person unclean, ¹⁹ because it goes not into the heart but into the stomach and passes into the sewer?' (Thus he pronounced all foods clean.) ²⁰ And he went on, 'It is what comes out of someone that makes that person unclean' ²¹ For it is from within, from the heart, that evil intentions emerge: fornication, theft, murder, ²² adultery, avarice, malice, deceit, indecency, envy, slander, pride, folly. ²³ All these evil things come from within and make a person unclean.'

A Moment of Prayerful Silence

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

Some Questions

to help us in our personal reflection.

- What pleased or touched you most in this text? Why?
- According to the text, what were the practices that the Pharisees taught the people? In what does Jesus criticize the Pharisees?
- In this text, what is the new way that Jesus shows the people to reach God?
- In the name of the “tradition of the elders” they do not observe the Commandment of God. Does this happen today? Where? When?
- The Pharisees were practicing Jews, but their faith was divorced from the lives of the people. Jesus criticizes them for this. Would Jesus criticize us today? Why?

Deeper into the theme

The Context of Then and of Today:

- In this Lectio let us take a close look at Jesus’ attitude concerning the question of purity. Mark had already mentioned this matter. In Mk 1: 23-28, Jesus drives an impure devil away. In Mk 1: 40-45, he heals a leper. In Mk 5: 25-34, he heals a woman considered impure. On many other occasions, Jesus touches those physically sick without fear of becoming impure. Here, in chapter 7, Jesus helps people and his disciples to deepen the idea of purity and the laws on purity.
- For centuries, for the Jews not to contract impurity, contact with pagans and eating with them was forbidden. In the 70’s, when Mark was writing his Gospel, some converted Jews said: “Now that we are Christians, we must leave behind old practices that keep us apart from converted pagans!” But other converted Jews thought they had to continue to observe the laws concerning purity. Jesus’ attitude, as described in today’s Gospel, helps to overcome this problem.

A Commentary on the Text:

- Mark 7: 1-2: The control of the Pharisees and the freedom of the disciples
The Pharisees and some Scribes who were in Jerusalem, watch Jesus’ disciples eating bread with impure hands. There are three points worth noting: (i) The Scribes are from Jerusalem, the capital! This means that they had come to observe and control Jesus’ steps. (ii) The disciples do not wash their hands before eating! This means that their living with Jesus gives them the courage to transgress the norms imposed by tradition and that they had a feeling for life. (iii) The practice of washing hands, which to this day is an important hygienic matter, had acquired a religious meaning that served to control and discriminate against persons.
- Mark 7: 3-4: Mark’s explanation concerning the tradition of the elders
“The tradition of the elders” passed on the norms to be observed by people so as to achieve the purity required by law. The observance of purity was considered a very serious matter. They thought that an impure person could not receive the blessing promised by God to Abraham. The norms concerning purity were taught in such a way that when people observed them, they could

follow the road to God, source of peace. However, rather than being a source of peace, these norms were chains, a form of slavery. It was practically impossible for the poor to observe these norms and laws. Thus, the poor were despised and considered ignorant and cursed people who did not know the law (Jn 7: 49).

- Mark 7: 5: The Scribes and Pharisees criticize the behavior of Jesus' disciples
The Scribes and Pharisees ask Jesus: Why do your disciples not respect the tradition of the elders but eat their food with unclean hands? They pretend to be interested in knowing the reason for the behavior of the disciples. In fact, they are criticizing Jesus for allowing his disciples to transgress the norms concerning purity. The scribes and doctors of the law were the guardians of doctrine. They dedicated their lives to the study of the Law of God and taught people how to observe completely the Law of God, especially the norms concerning purity. The Pharisees were a kind of fraternity, whose main preoccupation was to observe all the laws concerning purity. The word Pharisee means set apart. They endeavored so that, by the perfect observance of the laws concerning purity, people would become pure, set apart and holy as the Laws of the Tradition required! Because of the exemplary witness of their lives in following the laws of the times, they wielded great authority in the villages of Galilee.
- Mark 7: 6-8: Jesus' strong reply concerning the Pharisees' lack of coherence
Jesus replies quoting Isaiah: This people honors me only with lip-service, while their hearts are far from me. Their reverence of me is worthless; the lessons they teach are nothing but human commandments. You put aside the commandment of God to observe human traditions (Is 29: 13). Because, by insisting on the norms concerning purity, the Pharisees had emptied the commandments of the law of God of all coherence. Jesus immediately gives a concrete example of how they render the commandment of God insignificant.
- Mark 7: 9-13: A concrete example of how the Pharisees render the commandment of God incoherent
The "tradition of the elders" taught: a son who dedicates his possessions to the Temple, may not use these possessions to help his parents in need. Thus, in the name of tradition, they rendered incoherent the fourth commandment to love father and mother. There still are such people today. They seem to be observant, but only externally. Internally, their heart is far from God! As one of our hymns says: "His name is Jesus Christ and he is hungry, he lives by the side of the road. And when people see him, they move on to get to church quickly!" In Jesus' days, people, in their wisdom, did not agree with all that they were taught. They hoped that one day the Messiah would come to show them some other way to be pure. This hope comes to pass in Jesus.
- Mark 7: 14-16: Jesus explains to the people: a new way to reach God
Jesus says to the crowd: "Nothing that goes into someone from outside can make that person unclean!" (Mk 7: 15). Jesus reverses things: that which is

impure does not come from the outside to the inside, as the doctors of the law taught, but from the inside to the outside. Thus, no one need ask any more whether this food or this drink is pure or not. Jesus places the question of purity and impurity on a higher level, on the level of ethical behavior. He shows a way to God and, thus, fulfills the deepest desire of the crowd. Jesus ends his explanation with an expression that he likes to use: Anyone who has ears for listening should listen! Or: "That's it! You have heard me! Now try to understand!" In other words, use your heads and common sense and look at things through your experience of life.

