



Lectio Divina

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LECTIO DIVINA OCTOBER 2024

LECTIO DIVINA OCTOBER 2024	2
Tuesday, October 1, 2024	3
Wednesday, October 2, 2024	5
Thursday, October 3, 2024	8
Friday, October 4, 2024	10
Saturday, October 5, 2024	12
Sunday, October 6, 2024	14
Monday, October 7, 2024	20
Tuesday, October 8, 2024	23
Wednesday, October 9, 2024	25
Thursday, October 10, 2024	28
Friday, October 11, 2024	30
Saturday, October 12, 2024	33
Sunday, October 13, 2024	34
Monday, October 14, 2024	40
Tuesday, October 15, 2024	42
Wednesday, October 16, 2024	44
Thursday, October 17, 2024	46
Friday, October 18, 2024	49
Saturday, October 19, 2024	51
Sunday, October 20, 2024	54
Monday, October 21, 2024	56
Tuesday, October 22, 2024	59
Wednesday, October 23, 2024	60
Thursday, October 24, 2024	63
Friday, October 25, 2024	65
Saturday, October 26, 2024	66
Sunday, October 27, 2024	69
Monday, October 28, 2024	75
Tuesday, October 29, 2024	78
Wednesday, October 30, 2024	79
Thursday, October 31, 2024	82

1

¹ The Ecstasy of Saint Theresa, by Gian Lorenzo Bernini. Church of Santa Maria della Vittoria, Rome (*Livioandronico2013*, CC BY-SA 4.0 <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ecstasy_of_St._Teresa_HDR.jpg>, via *Wikimedia Commons*).

Tuesday, October 1, 2024

Ordinary Time

St. Therese of Lisieux - Memorial

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 You 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: 51-56

When the days for Jesus to be taken up were fulfilled, he resolutely determined to journey to Jerusalem, and he sent messengers ahead of him. On the way they entered a Samaritan village to prepare for his reception there, but they would not welcome him because the destination of his journey was Jerusalem. When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, "Lord, do you want us to call down fire from heaven to consume them?" Jesus turned and rebuked them, and they journeyed to another village.

Reflection

The Gospel today narrates and tells us how Jesus decides to go to Jerusalem. It also describes the first difficulties which He finds along this road. He presents us the beginning of the long and hard way along the periphery toward the capital city. Jesus leaves Galilee and goes toward Jerusalem. Not all can understand Him. Many abandon Him because the demands are enormous. Today, the same thing happens. Along the way in our community there are misunderstandings and abandonment.

- "Jesus decides to go to Jerusalem." This decision marks the hard and long way of Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem, from the periphery to the capital city. This journey occupies more than one third part of the Gospel of Luke (Lk 9: 51 to 19: 28). This is a sign that the journey to Jerusalem was of great importance in the life of Jesus. The long walk is also the symbol of the journey that the community is making. They seek to go through a difficult passage from the Jewish world toward the world of the Greek culture. This also symbolizes the tension between the new and the ancient which was closing more and more in on itself. It also symbolizes the conversion which each one of us must undergo in trying to follow Jesus. During the journey, the disciples try to follow Jesus, without returning; but they do not always succeed. Jesus dedicates much time to instructing those who follow Him closely. We have a

concrete example of this instruction in today's Gospel. At the beginning of the journey, Jesus leaves Galilee and takes the disciples with Him to the territory of the Samaritans. He tries to form them so that they will be ready to understand the openness to the new, toward the other, toward what is different.

- Luke 9: 51: *Jesus decides to go to Jerusalem.* The Greek text literally says, "Now it happened that as the time drew near for Him to be taken up, He resolutely turned His face towards Jerusalem." The expression "assumption" or "being snatched" recalls the prophet Elijah snatched to heaven (2 Kings 2: 9-11). The expression "turned His face" recalls the Servant of Yahweh, who said, "I have set my face like flint, and I know I shall not be put to shame" (Isa 50: 7). It also recalls an order which the prophet Ezekiel received from God: "Turn your face toward Jerusalem!" (Ezek 21: 7). To face something is to address it. One can meet someone face-to-face, which implies a gravity to the meeting. It is an expression that means there is seriousness, and not just a casual stroll. In using these expressions Luke suggests that while they were walking toward Jerusalem, the most open opposition to Jesus began with the official expectations and ideology of the Temple of Jerusalem. Those expectations wanted a glorious and nationalistic Messiah. Jesus wants to be a Servant Messiah. During the long journey, this opposition will increase and will finally end in the arrest of Jesus. The snatching of Jesus is His death on the cross, followed by His resurrection.
- Luke 9: 52-53: *The mission in Samaria failed.* During the journey, the horizon of the mission is extended. After the beginning, Jesus goes beyond the frontiers of the territory and of race. He sends His disciples to go and prepare for His arrival in a town of Samaria, but the mission, together with the Samaritans, fails. Luke says that the Samaritans did not receive Jesus because He was going to Jerusalem. But if the disciples had said to the Samaritans, "Jesus is going to Jerusalem to criticize the project of the Temple and to demand a greater openness", Jesus would have been accepted, because the Samaritans were of the same opinion. The failure of the mission is probably due to the disciples. They did not understand why Jesus "turned His face toward Jerusalem." The official propaganda of the glorious and nationalistic Messiah prevented them from seeing this. The disciples did not understand the openness of Jesus and therefore the mission failed!
- Luke 9: 54-55: Jesus does not accept the request of vengeance. James and John do not want to take home this defeat. They do not accept that someone is not in agreement with their ideas. They want to imitate Elijah and use fire for revenge (2 Kings 1: 10). Jesus rejects the proposal. He does not want the fire. Some bibles add, "You do not know what spirit is moving you!" This means that the reaction of the disciples was not according to the Spirit of Jesus. When Peter suggests to Jesus not to follow the path of the Servant Messiah, Jesus turns to Peter calling him Satan (Mk 8: 33). Satan is the evil spirit who wants to change the course of Jesus' mission. The message of Luke for the communities: those who want to hinder the mission among the pagans are moved by an evil spirit!

- In the ten chapters which describe the journey up to Jerusalem (Lk 9: 51 to 19: 28), Luke constantly reminds us that Jesus is on the way toward Jerusalem (Lk 9: 51, 53, 57; 10: 1, 38; 11: 1; 13: 22, 33; 14: 25; 17: 11; 18: 31; 18:37; 19: 1, 11, 28). He rarely says where Jesus passed. Only at the beginning of the journey (Lk 9: 51), in the middle (Lk 17: 11), and at the end (Lk 18: 35; 19: 1), is something known about the place where Jesus was passing. This refers to the communities of Luke and for all of us. The only thing that is sure is that we have to continue to walk. We cannot stop. The place where we have to pass by is not always clear and definite. What is sure is the objective: Jerusalem.

Personal Questions

- What are the problems which you have to face in your life because of the decision which you have made to follow Jesus?
- What can we learn from the pedagogy of Jesus with His disciples who wanted to take revenge on the Samaritans?
- How often do we ask for revenge or “getting even” in prayer - in not so many words, but in intent, in an Old Testament way of viewing God, rather than always in a humble and forgiving way in response to challenge or adversity? We see this lack of understanding today from those that preach “pray and you will get *your* way (and your opponents will lose).”

Concluding Prayer

All the kings of the earth give thanks to You, Yahweh,
when they hear the promises You make;
they sing of Yahweh’s ways,
‘Great is the glory of Yahweh!’ (Ps 138: 4-5)

Wednesday, October 2, 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 - Matthew 18: 1-5, 10

At this time the disciples came to Jesus and said, 'Who is the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven?'

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

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

Reflection

Today's Gospel presents a text taken from the Discourse of the Community (Mt 18: 1-35), in which Matthew gathers together some phrases of Jesus to help the communities of the first century to overcome the two problems which they had to face at that moment: the leaving or going away of the little ones because of the scandal caused by some (Mt 18: 1-14) and the need for dialogue to overcome the internal conflicts (Mt 18: 15-35).

The discourse of the Community treats several themes: the exercise of power in the community (Mt 18: 1-4), the scandal that excludes the little ones (Mt 18: 5-11), the obligation to struggle to bring back the little ones, for their return (Mt 18: 12-14), fraternal correction (Mt 18: 15-18), prayer (Mt 18: 19-20), and pardon (Mt 18: 21-35). The accent is placed on acceptance and on reconciliation because the basis of fraternity is the gratuitous love of God which accepts us and forgives us. It is only in this way that the community will be a sign of the Kingdom.

In today's Gospel we meditate on the part that speaks about the acceptance of the little ones. The expression, the little ones, or the least, does not only refer to children, but rather to persons who are not important in society, including children. Jesus asks that the little ones be at the center of the concern of the community, because "The Father does not want any of these little ones to be lost" (Mt 18: 14).

- Matthew 18: 1: The question of the disciples which results in the teaching of Jesus. The disciples want to know who is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven. The simple fact of asking this question indicates that they have not understood the message of Jesus well. The response of Jesus and the whole discourse of the community serves to make us understand that among the followers of Jesus the spirit of service, dedication to pardon, reconciliation, and gratuitous love, without seeking one's own interest, has to be a priority.
- Matthew 18: 2-5: the fundamental criterion; the one who makes himself as little as this child is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven. "Then Jesus called to himself a child and placed him in the middle;" the disciples want a reference point so as to be able to measure the importance of persons in the community. Jesus responds that it is the little ones! Children are not important in society; they do not belong to the world of the great. The disciples, instead of growing towards the heights and toward the center, should grow down and toward the periphery! In this way they will be the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven! And the reason for this is the following: "anyone who welcomes one little child like this, in my name, welcomes me!"

The love of Jesus for the little ones cannot be explained. The children have no merit; they are loved by their parents because they are children, not because of their position or ability or power. This is a pure gratuitous love of God which is manifested here and which can be imitated in the community of those who believe in Jesus.

- Matthew 18: 6-9: Do not scandalize the little ones. The Gospel today omits verses 6 to 9 and continues in verse 10. We give a brief key for the reading of these verses from 6 to 9. To scandalize the little ones means to be a reason for the loss of their faith in God and abandonment from the community. The excessive insistence on the norms and observance, as some Pharisees did, caused the little ones to go away, because they no longer found the liberty that Jesus had brought. Before this, Matthew keeps very strong phrases from Jesus, such as the one of the mill stone put around the neck, and the other one, "Alas for those who cause scandal!" This is a sign that at that time the little ones no longer identified themselves with the community and looked for another refuge. And today? In Brazil alone, every year, approximately one million persons abandon the historical churches and go to the Pentecostal ones. And these are the poor who do this. They leave because the poor and the little ones do not feel at home in their house! What is the reason? To avoid this scandal, Jesus orders to cut off the foot or the hand and take out the eye. These affirmations of Jesus cannot be taken literally. They mean that it is necessary to be very demanding in the struggle against scandal which drives away the little ones. It means to remove those things in our actions and ways that drive the little ones away. The hand, foot and eye were the mechanisms for action then. Today we have many more ways to perform actions and to interact with each other. We cannot in any way allow that the little ones feel marginalized in our community because in this case, the community would not be a sign of the Kingdom of God. It would not belong to Jesus Christ. It would not be Christian.
- Matthew 18: 10: The angels of the little ones are always in the presence of the Father. "See that you never despise any of these little ones, for I tell you that their angels in Heaven are continually in the presence of my Father in Heaven."

Personal Questions

- Are the little ones accepted in our community? Do the poorest people participate in our community?
- The angels of God, our Guardian Angel, and many times the angel of God, is the person who helps another person. Are there many angels in your life?

Concluding Prayer

Lord, you created my inmost self,
knit me together in my mother's womb. For so many marvels I thank you;
a wonder am I,
and all your works are wonders. (Ps 139: 13-14)

Thursday, October 3, 2024

Memorial of Saint Francis of Assisi

1) Opening prayer

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

2) Gospel Reading - Luke 9:57-62

As Jesus and his disciples were proceeding on their journey, someone said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." Jesus answered him, "Foxes have dens and birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to rest his head." And to another he said, "Follow me." But he replied, "Lord, let me go first and bury my father." But he answered him, "Let the dead bury their dead. But you, go and proclaim the Kingdom of God." And another said, "I will follow you, Lord, but first let me say farewell to my family at home." Jesus answered him, "No one who sets a hand to the plow and looks to what was left behind is fit for the Kingdom of God."

3) Reflection

In today's Gospel the long and hard journey of Jesus continues from the periphery of Galilee to the capital city. Leaving Galilee, Jesus enters Samaria and continues toward Jerusalem. Not all understand Him. Many abandon Him because the demands are enormous. Others get close to Him and decide to follow Jesus. At the beginning of His pastoral activity in Galilee, Jesus had called three: Peter, James and John (Lk 5:8-11). Also, in Samaria, there are three people who present themselves, who are called. In Jesus' responses there are requirements or conditions for being able to be His disciples.

- Luke 9:56-58: *The first one of the three new disciples. At that time, as they traveled along, they met a man who said to Jesus, "I will follow You wherever You go." Jesus answered, "Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man has nowhere to lay His head."* To this first person who wants to be His disciple, Jesus asks him to divest himself of everything: he will have nowhere to lay his head.
- Luke 9:59-60: *The second one of the three new disciples. To another one He says "Follow Me". And he replied, "Let me go and bury my father first". Jesus replied, "Leave the dead to bury their dead; your duty is to go and spread the news of the Kingdom of God".* To this second person called by Jesus to follow Him, He asks him to let the dead bury the dead. It was a popular saying which meant this: leave aside the things of the past. Do not lose time with what happened. Look ahead. After having discovered new life in Jesus, the disciple

should not waste time on what has happened in the past. This theme was also in Gn 19:17, as Lot was instructed. In the Sacrament of Reconciliation we see this as well. It is important to have “detachment from sin”, as well as contrition. Do not look back and see the past as something to yearn for, but instead, leave the sin of the past and look to follow Jesus.

- Luke 9:61-62: *The third one of the three new disciples. Another said, “I will follow You, Sir, but first let me go and say good-bye to my people at home”. But Jesus replied, “Once the hand is laid on the plough, no one who looks back is fit for the Kingdom of God”.* Jesus asks this third person called to discipleship to break the bonds of family unity. On another occasion He had said, “Anyone who loves his father and his mother more than Me cannot be My disciple” (Lk 14:26; Mt 10:37). Jesus is more demanding than the prophet Elijah, who allowed Elisha to greet and take leave of his parents (1 Kings 19:19-21). This also means to break the nationalistic bonds of race and the patriarchal family structure.
- These are three fundamental requirements for those who want to be the disciples of Jesus: (a) to abandon material goods, (b) not to be attached to things of the past (c) to break away from the family bonds. In reality, nobody, not even one wishing to do so, can break the family bonds or break away from things lived in the past. What is asked is to know how to re-integrate everything (material goods, personal life and family life) in a new way around the new axis, which is Jesus and the Good News of God which He has brought to us.
- Jesus lived and became aware of what He was asking of His followers. With His decision to go up to Jerusalem, Jesus reveals His plan. His journey toward Jerusalem (Lk 9:51–19:27) is depicted as the undertaking (Lk 9:51), the exodus (Lk 9:31) or the crossing (Lk 17:11). Arriving in Jerusalem Jesus fulfills the exodus, the undertaking or the definitive crossing from this world toward the Father (Jn 13:1). Only a truly free person can do this, because such an exodus presupposes the dedication of one's whole life for the brothers (Lk 23:44-46; 24:51). This is the exodus, the crossing, the undertaking of which the communities should be aware, if they are to carry on Jesus' mission.

4) Personal questions

- Compare each one of these three requirements with your life. How well are you fulfilling these requirements?
- What problems arise in your life as a result of the decision which you have made to follow Jesus?

For further study

St Francis was one who took the call from Jesus seriously. Like many saints, he was very involved in the pleasures of the time. However, once he recognized the call, he began to follow, ultimately “not looking back”. He was serious about not compromising in this regard, and his sincerity even moved Pope Innocent III. In fact, most saints don't begin as “saints”, but at some time decide to follow these

three requirements of Jesus without compromise. Take some time to read the lives of a few saints such as St Francis of Assisi, St Ignatius of Loyola, St Benedict, or St Bernard, just to name a few.

5) Concluding prayer

Yahweh, You examine me and know me, You know when I sit, when I rise, You understand my thoughts from afar. (Ps 139:1-2)

Friday, October 4, 2024

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 10: 13-16

Jesus said: 'Alas for you, Chorazin! Alas for you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. And still, it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon at the Judgement than for you. And as for you, Capernaum, did you want to be raised high as heaven? You shall be flung down to hell.
'Anyone who listens to you listens to me; anyone who rejects you rejects me, and those who reject me reject the one who sent me.'

Reflection

The Gospel today continues speaking about the sending out of the seventy-two disciples (Lk 10: 1-12). At the end, after sending them out, Jesus speaks about shaking off the dust from their shoes if the missionaries are not welcomed or accepted (Lk 10: 10-12). Today's Gospel stresses and extends the threats upon those who refuse to receive the Good News.

- Luke 10: 13-14: *Alas for you, Chorazin! Alas for you, Bethsaida!* The place which Jesus travelled or covered in the three years of his missionary life was small. It measures only a few square kilometers along the Sea of Galilee around the cities of Capernaum, Bethsaida, and Chorazin. In precisely this very small space Jesus works the majority of his miracles and presents his discourses. He has come to save the whole of humanity, and He hardly went out of the limited space of his land. But, tragically, Jesus had to see that the people of those cities do not want to accept the message of the Kingdom and are not converted. The cities fixed themselves in the rigidity of their beliefs, traditions

and customs and they do not accept the invitation of Jesus to change their life. *Alas for you, Chorazin; Alas for you Bethsaida! For if the miracle done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes.*" Jesus compares the two cities with Tyre and Sidon which in the past were unyielding enemies of Israel, ill-treating the people of God. For this reason they were cursed by the Prophets: (Is 23: 1; Jr 25: 22; 47, 4; Ez 26: 3; 27: 2; 28: 2; Jl 4: 4; Am 1: 10). And now Jesus says that these same cities, symbols of all the evil done to the people in the past, would have already converted if so many miracles would have been worked in them as in Chorazin and in Bethsaida.

- Luke 10: 15: *And you Capernaum. "Did you want to be raised high as Heaven? You shall be flung down to hell.* Jesus recalls the condemnation which Isaiah, the Prophet launched against Babylonia. Proud and arrogant, Babylonia thought: *"I shall scale the heavens; higher than the stars of God I shall set my throne. I shall sit on the Mount of the Assembly far away to the north. I shall climb high above the clouds, I shall rival the Most High"* (Is 14: 13-14). That is what it thought! But it completely deceived itself! The contrary happened. The Prophet says: *"Now you have been flung down to Sheol, into the depths of the abyss!"* (Is 14: 15). Jesus compares Capernaum with that terrible Babylonia which destroyed the monarchy and the temple and took the people as slaves, from which it never recovered. Like Babylonia, Capernaum thought it was something important, but it fell into the most profound hell. The Gospel of Matthew compares Capernaum with the city of Sodom, the symbol of the worse perversion, which was destroyed by God's anger (Gen 18: 16 to 19: 29). Sodom would have converted if it had seen the miracles which Jesus worked in Capernaum (Mt 11: 23-24). Today, the same paradox continues to exist. Many of us, Catholics since we were children, have such consolidated convictions that nobody is capable of converting us. In some places, Christianity, instead of being a source of change and of conversion, has become the refuge of the most reactionary forces of politics of the country.
- Luke 10: 16: *"Anyone who listens to you listens to me; anyone who rejects you rejects me. And those who reject me reject the one who has sent me."* This phrase places the accent on the identification of the disciples with Jesus, in so far as He is despised by the authorities. In Matthew the same phrase of Jesus, placed in another context, underlines the identification of the disciples with Jesus accepted by the people (Mt 10, 40). In both cases, the disciples identify themselves with Jesus as total gift, and through this gift realize their encounter with God, that God allows himself to be found by those who seek him.

Personal Questions

- Does my city and my country deserve the warning of Jesus against Capernaum, Corazin, and Bethsaida?
- How do I identify myself with Jesus?

Concluding Prayer

Protect me, O God, in you is my refuge. To Yahweh I say,
'You are my Lord, my happiness is in none.'
My birthright, my cup is Yahweh;
you, you alone, hold my lot secure. (Ps 16: 1-2, 5)

Saturday, October 5, 2024

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 10: 17-24

The seventy-two came back rejoicing. 'Lord,' they said, 'even the devils submit to us when we use your name.'

He said to them, 'I watched Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Look, I have given you power to tread down serpents and scorpions and the whole strength of the enemy; nothing shall ever hurt you. Yet do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you; rejoice instead that your names are written in heaven.'

Just at this time, filled with joy by the Holy Spirit, He said, 'I bless you, Father, Lord of heaven and of earth, for hiding these things from the learned and the clever and revealing them to little children. Yes, Father, for that is what it has pleased you to do. Everything has been entrusted to me by my Father; and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.'

Then turning to his disciples He spoke to them by themselves, 'Blessed are the eyes that see what you see, for I tell you that many prophets and kings wanted to see what you see, and never saw it; to hear what you hear, and never heard it.'

Reflection

- Context. Previously Jesus had sent 72 disciples. They now return from their mission and give an account of it. The proof of the success of their mission is due to the experience of the superiority and supremacy of the name of Jesus in regard to the power of evil. The defeat of Satan coincides with the coming of the Kingdom and the disciples have seen it in their present mission. The diabolical forces have been weakened and the demons have submitted to the power of the name of Jesus. Such a conviction cannot be the foundation of their joy and the enthusiasm of their missionary witness though. Joy has

its last root or origin in the fact of being known and loved by God. This does not mean that being protected by God through a relationship with Him always places us in an advantageous situation in the face of the diabolical forces. Here is inserted the mediation of Jesus between God and us: "Look, I have given you power" (v. 19). The power of Jesus is one that makes us experience success in regard to the devil's power and He protects us. Jesus has been present in the fall of Satan, even if he is not as yet definitively defeated or overcome. Christians are called to hinder and be an obstacle to the power of Satan on earth. They are sure of the victory in spite of the fact that they live in a critical situation. They participate in obtaining victory in the communion of love with Christ even though they may be tried by suffering and death. Just the same, the reason for joy is not in the certainty of coming out unharmed but of being loved by God. The expression of Jesus, "your names are written in heaven" is a witness that being present to the heart of God (memory) guarantees the continuity of our life in eternity. The success of the mission of the disciples is the result of the defeat of Satan. Now the benevolence of the Father is shown (vv. 21-22): the success of the word of Grace in the mission of the seventy-two, seen as the design of the Father and in the communion in the resurrection of the Son, begins with this revelation of the benevolence of the Father. The mission becomes a space for the revelation of God's will in human time. This experience is transmitted by Luke in the context of prayer. It shows on one side the reaction in heaven: "I bless you Father", (v. 21) and that on earth (vv. 23-24).

- The prayer of rejoicing or exultation. In the prayer that Jesus addresses to the Father, guided by the action of the Spirit, the word "exults" expresses the openness of the Messianic joy and proclaims the goodness of the Father. This is made evident in the little ones, in the poor and in those who have no value because they have accepted the Word transmitted by those sent and thus they have access to the relationship between the Divine Persons of the Trinity. Instead, the wise and the learned, on account of feeling sure, are gratified because of their intellectual and theological competence. But such an attitude prevents them from entering into the dynamism of salvation given by Jesus. The teaching that Luke intends to transmit to individual believers, as well as to the ecclesial communities, may be synthesized as follows: Humility opens to faith. The sufficiency of one's assurance closes to pardon, to light, to God's goodness. The prayer of Jesus has its effects on all those who accept this and allow themselves to be wrapped up by the goodness of the Father.

Personal Questions

- The mission to take the life of God to others implies a lifestyle that is poor and humble. Is your life permeated by the life of God, by the Word of grace that comes from Jesus?
- Do you have trust in God's call and in his power that asks to be manifested through simplicity, poverty and humility?

Concluding Prayer

Lord, you are kind and forgiving, rich in faithful love for all who call upon you. Yahweh, hear my prayer, listen to the sound of my pleading. (Ps 86: 5-6)

Sunday, October 6, 2024

27th Sunday of Ordinary Time
Mark 10: 2-16

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 silence in us 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 on the way to 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 10: 2-16

A Key to the Reading:

In the text of today's liturgy, Jesus gives advice concerning the relationship between wife and husband and between mothers and children. In those days, many people were excluded and marginalized. For instance, in the relationship between husband and wife, male domination prevailed. The wife did not have equal rights with the husband. In their relationship with the children, the "little" ones, there might be a "scandal" that could cause the children to lose their faith (Mark 9: 42). In the relationship between husband and wife, Jesus commanded the greatest equality. In the relationship between mothers and children, He commanded the greatest warmth and tenderness.