- Mark 7: 17-23: Jesus' explanation to his disciples

The disciples did not understand what Jesus meant. When they went home they asked him for an explanation. Jesus was astounded. He thought that they had understood. In his explanation he goes deep into the question concerning purity. He declares all food pure! No food that goes into a human being from the outside can make him impure, because it does not enter the heart but only the stomach and then goes into the sewer. That which makes a person impure, says Jesus, is what comes from the inside, from the heart, and that poisons human relationships. Then he mentions: "fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, malice, deceit, indecency, envy, slander, pride, folly." Thus, in many ways, by means of word, action or living together, Jesus helped people to be pure. By means of the word, he healed lepers (Mk 1: 40-44), drove out impure spirits (Mk 1: 26, 39; 3: 15, 22, etc) and overcame death, source of all impurity. By means of action, the woman excluded and considered impure is healed (Mk 5: 25-34). By means of living with Jesus, the disciples have the courage to imitate Jesus who, without any fear of contamination, ate with people who were considered impure (Mk 2: 15- 17).

Further Information:

The laws concerning purity and impurity in Jesus' days

The people then were greatly concerned with purity. The norms concerning *purity* pointed to the necessary conditions for coming into the presence of God and for feeling right before him. One could not go before God in any old way. Because God is Holy! The Law said: "Be holy, for I, Yahweh your God, am holy!" (Lev 19: 2). Anyone who was not pure could not appear before God to receive the blessing promised to Abraham.

For us to understand the seriousness of these laws concerning purity, we may remember what used to happen in our Church fifty years ago. Before the Second Vatican Council, to go to communion in the morning, people had to fast from midnight. Anyone who went to communion without fasting committed a mortal sin called sacrilege. We thought that a little food or drink made us impure to receive the consecrated host.

In Jesus' times too there were many matters and activities that made a person impure and therefore not possible to come before God: touching a leper, eating with a publican, eating without washing one's hands, touching blood or a dead body and many other things. All these things made a person impure, and any contact with that person contaminated others. That is why "impure" people had

to be avoided. People lived apart, always threatened by so many impure things that threatened their lives. All were afraid of everyone and everything. Now, with the coming of Jesus, suddenly everything changes! By believing in Jesus, it was possible to achieve purity and feel good before God without having to observe all the laws and norms of the “tradition of the elders”. It was a real and personal liberation! The Good News proclaimed by Jesus released people from a defensive attitude and restored to them the taste for life, the joy of being children of God, without fear of being happy!

Praying Psalm 24 (23)

Who Can Climb the Mountain of God!

To Yahweh belong the earth and all it contains, the world and all who live there; it is he who laid its foundations on the seas, on the flowing waters fixed it firm.

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, whose heart is not set on vanities, who does not swear an oath in order to deceive. Such a one will receive blessing from Yahweh, saving justice from the God of his salvation.

Such is the people that seeks him, that seeks your presence, God of Jacob. Gates, lift high your heads, raise high the ancient gateways, and the king of glory shall enter! Who is he, this king of glory?

It is Yahweh, strong and valiant, Yahweh valiant in battle. Gates, lift high your heads, raise high the ancient gateways, and the king of glory shall enter! Who is he, this king of glory?

Yahweh Sabaoth, he is the king of glory.

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.

Monday, September 2, 2024

Ordinary Time

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.

Gospel Reading - Luke 4: 16-30

Jesus came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day as he usually did. He stood up to read, and they handed him the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. Unrolling the scroll he found the place where it is written: The spirit of the Lord is on me, for he has anointed me to bring the good news to the afflicted. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives, sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim a year of favor from the Lord.

He then rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the assistant and sat down. And all eyes in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to speak to them, 'This text is being fulfilled today even while you are listening.'

And he won the approval of all, and they were astonished by the gracious words that came from his lips. They said, "This is Joseph's son, surely?"

But he replied, "No doubt you will quote me the saying, 'Physician, heal yourself,' and tell me, 'We have heard all that happened in Capernaum, do the same here in your own country.'" And he went on, "In truth I tell you, no prophet is ever accepted in his own country. There were many widows in Israel, I can assure you, in Elijah's day, when heaven remained shut for three years and six months and a great famine raged throughout the land, but Elijah was not sent to any one of these; he was sent to a widow at Zarephath, a town in Sidonia. And in the prophet Elisha's time there were many suffering from virulent skin-diseases in Israel, but none of these was cured—only Naaman the Syrian."

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

Reflection

Today we begin the meditation on the Gospel of Luke, which will extend three months until the end of the liturgical year. Today's Gospel speaks about Jesus' visit to Nazareth and the presentation of his program to the people of the Synagogue. In the first moment the people were admired. But immediately, when they become aware that Jesus wants to accept all, without excluding anyone, people rebel and want to kill him.

- Luke 4: 16-19: The proposal of Jesus. Urged by the Holy Spirit, Jesus returned to Galilee (Lk 4: 14) and begins to announce the Good News of the Kingdom of God. He goes to the community, teaches in the Synagogue, and arrives to Nazareth, where he had grown. He was returning to the community, in which he had participated since he was small, and during thirty years. The following Saturday, as it was the custom, Jesus went to the Synagogue to participate in the celebration, and he stands up to read. He chooses the text of Isaiah which speaks about the poor, of the prisoners, of the blind and the oppressed (Is 61: 1-2). This text is an image of the situation of the people of Galilee at the time of Jesus. The experience which Jesus had of God, the Father of Love, gave him a new look to evaluate the reality. In the name of God, Jesus takes a stand to defend the life of his people and, with the words of Isaiah, he

defines his mission: (1) to announce the Good News to the poor, (2) to proclaim liberty to captives, (3) to give sight to the blind; (4) to release the oppressed, and taking the ancient tradition of the prophets, (5) to proclaim “a year of grace from the Lord”. He proclaims the Jubilee Year!