A Division of the Text as an Aid to Reading:

- Mark 10: 2: The Pharisees' question concerning divorce;
- Mark 10: 3-9: Discussion between Jesus and the Pharisees concerning divorce;
- Mark 10: 10-12: Conversation between Jesus and the disciples concerning divorce;
- Mark 10: 13-16: Jesus commands warmth and tenderness between adults and children.

The Text:

The Pharisees approached Jesus and asked, "Is it lawful for a husband to divorce his wife?" They were testing him. He said to them in reply, "What did Moses command you?" They replied, "Moses permitted a husband to write a bill of divorce and dismiss her." But Jesus told them, "Because of the hardness of your hearts he wrote you this commandment. But from the beginning of creation, God made them male and female. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. So they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, no human being must separate." In the house the disciples again questioned Jesus about this. He said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her; and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery." And people were bringing children to him that he might touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this he became indignant and said to them, "Let the children come to me; do not prevent them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Amen, I say to you, whoever does not accept the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it." Then he embraced them and blessed them, placing his hands on them.

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 was the point that you liked best and which most drew your attention?
- How does the wife's position appear in the text?
- How did Jesus wish the relationship between husband and wife to be?
- What concerned the people who brought their children to Jesus?
- What was Jesus' reaction?
- What practical teaching can we draw from the children?

A Key to the Reading

for those who wish to go deeper into the theme.

Comment

- Mark 10: 2: The Pharisees' question concerning divorce

The Pharisees are crafty. They put Jesus to the test: "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" This shows that Jesus held a different opinion from that of the Pharisees, of whom this question was never asked. They do not ask whether it is lawful for the wife to divorce her husband. This never crossed their minds. This is a clear sign of strong male domination and of

marginalization of the wife in the social life of the times.

- Mark 10: 3-9: Jesus' reply: a man cannot divorce his wife

Instead of replying, Jesus asks, "What did Moses command you?" The Law allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce and to send the wife away (Deut 24: 1). This law illustrates the domination of the male. The husband could divorce his wife, but the wife did not have the same right. Jesus explains that Moses acted thus because of the hardness of heart of the people. However, God's intention was different when He created human beings. Jesus goes back to the Creator's intention (Gen 1: 27; 2: 24). He denies the husband the right to divorce his wife. He establishes on earth the obligation of the husband towards his wife and orders the greatest equality.

- Mark 10: 10-12: Equality between husband and wife

When they go home, the disciples question Jesus again concerning this matter of divorce. Jesus draws conclusions and reaffirms equality of rights and duties between husband and wife. Matthew's Gospel (cf. Mt 19: 10-12) explains a question put by the disciples concerning this theme. They say, "If this is how things are between husband and wife, it is better not to marry." Perhaps they prefer not to get married rather than get married without the privilege of dominating the wife. Jesus goes deeper into the matter. He presents three cases when a person may not get married: (1) impotence, (2) castration, and (3) for the sake of the Kingdom. However, for a man not to get married because he does not wish to share equality with the wife is inadmissible in the new law of love! Both marriage and celibacy have to be at the service of the Kingdom and not at the service of selfish interests. Neither can be a reason for keeping male domination of husband over wife. Jesus presents a new type of relation between the two. It is not lawful in marriage for a man to dominate the wife or vice versa.

- Mark 10: 13: The disciples prevent people from drawing near with their children. Some people brought their children so that Jesus might caress them. The disciples tried to prevent this. Why would they want to prevent this? The text does not tell us. One possibility might be due to Jewish law. Chapter 15 of Leviticus is the basis for the purity laws of the time during *niddatah*, which is a Hebrew word for "separation" and a term used for menstruation. This rendered a woman of childbearing age impure for 7 days each month, as well as those in physical contact with her, which became an issue in families with children. Abnormal bleeding as well as childbirth were included in this. Touching a woman in this state, or what she sat or had laid on, caused ritual impurity until sunset. Even in recent times there was a saying that "children should be seen and not heard." They were seen as the least important and influential in society.
- Mark 10: 14-16: Jesus reprehends the disciples and welcomes the children

Jesus' reaction teaches the opposite: "Let the children come to Me, do not hinder them!" He embraces the children, welcomes them and blesses them. When it is a question of welcoming someone and promoting fraternity, Jesus is not worried about the laws of purity; He is not afraid of transgressing the law. His gesture teaches us that "whoever does not receive the kingdom of

God like a child shall not enter it!" What does this sentence mean? 1) A child receives everything from his father. He does not merit what he receives; he lives in this gratuitous love. 2) Fathers receive children as gifts from God and treat them with care. Fathers are not to be concerned with holding dominion over their children, but with loving them and educating them.

Added Information for a Better Understanding of the Text

- **Jesus welcomes and defends the life of the little ones**

On several occasions, Jesus insists on the welcome due to little ones, to children. "Anyone who welcomes one of these little children in My name, welcomes Me" (Mark 9:37). "If anyone gives so much as a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is a disciple, then I tell you solemnly, he will most certainly not lose his reward" (Matthew 10:42). He asked that no one despise the little ones (Matthew 18:10). At the last judgment the just will be welcomed for having given food "to one of the least of these brothers of Mine" (Matthew 25: 40).

In the Gospels the expression "little ones" (in Greek *elachistoi*, *mikroi* or *neptoi*). Sometimes this means "children", sometimes those excluded from society. It is not easy to differentiate. Sometimes that which is "little" is the "child" and no one else. The child belongs to a category of "little", of the excluded. Having said this, it is not easy to distinguish what originates from the time of Jesus and what originates from the communities when the Gospels were written. Taking this into consideration, we can arrive at the context of exclusion that flourished at that time and the picture that existed of Jesus in the first communities: Jesus takes the side of the little ones, of the excluded, and takes on their defense. It is impressive when we look at all that Jesus did in defense of the life of children, of the little ones.

- ***To welcome and not to scandalize.***

This is one of Jesus' hardest words against those who give scandal to little ones, that is, those who are the reason for their disbelief in God. For these, it would be better if a millstone were hung around their necks and that they throw themselves to the bottom of the sea (Mark 9: 42; Luke 17: 2; Matthew 18: 6).

- ***To welcome and to touch.***

The mothers with their children in their arms drew near to Jesus to ask for a blessing. The apostles told them to go elsewhere. Jesus is not troubled as they are. He corrects the disciples and welcomes the mothers and their children. He touches them and embraces them. "Let the little children alone and let them come to Me; do not stop them!" (Mark 10: 13-16; Matthew 19: 13-15).

- ***To identify oneself with the little ones.***

Jesus identifies with the children. Whoever welcomes a child, "welcomes Me" (Mark 9: 37). "In so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of Mine, you did it to Me" (Matthew 25: 40).

- *To become a child once more.*

Jesus asks that the disciples become children again and accept the kingdom like a child. Failing that, it is impossible to enter the Kingdom of God (Mark 10: 15; Matthew 18: 3; Luke 9: 46-48). Let the child be the teacher of the adult. This was not the norm. We are used to the opposite.

- *To defend the right of those who cry.*

When Jesus entered the temple and upset the tables of the money changers, it was the children who cried. "Hosanna to the Son of David" (Matthew 21: 15). Jesus was criticized by the chief priests and the scribes, but He defended the children and in their defense, He quotes Scripture (Mt 21: 16).

- *To be thankful for the Kingdom present in children.*

Great is Jesus' joy when He hears that children, the little ones, have understood the things of the Kingdom proclaimed to the peoples. "I thank You Father!" (Mt 11:25-26) Jesus recognizes that the little ones understand the things of the Kingdom better than the doctors.

- *To welcome and to care for.*

Many are the children He welcomes, cares for or resurrects: the twelve year old daughter of Jairus (Mk 5: 41-42), the daughter of the Syro-Phoenician woman (Mk 7: 29-30), the son of the widow of Naim (Lk 7: 14-15) the young epileptic (Mk 9: 25-26), the son of the Centurion (Lk 7: 9-10), the son of the public administrator (Jn 4: 50), the young lad with five loaves and two fishes (Jn 6: 9).

The Context of Our Text in Mark's Gospel

Our text (Mk 10: 2-16) is part of a long instruction given by Jesus to His disciples (Mk 8: 27 to 10: 45). At the beginning of this instruction, Mark places the healing of the anonymous blind man of Bethsaida in Galilee (Mk 8: 22-26); at the end, the healing of the blind Bartimaeus of Jericho in Judea (Mk 10: 46-52). The two healings are symbolic of what will take place between Jesus and His disciples. The disciples too were blind since "they had eyes that do not see" (Mk 8: 18). They had to regain their sight; they had to let go of ideology that prevented them from seeing clearly; they had to accept Jesus as He was and not as they wanted Him to be. This long instruction aims at curing the blindness of the disciples. It is like a brief guide, a kind of catechism, using Jesus' own words. The following sequence shows the scheme of the instruction:

- The healing of a blind man 8: 22-26
- 1st proclamation 8: 27-38
- Teaching the disciples about the Servant Messiah 9: 1-29
- 2nd proclamation 9: 30-37
- Teaching the disciples about conversion 9: 38 to 10: 31
- 3rd proclamation 10: 32-45
- Healing of Bartimaeus the blind man 10: 46-52

As we can see, the teaching consists of three proclamations of the Passion Mk 8: 27-38; 9: 30-37; 10: 32-45. Between the first and second proclamation we have a series of teachings to help us understand that Jesus is the Servant Messiah (Mk 9: 1-29). Between the second and third proclamations we have a series of teachings that clarify the kind of conversions required at various levels of life in order to accept Jesus as the Servant Messiah (Mk 9: 38 to 10: 31). The background of the teachings is the journey from Galilee to Jerusalem. From the beginning to the end of this long instruction, Mark says that Jesus is on a journey to Jerusalem (Mk 8: 27; 9: 30, 33; 10: 1, 17, 32), where He will meet the cross.

Each of the three proclamations concerning the Passion is accompanied by gestures and words of incomprehension on the part of the disciples (Mk 8: 32; 9: 32-34; 10: 32-37), and by directives from Jesus, which comment on the lack of comprehension of the disciples and teaches them how they must behave (Mk 8: 34-38; 9: 35-37; 10: 35-45). A full understanding of Jesus' teaching is not achieved only through theoretical instruction, without any practical commitment, but by walking with Him on the journey of service, from Galilee to Jerusalem. Those who wish to uphold Peter's idea, that of a glorious Messiah without the cross (Mk 8: 32-33), will understand nothing, nor will they have the authentic attitude of willing disciples. They will go on being blind, seeing people as trees (Mk 8: 24). Without the cross it is not possible to understand who Jesus is and what it means to follow Jesus. The journey of the teaching is a journey of surrender, of abandonment, of service, of availability and acceptance of the conflict, knowing that there will be a resurrection. The cross is not a casual incident, up to a certain point on the journey. Only love and service can be crucified! Whoever gives his life in service for others suffers because he inconveniences those who snatch privileges.

Psalm 23

The Lord is my Shepherd, Climbing Calvary

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want;
He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters;
He restores my soul.
He leads me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake.
Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil;
for Thou art with me;
Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me.
Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
thou anointest my head with oil; my cup overflows.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I shall
dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Final Prayer

Lord Jesus, we thank You for the Word that has enabled us to understand the will of the Father. May Your Spirit enlighten our actions and grant us the strength to practice what 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, October 7, 2024

Opening Prayer

Father,
your love for us surpasses all our hopes and desires. Forgive our failings, keep us in your peace and lead us in the way of salvation.

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 10: 25-37

A lawyer stood up and, to test Jesus, asked, 'Master, what must I do to inherit eternal life?' He said to him, 'What is written in the Law? What is your reading of it?' He replied, 'You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.' Jesus said to him, 'You have answered right, do this and life is yours.' But the man was anxious to justify himself and said to Jesus, 'And who is my neighbor?' In answer Jesus said, 'A man was once on his way down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell into the hands of bandits; they stripped him, beat him and then made off, leaving him half dead. Now a priest happened to be travelling down the same road, but when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. In the same way a Levite who came to the place saw him and passed by on the other side.

But a Samaritan traveler who came on him was moved with compassion when he saw him. He went up to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them. He then lifted him onto his own mount and took him to an inn and looked after him.

Next day, he took out two *denarii* and handed them to the innkeeper and said, "Look after him, and on my way back I will make good any extra expense you have." Which of these three, do you think, proved himself a neighbor to the man who fell into the bandits' hands?'

He replied, 'The one who showed pity towards him.' Jesus said to him, 'Go, and do the same yourself.'