- In the Bible, the "Jubilee Year" was an important Law. Every seven years, at the beginning (Dt 15: 1; Lv 25: 3) it was necessary to restore the land to the clan of origin. All had to be able to return to their own property; and this way they prevented the formation of large estates and families were guaranteed their livelihood. It was also necessary to forgive their debts and to redeem the persons who were slaves. (Dt 15: 1-18). It was not easy to have the Jubilee Year every seven years (cf. Jer 34: 8-16). After the exile, it was decided to have it every fifty years (Lv 25: 8-12). The objective of the Jubilee was and continues to be: to re-establish the rights of the poor, to accept the excluded and to re-integrate them into the society to live together with others. The Jubilee was a legal instrument to return to the original sense of the Law of God. This was an occasion offered by God to make a revision of the path being followed, to discover and to correct the errors and to start again from the beginning. Jesus begins his preaching proclaiming a Jubilee “A year of grace from the Lord”.
- Luke 4: 20-22: To unite the Bible and Life. Having finished the reading, Jesus updates the text of Isaiah and says: “This text is being fulfilled today even while you are listening!” Taking the words of Isaiah as his own, Jesus gives them a full and definitive sense and he declares himself Messiah who comes to fulfil the prophecy. This way of updating the text provokes a reaction of discredit on the part of those who were in the Synagogue. They were scandalized and do not want to know anything about him. They do not accept that Jesus is the Messiah announced by Isaiah. They said: “Is he not the son of Joseph?” They were scandalized because Jesus speaks about accepting the poor, the blind and the oppressed. The people do not accept Jesus’ proposal. And, thus when he presents the project of accepting the excluded, he himself is excluded.
- Luke 4: 23-30: To overcome the limits of race. To help the community to overcome the scandal and to help them understand that his proposal formed part of tradition. Jesus tells two stories known in the Bible, the story of Elijah and the one of Elisha. Both stories criticize the mental closeness of the people of Nazareth. Elijah was sent to the widow of Zarephath (1 Kg 17: 7-16). Elisha was sent to take care of the foreigner of Syria (2 Kg 5: 14). Here arises the concern of Luke who wants to show that openness already comes from Jesus. Jesus had the same difficulty which the communities at the time of Luke were having. But the call of Jesus did not calm down people, all the contrary! The stories of Elijah and Elisha produced even greater anger. The community of Nazareth reaches the point of wanting to kill Jesus. But he keeps calm. The anger of others fails in drawing him away from his own path. Luke tells us that it is difficult to overcome the mentality of privilege and of mental closeness.

It is important to notice the details used in the Old Testament. Jesus quotes the text of Isaiah up to the point where it says: “to proclaim a year of grace from the Lord”. He does not quote the rest of the phrase which says: and a “day of

vengeance from our God". The people of Nazareth throw stones at Jesus because he pretends to be the Messiah, because he wants to accept the excluded and because he has omitted to read the phrase about vengeance. They wanted the day of Yahweh to be a day of vengeance against the oppressors of the people. In this case, the coming of the Kingdom would not have been a true change or conversion of the system. Jesus does not accept this way of thinking; he does not accept vengeance (cf. Mt 5: 44-48) His new experience of God Father/Mother helped him to understand better the sense of the prophecies.

Personal Questions

- The program of Jesus is to accept the excluded. Do we accept everybody, or do we exclude some? Which are the reasons which lead us to exclude certain persons?
- Is the program of Jesus truly our program, my program? Who are the excluded whom we should accept better in our community? Who or what thing gives us the strength to carry out the mission which is entrusted to us by Jesus?

Concluding Prayer

How I love your Law, Lord! I ponder it all day long.
You make me wiser than my enemies
by your commandment which is mine forever. (Ps 119: 97-78)

Tuesday, September 3, 2024

Ordinary Time

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.

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.

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 regarding 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.

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 neighborhood? 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?

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)

Wednesday, September 4, 2024

Ordinary Time

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.

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.

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 of 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 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.

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?

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)

Thursday, September 5, 2024

Ordinary Time

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.

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 signaled 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.

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 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 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 laborers 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!

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 to follow Jesus?

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)

Friday, September 6, 2024

Ordinary Time

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.

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.

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 Apocalypses 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.

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?

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)

Saturday, September 7, 2024

Ordinary Time

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.

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.”

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 (1 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, handwritten, 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."

Personal Questions

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

Concluding Prayer

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

Sunday, September 8, 2024

Twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

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

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

Gospel Reading – Mark 7: 31-37

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- 9; 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.

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.

The Text:

³¹Then 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."

A Moment of Prayerful Silence

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

Some Questions

to help us in our personal reflection.

- What is the 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»?
- How can we understand Jesus' concern for taking the man away from the crowd?
- Why does Jesus forbid the spreading of the news? How do we understand the people's disobedience of Jesus' command?
- What other New Testament and Old Testament texts are connoted or form the basis of this text?

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). Despite 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!

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 Canticle 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. Based 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 neighbor.

- Introduction: Mk 1:1-13:
Beginning of the Good News
Preparing the proclamation
- Summary: 1: 14-15
- 1st reading: Mk 1: 16-3: 16:
Growth of the Good News
Conflict appears
- Summary: 3: 7-12
- 2nd reading: Mk 3: 13-6: 6:
Growth of the conflict
The Mystery appears
- Summary: 6: 7-13
- 3rd reading: Mk 6: 14-8: 21:
Growth of the Mystery
Misunderstanding appears
- Summary: 8: 22-26
- 4th reading: Mk 8: 27-10: 45:
Growth of the misunderstanding
The dark light of the Cross appears
- Summary: 10: 46-52
- 5th reading: Mk 11: 1-13: 32:
Growth of the dark light of the Cross
Appearance of rupture and death
- Summary: 13: 33-37
- 6th 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.

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 marvelous 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.

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.

Monday, September 9, 2024

Ordinary Time

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.

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.

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 favorite 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 based on 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 behavior 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 neighbor 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.

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 center of your attention and of your commitment every person and all their requirements?

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)

Tuesday, September 10, 2024

Ordinary Time

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.

Gospel Reading - Luke 6: 12-19

Jesus departed to the mountain to pray, and he spent the night in prayer to God. When day came, he called his disciples to himself, and from them he chose Twelve, whom he also named Apostles: Simon, whom he named Peter, and his brother Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus, Simon who was called a Zealot, and Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor. And he came down with them and stood on a stretch of level ground. A great crowd of his disciples and a large number of the people from all Judea and Jerusalem and the coastal region of Tyre and Sidon came to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; and even those who were tormented by unclean spirits were cured. Everyone in the crowd sought to touch him because power came forth from him and healed them all.

Reflection

The Gospel today presents two facts: the choice of the twelve apostles (Lk 6: 12-16) and the enormous crowds who want to meet Jesus (Lk 6: 17-19). The Gospel today invites us to reflect on the twelve who were chosen to live with Jesus, being apostles. The first Christians remembered and registered the name of these twelve and of some other men and women, who followed Jesus and who, after His Resurrection, began to create the communities for the world outside. Today, also, we remember some catechists or people significant for our own Christian formation.

- Luke 6: 12-13: The choice of the 12 apostles. Before choosing the twelve apostles definitively, Jesus spent a whole night in prayer. He prays in order to know whom to choose and then chooses the twelve, whose names are in the Gospels, and they will receive the name of apostles. Apostle means sent, missionary. They were called to carry out a mission, the same mission that Jesus received from the Father (Jn 20: 21). Mark is more concrete and says that God called them to be with Him and He sends them on mission (Mk 3: 14).
- Luke 6: 14-16: The names of the 12 Apostles. With small differences the names of the twelve are the same in the Gospels of Matthew (Mt 10: 2-4), Mark (Mk 3: 16-19) and Luke (Lk 6: 14-16). The majority of these names come from the Old Testament. For example, Simeon is the name of one of the sons of the patriarch Jacob (Gen 29: 33). James (Giacomo) is the same name of Jacob (Gen 25: 26), Judah is the name of the other son of Jacob (Gen 35: 23). Matthew also had the name of Levi (Mk 2: 14), the other son of Jacob (Gen 35: 23). Of the twelve apostles, seven have a name that comes from the time of the patriarchs: two times Simon, two times James, two times Judah, and one time Levi! That reveals the wisdom and the pedagogy of the people. Through the names of the patriarchs and the matriarchs, which were given to the sons and daughters, people maintained alive the tradition of the ancestors and

helped their own children not to lose their identity. What are the names which we give our children today?

- Luke 6: 17-19: Jesus goes down from the mountain and people are looking for Him. Coming down from the mountain with the twelve, Jesus found an immense crowd of people who were trying to hear His words and to touch Him, because people knew that a life force came out of Him. In this crowd there were Jews and foreigners, people from Judaea and also from Tyre and Sidon. There were people who were abandoned, disoriented. Jesus accepts all those who look for Him, Jews and pagans! This is one of the themes preferred by Luke!
- These twelve men, called by Jesus to form the first community, were not saints. They were common people, like all of us. They had their virtues and their defects. The Gospels tell us very little on the temperament and the character of each one of them. But what they say, even if not much, is for us a reason for consolation.
- Peter was a generous person and full of enthusiasm (Mk 14: 29, 31; Mt 14: 28-29), but at the moment of danger and of making a decision, his heart becomes small and cannot go ahead (Mt 14: 30; Mk 14: 66-72). He was even Satan for Jesus (Mk 8: 33). Jesus calls him Rock (Peter). Peter of himself was not '*Pietra*' - Rock, he becomes Rock (*Pietra*) because Jesus prays for him (Lk 22: 31-32).
- James and John are ready to suffer with and for Jesus (Mk 10: 39), but they were very violent (Lk 9: 54), Jesus calls them "sons of thunder" (Mk 3: 17). John seemed to have some sort of envy. He wanted Jesus only for his group (Mk 9: 38).
- Philip had a nice welcoming way. He knew how to put others in contact with Jesus (Jn 1: 45-46), but he was not too practical in solving the problems (Jn 12: 20-22; 6: 7). Sometimes he was very naïve. There was a moment when Jesus lost His patience with him: Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know Me? (Jn 14: 8-9).
- Andrew, the brother of Peter and friend of Philip, was more practical. Philip goes to him to solve the problems (Jn 12: 21-22). Andrew calls Peter (Jn 1: 40-41), and Andrew found the boy who had five loaves of bread and two fish (Jn 6: 8-9).
- Bartholomew seems to be the same as Nathanael. This one was from there and could not admit that anything good could come from Nazareth (Jn 1: 46).
- Thomas was capable of sustaining his own opinion, for a whole week, against the witness of all the others (Jn 20: 24-25). But when he saw that he was mistaken, he was not afraid to acknowledge his error (Jn 20: 26-28). He was generous, ready to die with Jesus (Jn 11: 16).
- Matthew or Levi was a Publican, a tax collector, like Zaccheus (Mt 9: 9; Lk 19: 2). They were people who held to the system of oppression of that time.
- Simon, instead, seems to have belonged to the movement which radically opposed the system which the Roman Empire imposed on the Jewish people. This is why he was also called Zealot (Lk 6: 15). The group of the Zealots even succeeded in bringing about an armed revolt against the Romans.