Reflection

The Gospel today presents the parable of the Good Samaritan. To mediate on a parable is the same thing as to look deeper into our life to discover in it the call of God. In describing the long journey of Jesus to Jerusalem (Lk 9: 51 to 19: 28), Luke helps the communities to better understand what the Good News of the Kingdom consists of. He does it by presenting persons who come to speak with Jesus and ask Him questions. These are real questions from the people of the time of Jesus and they are also real questions asked by the communities of the time of Luke. Thus, today in the Gospel, a doctor of the law asks: "*What should I*

do to inherit eternal life?" The response, both of the doctor and that of Jesus, helps us to better understand the objective of the Law of God.

- Luke 10: 25-26: *"What should I do to inherit eternal life?"* A doctor, who knew the law wants to test Jesus and asks him: *"What should I do to inherit eternal life?"* The doctor thinks that he has to do something in order to be able to inherit. He wants to obtain the inheritance through his own personal effort. But an inheritance is not merited. We receive an inheritance by the simple fact of being *son or daughter*. *"Therefore, you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir by God's own act."* (Ga 4: 7) As sons and daughters we can do nothing to merit the inheritance. We can lose it however!
- Luke 10: 27-28: *The answer of the doctor. Jesus responds asking a new question: "What is written in the Law?"* The doctor responds correctly. Uniting two phrases of the Law, He says: *"You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself."* This phrase comes from Deuteronomy (Dt 6: 5) and from Leviticus (Lv 19: 18). Jesus approves of the response and says: *"Do this and life is yours!"* What is important, the principal thing, is to love God! But God comes to me in my neighbor. The neighbor is the revelation of God for me. And because of this, I have to love my neighbor also with all my heart, with all my soul and with all my strength and with all my mind!
- Luke 10: 29: *"And who is my neighbor?"* Wanting to justify himself, the doctor asks: *"And who is my neighbor?"* He wants to know: "In which neighbor God comes to me?" That is, which is the person close to me who is the revelation of God for me? For the Jews the expression "*neighbor*" was linked to the clan, it was not a neighbor. Anyone who did not belong to the clan was not a neighbor. According to Deuteronomy, they could exploit the "foreigner", but not the "neighbor" (Dt 15: 1-3). *Proximity was based on bonds of race and of blood. Jesus has a different way of seeing which He expresses in the parable of the Good Samaritan.*

Luke 10: 30-36: The Parable.

- Luke 10: 30: *The attack along the road of Jerusalem toward Jericho.* The Desert of Judah is between Jerusalem and Jericho, which is a refuge of rebels, marginalized, and where one could be attacked. Jesus tells a real fact which had happened many times. *"A man was on his way down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell into the hands of bandits; they stripped him, beat him and then made off, leaving him half dead."*
- Luke 10: 31-32: *A priest passed by travelling on the same road, then a Levite passed by.* By chance a priest passed by, and immediately after, a Levite passed. They are officials of the Temple of the official religion. Both of them saw the man who had been attacked but passed by and did nothing. Why did they do nothing? Jesus does not say. He allows one to guess with whom one identifies oneself. This must have happened many times, in the time of Jesus as well as in the time of Luke. This also happens today: a person from the Church goes by close to a poor person without helping him. It could also be that the priest and the Levite had a justification: "He is not my neighbor!" or,

"he is impure and if I touch him, I will also be impure." And today: "If I help him, I will miss Sunday Mass and will commit a mortal sin!"

- Luke 10: 33-35: *A Samaritan passed by.* Immediately after, a Samaritan who was travelling passed by. He saw the man and moved with compassion, he got close, bandaged his wounds, lifted him onto his own mount and took him to an inn and looked after him during the night. The following day he took out two *denarii* and handed them to the innkeeper. That was the salary of ten days and he tells him: "*Look after him and on my way back I will make good any extra expenses you have!*" This is the concrete and effective action. It is the progressive action: to arrive, to see, to be moved with compassion, to get close and to act. The parable says "*A Samaritan who was travelling.*" Jesus was also travelling up to Jerusalem. Jesus is the Good Samaritan. The communities should be the Good Samaritan.
- Luke 10: 36-37: *Which of these three do you think proved himself a neighbor to the man who fell into the bandits' hands?*" At the beginning the doctor had asked: "*Who is my neighbor?*" Behind the question was the concern for him. He wanted to know: God orders me to love whom, in a way to be able to have my conscience in peace and be able to say, "I have done everything that God has asked me to do." Jesus asks another question: "*Which of these three do you think proved himself a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the bandits?*" The condition of neighbor does not depend on the race, on the fact that they are relatives, on sympathy, on closeness or on religion. Humanity is not divided into neighbor and not neighbor. To know who our neighbor is depends on us: to arrive, to see, to be moved with compassion and to get close. If you get close, the other becomes your *neighbor!* It depends on you and not on the other! Jesus overturns everything and takes away from the doctor the security which could come to him from the Law.

The Samaritans. The word Samaritan comes from Samaria, the capital of the Kingdom of Israel in the North. After the death of Solomon, in the year 931 before Christ, the ten tribes of the North separated themselves from the kingdom of Judea in the South and formed an independent kingdom (1 K 12: 1-33). The Kingdom of the North survived approximately for 200 years. In 722, its territory was invaded by Assyria. A large part of its population was deported (2 K 17: 5-6) and people from other places went to Samaria (2 K 17: 24). There was a mixture of races and of religions (2 K 17: 25-33), and the Samaritans were born from these. The Jews of the South despised the Samaritans considering them unfaithful and adorers of false gods (2 K 17: 34-41). Many prejudices existed against the Samaritans. They were not well accepted. It was said of them that they had an erroneous doctrine and did not form part of the People of God. Some even went so far as to say that to be a Samaritan was something of the Devil (Jn 8: 48). Most likely, the cause of this hatred was not only a question of race and of religion, but also a political-economic problem, linked to the possession of the land. This rivalry even existed in the time of Jesus. But Jesus places the Samaritans as a model for others.

Personal Questions

- The Samaritan of the parable was not of the Jewish people, but he did what Jesus asks. Does this happen today? Do you know people who do not go to Church but live what the Gospel asks? Today, who are the priest, the Levite and the Samaritan?
- The doctor asks: "Who is my neighbor?" Jesus asks: "Who was the neighbor of the man who was the victim of the bandits"? There are two different points of view: the doctor asks starting from himself. Jesus asks starting from the needs of the other. Which is my perspective or point of view?

Concluding Prayer

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

Tuesday, October 8, 2024

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father,
your love for us surpasses all our hopes and desires. Forgive our failings, keep us in your peace and lead us in the way of salvation.
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 10: 38-42

In the course of their journey, He came to a village, and a woman named Martha welcomed Him into her house.
She had a sister called Mary, who sat down at the Lord's feet and listened to Him speaking.
Now Martha, who was distracted with all the serving, came to Him and said, 'Lord, do you not care that my sister is leaving me to do the serving all by myself? Please tell her to help me.'
But the Lord answered, 'Martha, Martha,' He said, 'you worry and fret about so many things, and yet few are needed, indeed only one. It is Mary who has chosen the better part, and it is not to be taken from her.'

Reflection

- Context. The journey of Jesus, undertaken in 9: 51, is surrounded by particular encounters, among the doctors of the Law (10: 25-37), that precede the encounter with Martha and Mary (vv. 38-42). Above all, there is a doctor of the Law who asks Jesus a question and, for the reader, it becomes a convenient

occasion to discover how eternal life is inherited or gained in intimacy with the Father. One can have access to eternal life by participating in the mission of Jesus, the first one sent who has shown us fully God's mercy (v. 37). In Jesus, the Father has become close to men and has shown his paternity in a tangible way. At the end of the encounter, the expression that Jesus addresses to the Doctor of the Law and to every reader is crucial: "Go, and do the same yourself" (v. 37). To become a neighbor, to get close to others as Jesus did, makes us become instruments to show, in a living way, the merciful love of the Father. This is the secret key to enter into eternal life.

- Listening to the Word. After this encounter with an expert of the Law, while He is on the way, Jesus enters into a village and is welcomed by old friends: Martha and Mary. Jesus is not only the first one sent by the Father, but He is also the one who gathers together men, and in our case, the members of the house of Bethany in so far as He is the only Word of the Father. If it is true that there are many services to be carried out, in welcoming attention to the needs of others, then even more is it true that what is irreplaceable is listening to the Word. The account that Luke gives is a real episode and at the same time an ideal. It begins with the welcome of Martha (v. 38). Then it sketches Mary with an attitude typical of the disciple, sitting at the feet of Jesus and totally attentive to listening to his Word. This attitude of Mary is extraordinary because in Judaism at the time of Jesus it was not permitted for a woman to go to the school of a teacher, a master. Up until now we have a harmonious picture: the welcome of Martha, the listening of Mary. But soon the welcome of Martha will be transformed into super activism: the woman is "pulled", divided by performing multiple services. She is so absorbed that she is unable to control the domestic services. The great amount of activities, understandable for such a guest, becomes so disproportionate as to prevent her living what is essential, precisely in the time that Jesus is present in her house. Her worry or concern is legitimate but then it becomes anguish, a state of mind that is not convenient when a friend is welcomed.
- Relate service to listening. Her service of acceptance, of welcome, is very positive but it is detrimental because of this state of anxiety with which she carries it out. The Evangelist makes the reader glimpse at this to show that there is no contradiction between the 'diaconia' of the table and that of the Word, but He wants to suggest that the service should be related to listening. Because she did not relate the spiritual attitude of service to that of listening, Martha feels that she has been abandoned by her sister. Instead, of dialoguing with Mary, she complains with the Master. Trapped in her solitude she goes against Jesus who seems to be indifferent to her problem ("Lord do you not care"...) and then with the sister, ("that my sister is leaving me to do the serving all by myself?"). In his response, Jesus does not reproach her, nor criticize her, but He tries to help Martha to recover that which is essential at that moment: listening to the Master. He invites her to choose that part, unique and a priority, that Mary has spontaneously taken. The episode invites us to consider a danger which is always frequent in the life of Christians: anxiety, worry, super activism that can isolate us from communion with Christ and with the community. The danger is more underhanded because frequently the material concerns or worries carried out with anxiety are those

we consider a form of service. What presses Luke is that in our communities the priority that should be given to the Word of God, and to listen to it, should not be neglected. Before serving the others, the relatives, and the ecclesial community, it is necessary to be served by Christ with His Word of grace. And thus immersed in the daily tasks like Martha, we forget that the Lord desires to take care of us... It is necessary, instead, to place in Jesus and in God all our concerns and worries.

Personal Questions

- Do you know how to relate service to listening to the Word of Jesus? Or rather do you allow yourself to be taken up by anxiety because of the multiple things to be done?
- Have you understood that before serving you have to accept to be served by Christ? Are you aware that your service becomes divine only if previously you will have accepted Christ and his word?

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)

Wednesday, October 9, 2024

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father,
your love for us surpasses all our hopes and desires. Forgive our failings, keep us in your peace and lead us in the way of salvation.
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 11: 1-4

Now it happened that Jesus was in a certain place praying, and when He had finished, one of his disciples said, 'Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.'

He said to them, 'When you pray, this is what to say: Father, may your name be held holy, your kingdom come;
give us each day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins,
for we ourselves forgive each one who is in debt to us. And do not put us to the test.'

Reflection

In yesterday's Gospel, we saw Mary sitting at the foot of Jesus, listening to his word. Anyone who listens to the Word of God has to give a response in prayer. In this way, today's Gospel continues with yesterday's Gospel. This is the account in which Jesus, because of his way of prayer, communicates to the disciples the desire to pray, to learn to pray from him.

- Luke 11: 1: Jesus, example of prayer. "One day, Jesus was in a certain place praying and when He had finished one of his disciples said to him: "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples." This petition of the disciples is strange, because at that time people learned to pray since they were children. Everyone prayed three times a day: in the morning, at noon and in the evening. They prayed often using the Psalms. They had their devotional practices, they had the Psalms, they had weekly meetings in the Synagogue and daily encounters at home. It seemed that this was not enough, however. The disciple wanted more: "Teach us to pray!" In the attitude of Jesus he discovers that he could still advance more, and for this he needed some initiation. The desire to pray was in all of them, but the way of praying needs help. The way of praying attains maturity throughout life and changes through the centuries. Jesus was a good teacher: He taught how to pray with words and with witness.
- Luke 11: 2-4: The prayer of the Our Father. "Jesus answers: "When you pray this is what you have to say: Father, may your name be held holy, your kingdom come; give us each day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive each one who is in debt with us. And do not put us to the test." In the Gospel of Matthew, in quite a didactic way, Jesus summarizes all of his teaching in seven petitions addressed to the Father. Here in Luke's Gospel there are five petitions. In these five requests, Jesus repeats the great promises of the Old Testament and asks that the Father help us to fulfill them. The first three (or two) speak to us about our relationship with God. The other four (or three) speak to us about the relationships among us.
 - Mt - Lk: Introduction: Our Father who are in heaven
 - Mt - Lk: 1st request: Hallowed be your Name
 - Mt - Lk: 2nd request: Your Kingdom come
 - Mt: 3rd request: Your will be done
 - Mt - Lk: 4th request: Our daily bread
 - Mt - Lk: 5th request: Forgive our offences
 - Mt - Lk: 6th request: Lead us not into temptation
 - Mt: 7th request: Deliver us from evil
- Father (Our): The title expresses the new relationship with God (Father). It is the basis of fraternity.
 - *To sanctify the Name*: the Name of Yahweh I am with you! God with us. God made himself known with this **name** (Ex 3: 11-15). The Name of God is sanctified when it is used with faith and not with magic; when it is used according to its true objective, and not for oppression, but for the liberation of the people and for the construction of the

Kingdom.

- *Your Kingdom come:* The only Lord and King of human life is God (Is 45: 21; 46: 9). The arrival of the Kingdom is the realization of all hopes and promises. It is the fullness of life, the overcoming of frustration suffered with the kings and human governments. This Kingdom will come when the will of God is completely fulfilled.
- *The daily bread:* In Exodus, the people every day received manna in the desert (Ex 16: 35). Divine Providence passed for fraternal organization as well as for sharing. Jesus invites us to fulfill a new Exodus, a new way of sharing in a fraternal spirit which will guarantee bread for all (Mt 6: 34-44; Jn 6: 48-51).
- *Forgiveness of debts:* Every 50 years, the Jubilee Year obliged everybody to forgive their debts. It was a new beginning (Lev 25: 8-55). Jesus announces a new Jubilee Year, "a year of grace from the Lord" (Lk 4: 19). The Gospel wants to begin everything new! Today, the external debt is not forgiven! Luke changes "debts" for "sins."
- *Not to fall into temptation:* In Exodus the people were tempted and fell (Deut 9: 6- 12). They complained and wanted to go back. (Ex 16: 3; 17: 3). In the new Exodus, the temptation was overcome thanks to the grace and strength that people received from God (1Co 10: 12-13).
- The witness of the prayer of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke:
 - At twelve years old, He goes to the Temple, in the House of the Father (Lk 2: 46-50).
 - When He was baptized and He assumes his mission, He prays (Lk 3: 21).
 - When He begins his mission, He spends forty days in the desert (Lk 4: 1-2).
 - At the hour of temptation, He faces the Devil with texts from Scripture (Lk 4: 3-12).
 - Jesus usually participated in the celebrations in the Synagogues on Saturday (Lk 4: 16)
 - He looks for the solitude of the desert to pray (Lk 5: 16; 9: 18).
 - On the day before He chose the twelve Apostles, He spent the night in prayer (Lk 6: 12).
 - He prays before meals (Lk 9: 16; 24: 30).
 - He prays before presenting the reality and before speaking about his Passion (Lk 9: 18).
 - In time of crisis, He goes up to the mountain to pray, is transfigured while He prays (Lk 9: 28).
 - When the Gospel is revealed to the little ones, He says: "Father I thank you!" (Lk 10: 21)
 - By praying He awakens in the Apostles the desire to pray (Lk 11: 1).

- He prays for Peter so that his faith will not fail (Lk 22: 32).
- He celebrates the Paschal Supper with his disciples (Lk 22: 7-14).
- In the Garden of Olives, He prays while his sweat fell like drops of blood (Lk 22: 41-42).
- In his anguish He asks his friends to pray with Him (Lk 22: 40, 46).
- When He was nailed to the cross, He asks for pardon for the bandits (Lk 23: 34).
- At the hour of his death, He says: "Into your hands I commit my spirit!" (Lk 23: 46; Ps 31: 6)
- Jesus dies sending out the cry of the poor (Lk 23: 46).

Personal Questions

- Do I pray? How do I pray? What does prayer mean for me?
- Our Father: I go over the five petitions and examine how I live them in my life

Concluding Prayer

Praise Yahweh, all nations, extol him, all peoples,
for his faithful love is strong
and his constancy never-ending. (Ps 117: 1-2)

Thursday, October 10, 2024

Opening Prayer

Father,
your love for us surpasses all our hopes and desires. Forgive our failings, keep us
in your peace and lead us in the way of salvation.
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 11: 5-13

Jesus said to his disciples, 'Suppose one of you has a friend and goes to him in
the middle of the night to say, "My friend, lend me three loaves, because a friend
of mine on his travels has just arrived at my house and I have nothing to offer
him;" and the man answers from inside the house, "Do not bother me. The door
is bolted now, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up to give it to
you." I tell you, if the man does not get up and give it to him for friendship's sake,
persistence will make him get up and give his friend all he wants.
'So I say to you: Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock,
and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; everyone
who searches finds; everyone who knocks will have the door opened.

What father among you, if his son asked for a fish, would hand him a snake? Or if he asked for an egg, hand him a scorpion?

If you then, evil as you are, know how to give your children what is good, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!

Reflection

The Gospel today continues to speak about the theme of prayer, which began with the teaching of the Our Father (Lk 11 1-4). Today, Jesus teaches that we should pray with faith and insistence without giving up. For this He uses a provocative parable.

- Luke 11, 5-7: *The parable that provokes.* As always when Jesus has an important thing to teach, He has recourse to a comparison, a parable. Today, He tells us a strange story which ends with a question. He addresses the question to the people who listened to Him and also to us who today read or listen to the story. *"Suppose one of you has a friend and goes to him in the middle of the night to say: My friend, lend me three loaves because a friend of mine on his travels has just arrived at my house and I have nothing to offer him; and the man answers from inside the house: "Do not bother me. The door is bolted now, and my children are with me in bed: I cannot get up to give it to you."* Before Jesus himself gives the answer, He wants our opinion. What would you answer: yes or no?
- Luke 11, 8: *Jesus responds to the provocation.* Jesus gives his response: *"I tell you, if the man does not get up and give it to him for friendship's sake, persistence will make him get up and give his friend all he wants."* If not Jesus, would you have had the courage to invent a story which suggests that God expects our prayers to see himself free from blows? The response of Jesus strengthens the message on prayer: God always expects our prayer. This parable reminds us of another one, also found in Luke's Gospel: the parable of the widow who insists to obtain her rights before the judge who respects neither God nor justice. He pays attention to the widow only because he wants to free himself from her insistence (Lk 18: 3-5). Then Jesus draws a conclusion to apply the message of the parable to life.
- Luke 11: 9-10: *the first application of the Parable.* *"So I say to you: Ask, and it will be given to you, search and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, everyone who searches finds, everyone who knocks will have the door opened."* To ask, to search, to knock at the door. If you ask, you will receive. If you search, you will find. If you knock, the door will be opened for you. Jesus does not say how much time the request should last, this knocking at the door, but the result is certain.
- Luke 11: 11-12: *the second application of the parable.* *"What father among you, if his son asked for a fish, would hand him a snake? Or if he asked for an egg, hand him a scorpion?"* This second application allows us see this type of public listening to the words of Jesus and his way of teaching under the form of dialogue. He asks: "You who are a father, when your son asks you for a fish, would you give him a snake?" The people answer: "No!" "And if he asks you for an egg, would you give him a scorpion?" - "No!" Through dialogue, Jesus involves the people in the comparison and, from the responses He receives

from them, the commitment to the message of the parable.

- Luke 11: 13: *The message: to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. "If you then evil as you are, know how to give your children what is good, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"* The greatest gift that God has for us is the gift of the Holy Spirit. When we were created, He breathed his spirit into our nose, and we became living beings (Gen 2: 7). In the second creation through Faith in Jesus, He gives us the Holy Spirit again. This is the same Spirit which made the Word become incarnate in Mary (Lk 1: 35). With the help of the Holy Spirit, the process of the Incarnation of the Word continues up to the hour of his death on the Cross. At the end, at the hour of death, Jesus commits the spirit to the Father: *"Into your hands I commit my Spirit"* (Lk 23: 46). Jesus promises us this Spirit as the source of truth and of understanding (Jn 14: 14-17; 16: 13) and a help in persecutions (Mt 10: 20; Ac 4: 31). This Spirit cannot be bought with money at the supermarket. The only way of obtaining it is through prayer. After nine days of prayer the abundant gift of the Spirit is obtained on the day of Pentecost (Ac 1: 14; 2: 1-4).

Personal Questions

- How do I respond to the provocation of the parable? A person who lives in a small apartment in a large city, how will she answer? Would she open the door?
- When you pray, do you pray convinced that you will obtain what you ask for?

Concluding Prayer

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

Friday, October 11, 2024

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father,
your love for us surpasses all our hopes and desires. Forgive our failings, keep us in your peace and lead us in the way of salvation.
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 11: 15-26

Jesus was driving out a devil, but some of the people said, 'It is through Beelzebul, the prince of devils, that He drives devils out.' Others asked him, as a

test, for a sign from heaven; but, knowing what they were thinking, He said to them, 'Any kingdom which is divided against itself is heading for ruin, and house collapses against house.

So, too, with Satan: if he is divided against himself, how can his kingdom last? - since you claim that it is through Beelzebul that I drive devils out. Now if it is through Beelzebul that I drive devils out, through whom do your own sons drive them out? They shall be your judges, then. But if it is through the finger of God that I drive devils out, then the kingdom of God has indeed caught you unawares. So long as a strong man fully armed guards his own home, his goods are undisturbed; but when someone stronger than himself attacks and defeats him, the stronger man takes away all the weapons he relied on and shares out his spoil.

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

'When an unclean spirit goes out of someone it wanders through waterless country looking for a place to rest, and not finding one it says, "I will go back to the home I came from." But on arrival, finding it swept and tidied, it then goes off and brings seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and set up house there, and so that person ends up worse off than before.'

Reflection

Today's Gospel speaks about a long discussion around the expulsion of a mute demon which Jesus had performed before the people.

- Luke 11: 14-16: Three diverse reactions in the face of that expulsion. Jesus was casting out devils. Before this very visible fact, in front of everyone, there were three different reactions. People were surprised, astonished, and applauded. Others said: "it is in the name of Beelzebul that He casts out devils." The Gospel of Mark tells us that it was a question of the Scribes who had gone to Jerusalem to control the activity of Jesus (Mk 3: 22). Others still asked for a sign from heaven because they were not convinced by a sign as evident as the expulsion done in front of all the people.
- Luke 11: 17-19: Jesus shows the incoherence of the enemies. Jesus uses two arguments to confront the accusation of casting out the devil in the name of Beelzebul. In the first place, if the devil casts out the devil himself, he divides himself and will not survive. In the second place, Jesus gives them back their argument: If I cast out the demons in name of Beelzebul, your disciples cast them out in whose name? With these words, they were also casting out demons in the name of Beelzebul.
- Luke 11: 20-23: Jesus is the strongest man who has come, a sign of the arrival of the Kingdom. Here Jesus leads us to the central point of his argument: "When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own home, his goods are undisturbed. But when someone stronger than himself attacks and defeats him, the stronger man takes away all the weapons he relied on and shares his spoil." According to the opinion of the people of that time, Satan dominated the world through the demons. He was a strong and well-armed man who guarded his house. The great novelty was the fact that Jesus succeeded to cast out the demons. This was a sign that He was and is the

strongest man who has come. With the coming of Jesus, the kingdom of Beelzebul was declining: "But if it is through the finger of God that I drive devils out, then the kingdom of God has indeed caught you unawares." When the magicians of Pharaoh saw that Moses did things that they were not capable of doing, they were more honest than the Scribes before Jesus and they said: "Here is the finger of God!" (Ex 8: 16-19)

- Luke 11: 24-26: The second fall is worse than the first one. At the time of Luke in the 80's, a time of persecution, many Christians returned and abandoned the community. They went back to live as before. To warn them and all of us, Luke keeps these words of Jesus about the second fall which is worse than the first one.
- The expulsion of the demons. The first impact caused by the action of Jesus among the people is the expulsion of the demons: "He gives orders even to unclean spirits and they obey him!" (Mk 1: 27). One of the principal causes of the discussion of Jesus with the Scribes was the expulsion of the devils. They slandered against Him saying: "He is possessed by Beelzebul!" "It is in the name of Beelzebul, head of demons that He casts out devils!" The first power that the Apostles received when they were sent out on mission was the power to drive out demons. "He gave them authority over unclean spirits" (Mk 6: 7). The first sign which accompanies the announcement of the Resurrection is the expulsion of demons. "The signs that will be associated with believers: in my name they will cast out devils!" (Mk 16: 17). The expulsion of devils was what struck people more (Mk 1: 27). This reached the center of the Good News of the Kingdom. By means of the expulsion Jesus restored or recovered persons to themselves. He restored their judgment and their conscience (Mk 5: 15). Especially in the Gospel of Mark, from beginning until the end, with words which are almost the same, constantly repeats the same image: "And Jesus cast out devils!" (Mk 1: 26, 34; 3: 11-12, 22, 30; 5: 1-20; 6: 7; 13; 7: 25-29; 9: 25-27, 38; 16: 17). It seems to be a refrain which is always repeated. Today, instead of always using the same words, we will use different words to transmit the same image and we will say: "Jesus overcame the power of evil, Satan, who causes so much fear to people, He dominated him, seized him, conquered him, cast him out, eliminated him, exterminated him, destroyed him and killed him!" By this the Gospel wants to tell us: "It is forbidden to the Christian to fear Satan!" By his Resurrection and by his liberating action, Jesus drives away from us the fear of Satan, He gives freedom to the heart, firmness in our actions and causes hope to emerge in the horizon! We should walk along the path of Jesus savoring the victory over the power of evil!