- Judah was the one who was in charge of the money in the group (Jn 13: 29). He betrayed Jesus.
- James, son of Alphaeus, and Judas Thaddeus. The Gospels say nothing of these two; they only mention their name.

Personal Questions

- Jesus spends the whole night in prayer to know whom to choose, and then He chooses those twelve. What conclusions can you draw? Do you do the same when making an important choice in your life?
- Do you recall the people who began the community to which you belong? What do you remember about them: the content of what they taught or the witness they gave?

Concluding Prayer

They shall dance in praise of His name, play to Him on tambourines and harp!
For Yahweh loves His people,
He will crown the humble with salvation. (Ps 149: 3-4)

Wednesday, September 11, 2024

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.

Gospel Reading - Luke 6:20-26

Raising his eyes toward his disciples Jesus said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for the Kingdom of God is yours. Blessed are you who are now hungry, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who are now weeping, for you will laugh. Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude and insult you, and denounce your name as evil on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice and leap for joy on that day! Behold, your reward will be great in heaven. For their ancestors treated the prophets in the same way. But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. But woe to you who are filled now, for you will be hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will grieve and weep. Woe to you when all speak well of you, for their ancestors treated the false prophets in this way."

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 on the plain" because, according to Luke, Jesus came down from the mountain and stopped in a place which was flat 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 Mount." 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 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 meaning 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 fill! Blessed are you, who are weeping now, you shall laugh!" One part of the sentence 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 4th 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 a 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 favor 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, not in Matthew's. Luke is more radical in denouncing injustices.
- In front of 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!" Luke, in transmitting these words of Jesus, is thinking more of the communities of his time. In those communities there were rich and poor people, and there was discrimination against the poor on the part of the rich, the same discrimination which marked the structure of the Roman Empire (cf. Jas 5: 1-6; Rev 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 authorities of the Jews used their prestige and power to criticize Jesus.

Personal Questions

- Do we look at life and at people from the viewpoint 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 commercial advertising, 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?
- Rich and poor are two terms with many interpretations. What is my interpretation? How does this fit with the meaning Jesus intended? Do I live authentically and without compromise in my interpretation of His message and meaning?

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)

Thursday, September 12, 2024

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.

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."

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 favor 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 pieces of advice: 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 favor 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; 3: 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).

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”?

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)

Friday, September 13, 2024

Ordinary Time

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.

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.

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).

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?

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)

Saturday, September 14, 2024

Exaltation of the Cross

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.

LECTIO

Gospel Reading - John 3: 13-17

Jesus said to Nicodemus: "No one has gone up to heaven except the one who has come down from heaven, the Son of Man.

And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life."

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life.

For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.

MEDITATIO

Key for the Reading:

The text for today's 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; Dan 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* (suffering and glorious) 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” (Eph 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. Deut 30: 12; Prov 30: 4). The fourth Gospel is full of references to the mystery of He who “is from Heaven” (1 Cor 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, unto death, and death on the Cross, on which He was lifted up like the serpent in the desert, which, “anybody... who looked at it would survive” (Num 21: 7-9; Zech 12: 10). John reminds us in the scene of the death of Jesus 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.”

A Few Questions:

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

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 a parable, 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 flatter 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.

CONTEMPLATIO

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

Sunday, September 15, 2024

Twenty-fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

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

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

Gospel Reading – Mark 8: 27-35

A Key to the Reading:

The text of the Gospel of this 24th 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?

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^a: 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

Gospel Text: Mark 8: 27-35

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.'

A Moment of Prayerful Silence

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

Some Questions

to help us in our personal reflection.

- Which point in this text pleased you the most or what struck you the most? Why?
- Which is the opinion of the people and of Peter on Jesus? Why do Peter and the people think in this way?
- 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?
- What does Jesus ask from those who want to follow him?
- What prevents us today from recognizing and assuming the project of Jesus?

To Deepen the Theme

Context of Yesterday and of Today:

- 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 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.
- 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).

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 legitimized 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.

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: 1st announcement of the Passion
- Mk 9: 1-29: Instruction on the Messiah Servant
- Mk 9: 30-37: 2nd Announcement of the Passion
- Mk 9: 38 to 10: 31: Instructions on conversation
- Mk 10: 32-45: 3rd 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 word *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 criticizes 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, criticizing the lack of understanding of the Disciples and teaching how their behavior 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.

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 forever, 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. Neighbors 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.

Look on 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.

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.

Monday, September 16, 2024

Opening Prayer

Holy Father, through Jesus Your Son, the Word made flesh for us, send me Your Holy Spirit, that my ears may be opened to hear the "letter of love" that You have written on me and enlighten my mind that I may understand it in depth. Make my heart docile that it may receive Your will with joy and help me to give witness to it. Amen.

Reading

From the Gospel According to Luke 7: 1-10

When Jesus had finished all his words to the people, he entered Capernaum. A centurion there had a slave who was ill and about to die, and he was valuable to him. When he heard about Jesus, he sent elders of the Jews to him, asking him to come and save the life of his slave. They approached Jesus and strongly urged him to come, saying, "He deserves to have you do this for him, for he loves our nation and he built the synagogue for us." And Jesus went with them, but when he was only a short distance from the house, the centurion sent friends to tell him, "Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you enter under my roof. Therefore, I did not consider myself worthy to come to you; but say the word and let my servant be healed. For I too am a person subject to authority, with soldiers subject to me. And I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes; and to another, 'Come here,' and he comes; and to my slave, 'Do this,' and he does it." When Jesus heard this he was amazed at him and, turning, said to the crowd following him, "I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith." When the messengers returned to the house, they found the slave in good health.