Personal Questions

- To drive out the power of evil. Which is today the power of evil which standardizes people and robs from them the critical conscience?
- Can you say that you are completely free? In the case of a negative response, some part of you is under the power of other forces. What do you do to cast out this power which dominates you?

Concluding Prayer

Full of splendor and majesty his work, his saving justice stands firm forever.
He gives us a memorial of his great deeds; Yahweh is mercy and tenderness. (Ps
111: 3-4)

Saturday, October 12, 2024

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father,
your love for us surpasses all our hopes and desires. Forgive our failings, keep us
in your peace and lead us in the way of salvation.
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 11: 27-28

It happened that as Jesus was speaking, a woman in the crowd raised her voice
and said, 'Blessed the womb that bore you and the breasts that fed you!'
But He replied, 'More blessed still are those who hear the word of God and keep
it!'

Reflection

Today's Gospel is very brief, but it has a very important significance in the
Gospel of Luke in general. It gives us the key to understand what Luke teaches
regarding Mary, the Mother of Jesus, in the so-called Gospel of the Infancy (Lk 1
and 2).

- Luke 11: 27: The exclamation of the woman. "At that time, as Jesus was speaking, a woman in the crowd raised her voice and said: "Blessed the womb that bore you and the breasts that fed you!" The creative imagination of some apocryphal books suggests that the woman was a neighbor of Our Lady, there in Nazareth. She had a son called Dimas, who with other boys of Galilee at that time, went to war with the Romans. He was made a prisoner and killed at the side of Jesus. He was the good thief (Lk 23: 39-43). His mother, having heard about the good that Jesus did to people, remembered her neighbor Mary, and said: "Mary must be very happy to have such a son!"
- Luke 11: 28: The response of Jesus. Jesus responds, giving the greatest praise to his mother: "More blessed still are those who hear the word of God and keep it." Luke speaks little about Mary here (Lk 11: 28) and in the Gospel of the Infancy (Lk 1 and 2). For Luke, Mary is the Daughter of Sion, the image of the new People of God. He represents Mary as the model for the life of the communities. In Vatican Council II, the document prepared on Mary was inserted in the last chapter of the document *Lumen Gentium* on the Church. Mary is the model for the Church. And especially in the way in which Mary relates with the Word of God, Luke considers her as an example for the life of

the communities: "Blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it." Mary teaches us how to accept the Word of God, how to incarnate it, live it, deepen it, make it be born and grow, and allow it to shape us, even when we do not understand it, or when it makes us suffer. This is the vision which is subjacent in the Gospel of the Infancy (Lk 1 and 2). The key to understand these two chapters is given to us by today's Gospel: "Blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it!" Let us see in these chapters how Mary enters into relationship with the Word of God:

a) Luke 1: 26-38: The Annunciation: "Let it happen to me as you have said!" To know how to open oneself, to accept the Word of God so that it becomes incarnate.

b) Luke 1: 39-45: The Visitation: "Blessed is she who has believed!" To know how to recognize the Word of God in a visit and in many other facts of life.

c) Luke 1: 46-56: The Magnificat: "The Lord has done great things for me! To recognize the Word in the story of the people and sing a song of resistance and hope.

d) Luke 2: 1-20: The Birth of Our Lord: "She pondered all these things in her heart!" There was no outward place for them. The marginalized accept the Word.

e) Luke 2: 21-32: The Presentation: "My eyes have seen the salvation!" The many years of life purify the eyes.

f) Luke 2: 33-38: Simeon and Anna: "A sword will pierce your soul too!" To accept and incarnate the Word in life, to be a sign of contradiction.

g) Luke 2: 39-52: At twelve years old in the Temple: "Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" They did not understand what He meant!

h) Luke 11: 27-28: The praise to the mother: "Blessed the womb that bore you!" Blessed are those who hear the Word of God and keep it.

Personal Questions

- Do you succeed in discovering the Word of God in your life?
- How do you live devotion to Mary, the Mother of Jesus?

Concluding Prayer

Sing to him, make music for him, recount all his wonders!
Glory in his holy name, let the hearts that seek Yahweh rejoice! (Ps 105: 2-3)

Sunday, October 13, 2024

28th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus, send Your Spirit to help us to read the Scriptures as 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 silence in us 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 on the way to 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 the Father to us and sent us Your Spirit. Amen.

Gospel Reading: Mark 10: 17-30

A Key to the Reading:

The Gospel of the 28th Sunday of Ordinary Time tells the story of a young man who asks Jesus for the way to eternal life. Jesus gives him an answer, but the young man cannot accept it because he is very rich. Wealth gives a kind of security to people, and they have difficulty in giving up such security. Because such people are attached to the advantages that their possessions bring, they worry about defending their interests. The poor person does not have such worries and thus is freer. But there are poor people with a rich mentality. They are poor, but not “poor in spirit” (Mt 5: 3). Not just wealth, but also the desire for wealth, can change people and make them slaves to the goods of this world. Such people would find it difficult to accept Jesus’ invitation: “Go and sell what you own and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow Me” (Mk 10: 21) Such people will not take the step suggested by Jesus. Am I able to leave everything for the Kingdom?

In our text, several people seek Jesus to ask Him for advice: the rich young man, the disciples, and Peter. In our reading, let us look at the preoccupations of each of these persons and at Jesus’ reply to them.

A Division of the Text to Help with the Reading:

- Mark 10: 17: The request of the one who wishes to follow Jesus
- Mark 10: 18-19: Jesus’ surprising and demanding reply
- Mark 10: 20-21: The conversation between Jesus and the young man
- Mark 10: 22: The young man is alarmed and will not follow Jesus
- Mark 10: 23-27: The conversation between Jesus and His disciples concerning the rich entering the Kingdom
- Mark 10: 28: Peter’s question
- Mark 10: 29-30: Jesus’ reply

Text:

As Jesus was setting out on a journey, a man ran up, knelt before him, and asked him, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus answered him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: You shall not kill; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal; you shall not bear false witness; you shall not defraud; honor your father and your mother." He replied and said to him, "Teacher, all of these I have observed from my youth." Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said to him, "You are lacking in one thing. Go, sell what you have, and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." At that statement his face fell, and he went away sad, for he had many possessions. Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" The disciples were amazed at his words. So Jesus again said to them in reply, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for one who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." They were exceedingly astonished and said among themselves, "Then who can be saved?" Jesus looked at them and said, "For human beings it is impossible, but not for God. All things are possible for God." Peter began to say to him, "We have given up everything and followed you." Jesus said, "Amen, I say to you, there is no one who has given up house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands for my sake and for the sake of the gospel who will not receive a hundred times more now in this present age: houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and eternal life in the age to come."

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 touched you most in this text? Why?
- What worried the young man and what deceived him?
- What does the following mean for us today: "Go and sell what you own and give the money to the poor"? Can we take this literally? What do you "own"? With so many poor in society today, how do you decide who to give to?
- How do we understand the comparison between the needle and the camel?
- How do we understand the hundredfold in this life, but with persecutions?
- How do we understand and practice today Jesus' suggestions to the rich young man?
- Jesus tells His disciples on His mission to go without gold or silver or much of anything. What of those who claim to be missionaries of Jesus, while enjoying their large estates, fancy cars, and the fame from their positions?

For Those Who Wish to Go Deeper Into the Theme

The Context of Yesterday and of Today.

- This Sunday's Gospel describes the on-going conversion that, according to Jesus' invitation, must take place in our relationship with material goods. To understand fully the importance of Jesus' instructions, it is good to remember the wider context in which Mark places these texts. Jesus is on the way to Jerusalem, where He will be crucified (cf. Mk 8: 27; 9: 30, 33; 10: 1, 17, 32). He is about to give His life. He knows that He soon will be killed but does not recoil. He says, 'The Son of Man Himself came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many!' (Mk 10: 45) This attitude of fidelity and dedication to the mission received from the Father makes it possible for Jesus to see what really matters in life.
- Jesus' suggestions are valid for all times, both for Jesus' times and Mark's times as well as for today in the 21st century. They are like mirrors that mirror back what is important in life, yesterday and today: to start again, from the beginning, the building of the Kingdom, renewing human relationships on all levels, among ourselves and with God, as well as with material goods.

A Commentary on the Text:

- Mark 10: 17-19: The Commandments and Eternal Life

Someone comes and asks, "Good master, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Matthew's Gospel says that it was a young man (Mt 19: 20, 22). Jesus replies rather harshly, "Why do you call Me good. No one is good but God alone!" Jesus deflects attention from Himself to God, since He wishes to do the Father's will, to reveal the Father's plan. Then Jesus says, "You know the commandments: you shall not kill, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false witness, honor your father and mother." The young man had asked what he must do to inherit eternal life. He wanted to live close to God! But Jesus only reminds him of the commandments that concern life close to the neighbor! He does not mention the first three commandments that talk of the relationship with God! For Jesus, we can only be in good stead with God if we are in good stead with the neighbor. We must not deceive ourselves. The gate that leads to God is our neighbor. There is no other!

- Mark 10: 20: What is the Use of Keeping the Commandments?

The young man answers that he already had long observed the commandments. What follows is strange. The young man wanted to know the way to eternal life. Now, the way to eternal life was and still is to do God's will as expressed in the commandments. This means that the young man observed the commandments without knowing why! He did not know that his practice of observing the commandments since his youth was the way to God, to eternal life. Many Catholics today do not know why they are Catholic. "I was born in Italy, I was born in Ireland, so I am Catholic!" Just a habit!"

- Mark 10: 21-22: Sharing Goods with the Poor

Jesus looked steadily at him and He was filled with love for him and He said,

“You need to do one thing more. Go and sell what you own and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow Me!” Jesus does not judge the young man, does not criticize him, but seeks to help him take one more step in life. The conversion that Jesus asks for is an on-going one. The observance of the commandments is but the first step on a ladder that goes further and higher. Jesus asks for more! The observance of the commandments prepares us to be able to give ourselves completely to our neighbor. The Ten Commandments are the way to the perfect practice of the two commandments of love of God and of neighbor (Mk 12: 29-31; Mt 7: 12). Jesus asks a lot, but He asks it with much love. The young man does not accept Jesus’ invitation and goes away because “he was a man of great wealth.”

- Mark 10: 23-27: The Camel and the Eye of a Needle

When the young man goes away, Jesus comments on his decision: How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God! The disciples are astonished. Jesus repeats what He said and adds a proverb that was used then to say that something was humanly impossible. It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God! Each nation has its expressions and proverbs that cannot be taken literally. For instance, in Brazil, to say that someone must not bother other people they say: “Go and take a bath!” If one takes this expression literally then one is deceived and is not aware of the message! The same may be said about the camel that has to go through the eye of a needle. Impossible!

The disciples are astonished by what Jesus says! This means that they had not understood Jesus’ answer to the rich young man: “Go and sell all you own, give the money to the poor, and come, follow Me!” The young man had observed the commandments without understanding why. Something similar was happening to the disciples. To follow Jesus, they had left everything (Mk 1: 18, 20), without understanding why they had left everything! If they had understood the why, they would not have been so astonished by Jesus’ demands. When wealth or the desire for wealth takes over the human heart and vision, then it becomes difficult to understand the meaning of life and of the Gospel. Only God can help such a person! “For mortals it is impossible, but not for God, because for God everything is possible.”

When Jesus says that it is almost impossible for “a rich man to enter the kingdom of God,” He is not referring in the first instance to entering heaven after death, but to entering the community around him. To this day, it is very difficult for a rich person to leave everything and enter into a small basic ecclesial community side by side with the poor, together with them, and so to follow Jesus.

- Mark 10: 28-30: The Conversation between Jesus and Peter

Peter had understood that “to enter the kingdom of God” was the same thing as following Jesus in poverty. So he asks, “We have left everything and followed You. What then shall we get in return?” Despite leaving everything, Peter still had the old mentality. He had not yet understood the meaning of service and gratuity. He and his companions left everything to have something in return: “What then shall we get in return?” Jesus’ reply is

symbolic. He hints that they must not expect any return, any security, any promotion. They will receive a hundredfold, yes! But not without persecutions in this life! In the world to come they will have the eternal life of which the young man spoke. "In truth I tell you, there is no one who has left house, brothers, sisters, mother, father, children, or land for My sake and for the sake of the gospel who will not receive a hundred times as much, houses, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, and land – and persecutions, too – now in this present time and, in the world to come, eternal life

Further information:

Jesus and the Option for the Poor

A double slavery marked the state of people in Galilee at the time of Jesus: (i) The political slavery of Herod, supported by the Roman Empire, that imposed a general organized system of exploitation and repression; (ii) The slavery of the official religion, upheld by the religious authorities of the time. Because of this, the family, the community, the clan were disintegrating, and most people lived excluded, marginalized, with no fixed place, without a religion and without a society. To fight this disintegration of the community and the family, there were several movements, which, like Jesus, tried a new way of life and of living together in community. Such were the Essenes, the Pharisees and, later, the Zealots, all of whom lived in community. In Jesus' community, however, there was something new and different from the other two groups. This was the attitude towards the poor and the excluded.

The community of Pharisees lived *apart*. The word "Pharisee" means "separate." They lived apart from the *impure* people. Many Pharisees looked upon the people as ignorant and cursed (Jn 7: 49), full of sin (Jn 9: 34). They learned nothing from the people (Jn 9: 34). On the other hand, Jesus and His community lived among the excluded, who were considered impure: publicans, sinners, prostitutes, and lepers (Mk 2: 16; 1: 41; Lk 7: 37). Jesus sees the richness and value they possess (Mt 11: 25-26; Lk 21: 1-4). He proclaimed the poor happy because the Kingdom belongs to them (Lk 6: 20; Mt 5: 3). He defines His own mission as "proclaiming the Good News to the poor" (Lk 4: 18). He lives like the poor. He owns nothing, not even a stone to lay His head upon (Lk 9: 58). To those who wished to follow him he offered a choice: God or mammon! (Mt 6: 24). He tells them to make choices in favor of the poor! (Mk 10: 21) The poverty that characterizes Jesus' life and that of His disciples, also characterized His mission. Contrary to other missionaries (Mt 23: 15), Jesus' disciples could not carry anything with them, no gold, no silver, no two tunics, no purse and no sandals (Mt 10: 9-10). They had to trust in the hospitality of others (Lk 9: 4; 10: 5-6). And if they were made welcome by the people, they had to work like everyone else and live on what they earned (Lk 10: 7-8). They had to look after the sick and needy (Lk 10: 9; Mt 10: 8). Then they could say to people, "The Kingdom of God is very near to you" (Lk 10: 9).

On the other hand, when it is a matter of administering goods, what strikes us in Jesus' parables is the seriousness that He demands in the use of these goods (Mt 25: 21, 26; Lk 19: 22-23). Jesus wants money to be at the service of life (Lk 16: 9-13). For Jesus, poverty was not synonymous with laziness and negligence.

This different witness in favor of the poor was what was missing in the popular movements of the times of the Pharisees, Essenes, and Zealots. In the Bible, every time a movement arises to renew the Covenant, it begins by establishing once again the rights of the poor and excluded. Without this, the Covenant is impossible. Thus did the prophets and thus does Jesus. He denounces the old system that, in the name of God, excluded the poor. Jesus proclaims a new beginning that, in the name of God, gathers the excluded. This is the meaning and reason for the insertion of the mission of the Jesus' community amid the poor. He dips into the roots and inaugurates the New Covenant.

Praying with Psalm 15 (14)

God's Guest!

Yahweh, who can find a home in Your tent, who can dwell on Your holy mountain?

Whoever lives blamelessly, who acts uprightly, who speaks the truth from the heart, who keeps the tongue under control, who does not wrong a comrade, who casts no discredit on a neighbor, who looks with scorn on the vile, but honors those who fear Yahweh, who stands by an oath at any cost, who asks no interest on loans, who takes no bribe to harm the innocent. No one who so acts can ever be shaken.

Final Prayer

Lord Jesus, we thank You 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 what 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, October 14, 2024

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Lord,
our help and guide, make your love the foundation of our lives.
May our love for you express itself in our eagerness to do good for others. You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

Gospel Reading - Luke 11: 29-32

The crowds got even bigger, and Jesus addressed them, 'This is an evil generation; it is asking for a sign. The only sign it will be given is the sign of

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

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

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

Reflection

The Gospel today presents a very hard accusation of Jesus against the Pharisees and the Scribes. They wanted Jesus to give them a sign, because they did not believe in the signs and in the miracles which He was working. This accusation of Jesus continues in the Gospels of the following days. In meditating on these Gospels, we have to be very attentive not to generalize the accusation of Jesus as if it were addressed to the Hebrew people. In the past, this lack of attention, unfortunately, contributed to an increase in anti-Semitism among Christians, which has caused so much harm to humanity throughout the centuries. Instead of pointing the finger against the Pharisees of the time of Jesus, it is better to look at ourselves in the mirror of the texts to discover in them the Pharisee which may live hidden in our Church and in each one of us, and who merits this criticism from Jesus.

- Luke 11: 29-30: The sign of Jonah. "At that time, the people crowded, and Jesus began to say: This is an evil generation; it is asking for a sign. The only sign it will be given is the sign of Jonah." The Gospel of Matthew says that it was the Scribes and the Pharisees who were asking for a sign (Mt 12: 38). They wanted Jesus to work a sign for them, a miracle, in such a way that they could become aware if He was the one sent by God, as they had imagined. They wanted Jesus to submit himself to their criteria. They wanted to fit Him into the framework of their own idea of the Messiah. There was no openness for a possible conversion in them. But Jesus did not submit himself to their request. The Gospel of Mark says that Jesus, before the request of the Pharisees sighed profoundly (Mk 8: 12), probably because He was upset and sad in the face of such blindness. It serves nothing to try to show a beautiful picture to a person who does not want to open their eyes. The only sign that will be given is the sign of Jonah. "For just as Jonah became a sign to the people of Nineveh, so will the Son of man be a sign to this generation." How will this sign of the Son of man be? The Gospel of Matthew responds: "For as Jonah remained in the belly of the sea-monster for three days and three nights, so will the Son of man be in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights" (Mt 12: 40). The only sign will be the resurrection of Jesus. This is the sign which will be given in the future to the Scribes and the Pharisees. Jesus, who was condemned to death by them and to death on the cross, will rise from the dead by God and will continue to resurrect in many ways in those who believe in him. The sign which converts is not the miracles but the witness of life!

- Luke 11: 31: Solomon and the Queen of the South. The reference to the conversion of the people of Nineveh associates and recalls the conversion of the Queen of the South: “The Queen of the South will stand up against this generation and be their condemnation; because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and look, there is something greater than Solomon here.” This reminder of the episode of the Queen of the South who recognizes the wisdom of Solomon shows how the Bible was used at that time. It was by association. The principal rule for the interpretation was this one: “The Bible is explained by the Bible.” Up until now, this is one of the more important norms for the interpretation of the Bible, especially for the reading of the Word of God in a climate of prayer.
- Luke 11: 32: And look there is something greater than Solomon here. After the digression on Solomon and on the Queen of the South, Jesus returns to speak about the sign of Jonah: “The men of Nineveh will appear against this generation and be its condemnation, because when Jonah preached they repented.” The people of Nineveh were converted because of the witness of the preaching of Jonah. He denounces the unbelief of the Scribes and of the Pharisees because “something greater than Jonah is here.” Jesus is greater than Jonah, greater than Solomon. For us Christians, He is the principal key for Scripture (2 Co 3: 14-18).

Personal Questions

- Jesus criticizes the Scribes and the Pharisees who managed to deny the evidence, rendering themselves incapable to recognize the call of God in the events. As Christians today, personally and collectively, do we deserve the same criticism of Jesus?
- Nineveh was converted because of the preaching of Jonah. The Scribes and the Pharisees were not converted. Today, the calls of reality cause changes and conversions
- in people in the whole world: the ecological threat, urbanization that dehumanizes, consumerism which standardizes and alienates, injustice, violence, etc. Many Christians live far away from these calls of God which come from reality.

Concluding Prayer

Praise, servants of Yahweh, praise the name of Yahweh. Blessed be the name of Yahweh, henceforth and forever. (Ps 113: 1-2)

Tuesday, October 15, 2024

Ordinary Time

St. Teresa of Jesus, Virgin and Doctor of the Church

Opening Prayer

Lord, our help and guide, make your love the foundation of our lives.
May our love for you express itself in our eagerness to do good for others.
You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading - Luke 11: 37-41

Jesus had just finished speaking when a Pharisee invited Him to dine at his house. He went in and sat down at table. The Pharisee saw this and was surprised that He had not first washed before the meal. But the Lord said to him, 'You Pharisees! You clean the outside of cup and plate, while inside yourselves you are filled with extortion and wickedness. Fools! Did not He who made the outside make the inside too? Instead, give alms from what you have and, look, everything will be clean for you.'

Reflection

In today's Gospel there is the continuation of the tense relationship between Jesus and the religious authority of his time. But despite the tension there was a certain familiarity between Jesus and the Pharisees. Invited to eat at their house, Jesus accepted the invitation. He does not lose his freedom before them, and neither do the Pharisees before him.

- Luke 11: 37-38: The admiration of the Pharisees before the liberty of Jesus. "At that time after Jesus had finished speaking, a Pharisee invited Him to dine at his house. He went in and sat down at table. The Pharisee saw this and was surprised that He had not first washed before the meal." Jesus accepts the invitation to eat at the house of the Pharisee, but He does not change his way of acting, sitting at table without washing his hands. Neither does the Pharisee change his attitude before Jesus, because he expresses his surprise at the fact that Jesus did not wash his hands. At that time, to wash the hands before eating was a religious obligation, imposed upon people in the name of purity, ordered by the law of God. The Pharisee was surprised by the fact that Jesus does not observe this religious norm. But in spite of their total difference, the Pharisee and Jesus have something in common: for them life is serious. The way of doing of the Pharisee was in the following: every day, they dedicated eight hours to study and to the meditation of the law of God, another eight hours to work in order to be able to survive with the family and the other eight hours to rest. This serious witness of their life gives them a great popular leadership. Perhaps because of this, in spite of the fact of being very diverse, both Jesus and the Pharisees understood and criticized one another without losing the possibility to dialogue.
- Luke 11: 39-41: The response of Jesus. "You Pharisees you clean the outside of the cup and plate, while inside yourselves you are filled with extortion and wickedness. Fools! Did not He who made the outside make the inside too? Instead, give alms from what you have and, look, everything will be clean for you." The Pharisees observed the law literally. They only looked at the letter of the law and because of this they were incapable to perceive the spirit of the

law, the objective that the observance of the law wanted to attain in the life of the persons. For example, in the law it was written: "Love the neighbor as yourself" (Lv 19: 18). And they commented: "We should love the neighbor, yes, but only the neighbor, not the others!" And from there arose the discussion around the question: "Who is my neighbor?" (Lk 10: 29) The Apostle Paul writes in his second Letter to the Corinthians: "The letter kills, the spirit gives life" (2 Co 3: 6). In the Sermon on the Mountain, Jesus criticizes those who observe the letter of the law but transgress the spirit (Mt 5: 20). To be faithful to what God asks us it is not sufficient to observe the letter of the law. It would be the same thing as to clean the cup on the outside and to leave the inside all dirty: robbery and injustice so on. It is not sufficient not to kill, not to rob, not to commit adultery, not to swear. Only to observe the law of God fully, beyond the letter, goes to the roots and pulls out from within the person the desires of "robbery and injustice" which can lead to murder, robbery, adultery. It is in the practice of love that the fullness of the law is attained (cf. Mt 5: 21-48).