MEDITATION

- Chapter 7 of the Gospel of Luke helps us to receive the call addressed to the pagan to adhere to faith in the Lord Jesus. The figure of the centurion

becomes the example for all those who want to abide by the faith of Israel and then encounter and know the face of the Father in Jesus. In the meditation on this Gospel, we are also proposed to open ourselves to faith or to make our confidence in the Word of the Lord more firmly unshaken. Let us try, then, to follow, with our hearts, the example of this Roman centurion, so that in Him we may also be present.

- Perhaps the first aspect that emerges from the reading of the passage is the situation of suffering in which the centurion finds himself. Try to hear more attentively the words that try to give light to this reality. Capernaum, a border city, a city apart, on the margins, a city where the blessings of God seem slow to arrive. The grave illness; the imminent death of a dear person.
- But we soon see that the Lord enters into this situation, coming to share in it, to live in it with His loving presence. The words in italics confirm this truth: “asking Him to come”; “and Jesus went with them”; “He was only a short distance.” It is wonderful to see this movement of Jesus who moves near to him who calls Him, who searches for Him and who asks for salvation. This is how Jesus acts with each one of us.
- But it is also very useful to enter into contact with the figure of the centurion, who is here a bit like our master, our guide on the way of faith.
- “When he heard about Jesus.” He received the announcement, he heard the good news and held it in his heart. He did not let it escape and did not close his ears to life. He remembered Jesus and now he goes in search for Him.
- “He sent.” Twice does the centurion carry out his action: first sending the elders of the people to Jesus, authoritative figures, then by sending his friends. Luke uses two different verbs and this helps us to understand better that in this man something took place, a state of passage: he became more and more open to the encounter with Jesus. Sending his friends is a bit like going to Jesus Himself.
- “Asking Him to come and save.” Two beautiful verbs that explain the whole intensity of his request to Jesus. He wants Jesus to come, to be near, to enter into his poor life, to come and visit his pain. It is a declaration of love, of great faith, because it is as if he was saying: “Without You, I cannot live anymore. Come!” And he does not ask for any mere salvation, a superficial healing, as the particular verb chosen by Luke helps us to understand. In fact, here it is a traverse salvation, one that crosses the entirety of life, of the entire person, and is capable of taking a person beyond, past every obstacle, every difficulty or trial, beyond even death.
- “I am not worthy.” Luke puts these words in the mouth of the centurion twice, and these words help us to understand the great transformation that has taken place within himself. He feels unworthy, incapable, insufficient, as the two different Greek terms used here indicate. Perhaps the first conquest on the road of faith with Jesus is exactly this: the discovery of our great need for Him, for His presence and the more certain knowledge that alone we can do nothing because we are poor, we are sinners. However, precisely because of this we are infinitely loved!

- “Say the word.” Here is the great leap, the great transformation in faith. The centurion now believes in a clear, serene and faithful way. While Jesus walked towards him, he was also completing his own interior journey, changing, becoming a new man. First, he welcomed the person of Jesus, then His word. For him it is the Lord as He is, His word is efficacious, true, powerful, able to do what He says. All of his doubts have crumbled; nothing remains but faith, the certain confidence in salvation, in Jesus.

Questions

- Does my prayer feel like that of the centurion, addressed to Jesus to come and save? Am I also ready to explain to the Lord my uneasiness, my need for Him? Am I perhaps ashamed to present to Him the sickness, the death that lives in my house, in my life? What do I need in order to fulfill this first step in trust?
- And if I open my heart in prayer, to the invocation, if I invite the Lord to come, what is the profound attitude of my heart? Is there also in me, as in the centurion, the knowledge of being unworthy, of not being sufficient solely of myself, of not being pretentious? Do I know how to place myself before the Lord with that humility that comes from love, from serene trust in Him?
- Is His Word good enough for me? Do I ever listen to it in its entirety with attention, with respect, even though, perhaps, I am not able to fully understand it?
- And in this moment, what is the word that I want to hear from the mouth of the Lord for me? What do I want Him to say to me?
- The pagan centurion had such a great faith ... and I, who am Christian, what faith do I have? Perhaps it is true that I must pray like this: “Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!” (Mark 9: 24)

Final Prayer

Your words are a lamp for my steps, Lord! How can a youth keep his way pure?

By observing Your word.

With all my heart I search for You:

do not let me deviate from Your commands.

Put again into my heart Your promise that I may not sin against You.

Blessed are You, Lord: teach me Your decrees.

With my mouth I recount all of the wisdom from Your mouth.

On the way of Your teachings is my joy, more than all other riches.

I want to meditate on Your precepts, to consider Your ways.

In Your decrees is my delight, I will not forget Your word.

Tuesday, September 17, 2024

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.

Gospel Reading - Luke 7: 11-17

It happened that soon afterwards Jesus went to a town called Nain, accompanied by his disciples and a great number of people. Now when he was near the gate of the town there was a dead man being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. And a considerable number of the townspeople was with her. When the Lord saw her he felt sorry for her and said to her, 'Don't cry.' Then he went up and touched the bier and the bearers stood still, and he said, 'Young man, I tell you: get up.' And the dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him to his mother. Everyone was filled with awe and glorified God saying, 'A great prophet has risen up among us; God has visited his people.' And this view of him spread throughout Judaea and all over the countryside.

Reflection

Today's Gospel presents the episode of the resurrection of the son of the widow of Nain. The literary context of this episode of the VII chapter of Luke helps one to understand. The Evangelist wants to show that Jesus opens the road, revealing the novelty of God which is presented to us in the announcement of the Good News. And in this way the transformation and openness take place: Jesus accepts the request of a foreigner, a non Jew (Lk 7: 1-10) and resurrects the son of a widow (Lk 7: 11-17). The way in which Jesus reveals the Kingdom surprises the Jewish brothers who were not accustomed to such great openness. Even John the Baptist is surprised and orders to go and ask: "Are you the one who is to come or are we to expect someone else?" (Lk 7: 18-30). Jesus denounces the incoherence of his patricians: "They are like children shouting to one another without knowing what they want!" (Lk 7: 31-35). And finally, there is the openness of Jesus toward women (7: 36-50).

- Luke 7: 11-12: The meeting of the two processions. "Jesus went to a town called Nain. His disciples and a great crowd were going with him. When he was close to the gate of the town, there was a dead man being carried out to the cemetery, the only son of his mother and she was a widow." Luke is like a painter. With few words he succeeds to paint a very beautiful picture on the encounter of the two processions: the procession of death which is going out of the city and accompanies the widow who is taking her only son towards the cemetery; the procession of life which enters the city and accompanies Jesus. The two meet in the small square at the side of the gate of the town of Nain.

- Luke 7: 13: Compassion begins to act here. “When the Lord saw her, he felt sorry for her and said to her: “Do not cry!” It is compassion which moves Jesus to speak and to act. Compassion signifies literally: “to suffer with”, to assume or make ours the suffering of the other person, identifying oneself with the person, feeling the pain, the suffering. It is compassion which puts into action the power of Jesus, the power of life over death, the creative power.
- Luke 7: 14-15: “Young man, I tell you, get up!” Jesus gets near the bier and says: “Young man, I tell you, get up!” And the dead man sat up and began to talk; and Jesus gave him to his mother”. Sometimes, at the moment of a great sorrow caused by the death of a loved person, people say: “In Jesus’ time, when he walked on this earth there was hope not to lose a loved person because Jesus could resurrect her”. These persons consider the episode of the resurrection of the son of the widow of Nain as an event of the past which arouses nostalgia and also certain envy. The intention of the Gospel, instead, is not, that of arousing nostalgia or envy, but rather of helping us to experience better the living presence of Jesus in our midst. It is the same Jesus, who continues alive in our midst, capable of overcoming death and the sorrow of death. He is with us today, and in the face of the problems of sorrow which strike us, he tells us: “I tell you, get up!”
- Luke 7: 16-17: The repercussion. “Everyone was filled with awe and glorified God saying: ‘A great prophet has risen up among us; God has visited his people’. The fame of these events spread throughout Judaea and all over the countryside”. It is the prophet who was announced by Moses (Dt 18: 15). It is God who comes to visit us and the “Father of orphans and protector of the widows” (Ps 68: 6; Judith 9: 11).

Personal Questions

- Compassion moves Jesus to resurrect the son of the widow. Does the suffering, the sorrow of others produce in me the same compassion? What do I do to help the others to overcome the sorrow and to create a new life?
- God visited his people. Do I perceive the many visits of God in my life and in the life of the people?

Concluding Prayer

Serve Yahweh with gladness,
 come into his presence with songs of joy!
 Be sure that Yahweh is God, he made us,
 we belong to him, his people, the flock of his sheepfold. (Ps 100: 2-3)

Wednesday, September 18, 2021

Ordinary Time

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.

Gospel Reading - Luke 7: 31-35

Jesus said to the crowds: "To what shall I compare the people of this generation? What are they like? They are like children who sit in the marketplace and call to one another, 'We played the flute for you, but you did not dance. We sang a dirge, but you did not weep.' For John the Baptist came neither eating food nor drinking wine, and you said, 'He is possessed by a demon.' The Son of Man came eating and drinking and you said, 'Look, he is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.' But wisdom is vindicated by all her children."

Reflection

In today's Gospel we see the originality of the Good News which opens the way for people who are attached to ancient forms of faith who 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 confusion 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 marketplace: 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).

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?

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)

Thursday, September 19, 2024

Ordinary Time

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.

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, "Yes 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."

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 favor from Jesus. In the attitude that both take before Jesus they indicate how much they appreciate the favor 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, 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.

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?

Concluding Prayer

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

Friday, September 20, 2024

Ordinary Time

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.

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.

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 Joset, 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, Jeanna, 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).

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.

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)

Saturday, September 21, 2024

Feast of St. Matthew, Apostle and Evangelist

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.

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.'

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 of.

- 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' behavior, 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).

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?

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)

Sunday, September 22, 2024

Twenty-fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

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

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

Gospel Reading: Mark 9: 30-37

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 II (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 criticizes 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.

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
-

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 anyone 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.

A Moment of Prayerful Silence

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

Some Questions

to help us in our personal reflection.

- Which words pleased you most or drew your attention?
- 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?
- What is Jesus' teaching in each episode?
- What does the phrase "Anyone who is not against us is for us" mean for us today?

A Key to the Reading

for those who wish to go deeper into the text.

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 characterized 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.

Further Explanations to Better Understand the Text

- Jesus, the "Son of Man"

This is Jesus' favorite 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 humanizes (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 realizing the Kingdom

of God as a *human* kingdom. A kingdom that does not destroy life, but rather builds it up! It humanizes people.

- When Jesus presents himself to his disciples as the *Son of Man*, he assumes as his own 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 humanizing 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 center, 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 criticized 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.

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
favor 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 favor, 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 forever.

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.

Monday, September 23, 2024

Ordinary Time

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.

Gospel Reading - Luke 8: 16-18

Jesus said to the crowd: "No one who lights a lamp conceals it with a vessel or sets it under a bed; rather, he places it on a lampstand so that those who enter may see the light. For there is nothing hidden that will not become visible, and nothing secret that will not be known and come to light. Take care, then, how you hear. To anyone who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he seems to have will be taken away."

Reflection

Today's Gospel presents three brief phrases pronounced by Jesus. They are phrases scattered in different places which Luke collected here after the parable of the seed (Lk 8: 4-8) and of His explanation to the disciples (Lk 8: 9-15). This literary context, in which Luke places the three phrases, helps us to understand how he wants people to understand these phrases of Jesus.

- Luke 8: 16: The lamp which gives light. "No one lights a lamp to cover it with a bowl or to put it under a bed; no, it is put on a lamp-stand so that people may see the light when they come in. This phrase of Jesus is a brief parable. Jesus

does not explain, because all know what He is speaking about. This belonged to everyday life. At that time, there was no electric light. Just imagine this! The family meets at home. The sun begins to set. A person gets up, lights the lamp, covers it with a vase or places it under the bed. What will the others say? All will scream out: "Are you crazy... place the lamp on the table!" In a biblical meeting somebody made the following comment: The Word of God is a lamp which is necessary to light in the darkness of the night. If it remains closed up in the book of the bible, it will be like the lamp under a vase. But when it is placed on the table it gives light to the whole house, when it is read in community and is connected to life.

- In the context in which Luke places this phrase, he is referring to the explanation which Jesus gave about the parable of the seeds (Lk 8: 9-15). It is as if he would say: the things which you have just heard you should not keep them only for yourselves, but you should share them with others. A Christian should not be afraid to give witness and spread the Good News. Humility is important, but the humility which hides the gifts of God given to edify the community is false (1 Cor 12: 4-26; Rom 12: 3-8).
- Luke 8: 17: That which is hidden will be manifested. "There is nothing hidden which will not be manifested, nothing secret which will not be known and brought to light." In the context in which Luke places this second phrase of Jesus, it also refers to the teachings given by Jesus particularly to the disciples (Lk 8: 9-10). The disciples cannot keep these only for themselves, but they should share them, because they form part of the Good News which Jesus has brought.
- Luke 8: 18: Attention to preconceptions. "So take care how you listen, anyone who has will be given more, anyone who has not, will be deprived even of what he thinks he has." At that time, there were many preconceptions on the Messiah which prevented people from understanding, in a correct way, the Good News of the Kingdom which Jesus announced. "For this reason, this warning of Jesus concerning preconceptions is quite actual. Jesus asks the disciples to be aware of the preconceptions with which they listen to the teaching that He presents. With this phrase of Jesus, Luke is saying to the communities and to all of us: "Be attentive to the ideas with which you look at Jesus!" Because if the color of the eyes is green, everything will seem to be green. If it were blue, everything would be blue! If the idea that I have when I look at Jesus is mistaken, erroneous, everything which I receive and teach about Jesus will be threatened by error! If I think that the Messiah has to be a glorious King, I will not want to hear anything which Jesus teaches about the Cross, about suffering, persecution and about commitment, and to lose even what I thought I possessed. Joining this third phrase to the first one, I can conclude what follows: anyone who keeps for himself what he receives and does not distribute it to others, loses what he has, because it becomes corrupt.

Personal Questions

- Have you had any experience of preconceptions which have prevented you from perceiving and appreciating in their just value, the good things that persons have?
- Have you perceived the preconceptions which are behind certain stories, accounts, and parables which certain persons tell us?

Concluding Prayer

How blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the Law of Yahweh! Blessed are those who observe His instructions, who seek Him with all their hearts. (Ps 119: 1-2)

Tuesday, September 24, 2024

Ordinary Time

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.

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.'

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 kilometers. 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 fails 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 to fight in defense 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).

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?

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)

Wednesday, September 25, 2024

Ordinary Time

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.

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.

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 understand the fundamental points of the mission, to announce the Good News:
 - 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.

- 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 laborer 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.
- 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” (*goél*) 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).
- 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, *goél*). 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.

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?

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)

Thursday, September 26, 2024

Ordinary Time

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.

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.

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. Sometimes 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 newborn 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 newborn 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.

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?

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)

Friday, September 27, 2024

Ordinary Time

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.

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."

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 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 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 fulfill 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.

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?

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 Savior; I shelter behind him. (Ps 144: 1-2)

Saturday, September 28, 2024

Ordinary Time

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.

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.

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: 1, 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).

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.

Concluding Prayer

Forever, 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)

Sunday, September 29, 2024

Twenty-six Sunday of Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

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

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

Reading

A Key to the Reading:

The Gospel text of the 26th Sunday of ordinary time recounts part of a long instruction that Jesus addressed to his disciples (Mk 8: 22 a 10: 52). (See the commentary on the Gospel of 24th Sunday). This Gospel especially sets down three conditions necessary for the conversion of someone who wishes to follow him:

- 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).

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.

Gospel Text: Mark 9: 38-43, 45, 47-48

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.

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

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

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

A Moment of Prayerful Silence

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

Some Questions

to help us in our personal reflection.

- What pleased or struck you most in this text? Why?
- What does Jesus' statement mean for us today when he says: –Anyone who is not against us is for us?|?
- What does the “cup of water” mentioned by Jesus mean for us today?

- Who were the “little ones”? What does “anyone who is the downfall of one of these little ones” mean (v. 42)?
- “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?
- 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?

To Go Deeper Into the Theme

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 recognize 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 maybe 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.

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.

Further Information:

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 legitimize 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 defense 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 criticized by the chief priests and Scribes, but Jesus defends them and even quotes Scripture in their defense (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).

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.

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.

Monday, September 30, 2024

Ordinary Time

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.

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.'

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 anymore, 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.

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?

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)