Personal Questions

- Does our Church today merit the accusation which Jesus addressed against the Scribes and the Pharisees? Do I deserve it?
- To respect the seriousness of life of others who think in a different way from us, can facilitate today dialogue which is so necessary and difficult. How do I practice dialogue in the family, in work and in the community?

Concluding Prayer

Let your faithful love come to me, Yahweh, true to your promise, save me!
Give me an answer to the taunts against me since I rely on your word. (Ps 119: 41-42)

Wednesday, October 16, 2024

Opening Prayer

Lord,
our help and guide, make Your love the foundation of our lives.
May our love for You express itself in our eagerness to do good for others.
You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading - Luke 11: 42-46

The Lord said: "Woe to you Pharisees! You pay tithes of mint and of rue and of every garden herb, but you pay no attention to judgment and to love for God. These you should have done, without overlooking the others. Woe to you Pharisees! You love the seat of honor in synagogues and greetings in

marketplaces. Woe to you! You are like unseen graves over which people unknowingly walk." Then one of the scholars of the law said to him in reply, "Teacher, by saying this you are insulting us too." And he said, "Woe also to you scholars of the law! You impose on people burdens hard to carry, but you yourselves do not lift one finger to touch them."

Reflection

In today's Gospel the conflicting relationship between Jesus and the religious authority of the time continues. Today in the church we have the same conflict. In a certain diocese the Bishop convoked the poor to participate actively. They accepted the request and numerous began to participate. A great conflict arose. The rich said that they had been excluded and some priests began to say, "the Bishop is doing politics and forgets the Gospel."

- Luke 11:42: Alas for you who do not think of justice and love. "Alas for you, Pharisees, because you pay your tithe of mint and rue and all sorts of garden herbs and neglect justice and the love of God. These you should have practiced without neglecting the others." Jesus' criticism of the religious leaders of the time can be repeated against many religious leaders of the following centuries, even up until now. Many times, in the name of God, we insist on details and we forget justice and love. For example,

Jansenism rendered arid the living out of faith, insisting on observance and penance and leading people away from the path of love. Saint Therese of Lisieux grew up in a Jansenistic environment which marked France at the end of the XIX century. After a painful personal experience, she knew how to recover the gratuity of the love of God with the force which has to animate the observance of the norms from within because, without the experience of love, observance makes an idol of God.

The final observation of Jesus: "You should practice this, without neglecting the others." This observation recalls another observation of Jesus which serves as a comment: "Do not imagine that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets. I have come not to abolish but to complete them. In truth I tell you, till heaven and earth disappear, not one dot, not one little stroke, is to disappear from the Law until all its purpose is achieved. Therefore, anyone who infringes even one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be considered the least in the Kingdom of Heaven; but the person who keeps them and teaches them will be considered great in the Kingdom of Heaven. For I tell you, if your uprightness does not surpass that of the scribes and Pharisees you will never get into the Kingdom of Heaven" (Mt 5: 17-20).

- Luke 11:43: Alas for you, because you like to take the seats of honor. "Alas for you, Pharisees, because you like to take the seats of honor in the synagogues and to be greeted respectfully in the marketplaces." Jesus calls the attention of the disciples to the hypocritical behavior of some Pharisees. They like to go around the streets with long tunics, and receive the greetings of the people, to occupy the first seats in the synagogues and the seats of honor at banquets (cf. Mt 6: 5; 23: 5-7). Mark says that they liked to enter the houses of widows to recite long prayers in exchange for some money. Such people will

be judged very severely (Mk 12: 38-40). This also happens today in the Church.

- Luke 11: 44: Alas for you, unmarked tombs. “Alas for you, scribes and Pharisees, because you are like whitewashed tombs that look handsome on the outside, but inside are full of the bones of the dead and every kind of corruption” (Mt 23: 27-28). The image of “whitewashed tombs” speaks for itself and does not need any comments. Through this image, Jesus condemns a fictitious appearance of persons who are correct, but interiorly there is the complete negation of how they want to appear to be on the outside. Luke speaks about unmarked tombs: Alas for you, because you are like those unmarked tombs that people walked on without knowing it.” Anyone who walks on or touches a tomb becomes impure, even if the tomb is hidden under the ground. This image is very strong: on the outside the Pharisee seems to be just and good, but this aspect is deceitful because inside there is a hidden tomb that, without people being aware, spreads a poison that kills, communicates a mentality that leads people away from God, suggests an erroneous understanding of the Good News of the Kingdom. It is an ideology which makes God a dead idol.
- Luke 11: 45-46: Criticism of the doctors of the Law and Jesus’ response. A lawyer then spoke up and said, “Master, when You speak like this You insult us, too!” In His response Jesus does not turn back, rather He shows clearly that the same criticism is also for the scribes: “Alas for you lawyers as well, because you load on people burdens that are unbearable, burdens that you yourselves do not touch with your fingertips!” In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus expresses the same criticism which serves as a comment: “The scribes and the Pharisees occupy the chair of Moses. You must, therefore, do and observe what they tell you, but do not be guided by what they do, since they do not practice what they preach. They tie up heavy burdens and lay them on people’s shoulders, but will they lift a finger to move them?” (Mt 23: 2-4).

Personal Questions

- Hypocrisy maintains an appearance which deceives. In what ways am I hypocritical? How far does the hypocrisy of our Church go?
- How can I address this hypocrisy? How have others in history addressed it? Is there guidance in their example for me?
- Jesus criticized the scribes who insisted on the disciplinary observance of the minute points of the law, as, for example, paying the tithe of mint and rue and all sorts of garden herbs and forgetting the objective of the Law, which is the practice of justice and love. How does this criticism also apply to me?

Concluding Prayer

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

Thursday, October 17, 2024

Opening Prayer

Lord,
our help and guide, make your love the foundation of our lives.
May our love for you express itself in our eagerness to do good for others.
You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and
ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading - Luke 11: 47-54

Jesus said: 'Alas for you because you build tombs for the prophets, the people your ancestors killed! In this way you both witness to what your ancestors did and approve it; they did the killing, you do the building.

'And that is why the Wisdom of God said, "I will send them prophets and apostles; some they will slaughter and persecute, so that this generation will have to answer for every prophet's blood that has been shed since the foundation of the world, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who perished between the altar and the Temple." Yes, I tell you, this generation will have to answer for it all.

'Alas for you lawyers who have taken away the key of knowledge! You have not gone in yourselves and have prevented others from going in who wanted to.'
When he left there, the scribes and the Pharisees began a furious attack on him and tried to force answers from him on innumerable questions, lying in wait to catch him out in something he might say.

Reflection

Once again for the one hundredth time, today's Gospel speaks about the conflict between Jesus and the religious authorities of that time.

- Luke 11: 47-48: Alas for you because you build tombs for the prophets. "Alas for you because you build tombs for the prophets, the people your ancestors killed! In this way you both witness to what your ancestors did and approve it; they did the killing; you do the building." Matthew says that these were the Scribes and the Pharisees (Mt 23: 19). Jesus' reasoning is clear. If the ancestors killed the prophets and the sons built the tombs, it is because the sons approved the crime of their fathers; besides everybody knows that the dead prophet does not disturb anybody. In this way the sons become witnesses and accomplice of the same crime (cf. Mt 23: 29-32).
- Luke 11: 49-51: To ask for an account of the blood that has been shed since the foundation of the world. "That is why the wisdom of God said: I will send them prophets and apostles; some they will slaughter and persecute, so that this generation will have to answer for every prophet's blood that has been shed since the foundation of the world, from the blood of Able to the blood of Zechariah, who perished between the altar and the Temple. Yes, I tell you, this generation lying in wait to catch him out in something he might say." Compared with the Gospel of Matthew, Luke usually offers a brief version of

Matthew's text. But here he increases the observations: "shed since the creation of the world, of the blood of Abel." He did the same thing with the genealogy of Jesus. Matthew, who wrote for the converted Jews, begins with Abraham (Mt 1: 1, 2, 17), while Luke goes back to Adam (Lk 3: 38). Luke universalizes and includes the Pagans, then he writes his Gospel for the converted Pagans. The information about the murdering of Zechariah in the Temple is given in the Book of Chronicles: "The spirit of God then invested Zechariah son of Jehoiada the priest. He stood up before the people and said, 'God says this, 'Why transgress Yahweh's commands to your certain ruin? For if you abandon Yahweh, he will abandon you. Then they plotted against him and at the king's order stoned him in the court of the Temple of Yahweh'" (2Cr 24: 20-21). Jesus knew the story of his people to the minutest detail. He knew that he would be the next one on the list from Abel to Zechariah; and up until now the list continues to be open. Many people have died for the cause of justice and of truth.

- Luke 11: 52: Alas for you Doctors of the Law. "Alas for you lawyers who have taken away the key of knowledge. You have not gone in yourselves and have prevented others from going in who wanted to." How do they close the Kingdom? They believe that they have the monopoly of knowledge in regard to God and to God's Law and they impose on others their own way, without leaving a margin for a different idea. They present God as a severe judge and in the name of God they impose laws and norms which have nothing to do with the commandments of God, they falsify the image of the Kingdom and kill in others the desire to serve God and the Kingdom. A community which organizes itself around this false god "does not enter into the Kingdom", neither is it an expression of the Kingdom, and prevents its members from entering into the Kingdom. It is important to notice the difference between Matthew and Luke. Matthew speaks about the entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven and the phrase is written in the verbal form in the present: "Alas for you, lawyers of the Law and Pharisees, hypocrites, who close the Kingdom of Heaven before men, because in this way you do not enter, and you prevent others from going in who wanted to enter. (Mt 23: 13) The expression to enter the Kingdom of Heaven could mean to enter in Heaven after death, but it is probable that it is a question of entering into the community, around Jesus and in the communities of the first Christians. Luke speaks about the key of knowledge and the phrase is written in the verbal form in the past. Luke simply ascertains the pretension of the Scribes to possess the key of knowledge in regard to God and to the law of God prevents them from recognizing Jesus as Messiah and prevents the Jewish people from recognizing Jesus as Messiah: You take possession of the key of knowledge. You yourselves do not enter and you prevent others to enter.
- Luke 11: 53-54: The reaction against Jesus. The reaction of the religious authority against Jesus was immediate. "When he left there, the Scribes and the Pharisees began a furious attack on him and tried to force answers from him on innumerable questions, lying in wait to catch him out in something he might say." Since they considered themselves the only true interpreters of the Law of God, they tried to provoke Jesus on questions of interpretation of the Bible to be able to surprise him in something which he would say. Thus,

the opposition against Jesus and the desire to eliminate it continues to grow. (Lk 6: 11; 11: 53-54; 19: 48; 20: 19-20; 22: 2).

Personal Questions

- Many persons who wanted to enter were prevented from doing it and they no longer believed because of the anti-evangelical attitude of the priests. Do you have any experience regarding this?
- The Scribes began to criticize Jesus who thought and acted in a different way. It is not difficult to find reasons for criticizing anyone who thinks differently from me. Do you have any experience regarding this?

Concluding Prayer

Yahweh has made known his saving power, revealed his saving justice for the nations to see, mindful of his faithful love and his constancy to the House of Israel. (Ps 98: 2-3)

Friday, October 18, 2024

St. Luke the Evangelist

Opening Prayer

Lord,
our help and guide, make your love the foundation of our lives.
May our love for you express itself in our eagerness to do good for others.
You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading - Luke 10: 1-9

The Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them out ahead of Him in pairs, to all the towns and places He himself would be visiting. And He said to them, 'The harvest is rich but the laborers are few, so ask the Lord of the harvest to send laborers to do his harvesting. Start off now, but look, I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. Take no purse with you, no haversack, no sandals. Salute no one on the road.

Whatever house you enter, let your first words be, "Peace to this house!" And if a man of peace lives there, your peace will go and rest on him; if not, it will come back to you. Stay in the same house, taking what food and drink they have to offer, for the laborer deserves his wages; do not move from house to house. Whenever you go into a town where they make you welcome, eat what is put before you. Cure those in it who are sick, and say, "The kingdom of God is very near to you."

Reflection

Today, on the feast of the Evangelist Saint Luke, the Gospel presents to us the sending out of the seventy-two disciples who have to announce the Good News of God in the villages and in the cities of Galilee. We are the seventy-two who come after the Twelve. Through the mission of the disciples, Jesus seeks to recover the community values of the tradition of the people who felt crushed by the twofold slavery of the Roman domination and by the official religion. Jesus tries to renew and organize the communities in such a way that again they are an expression of the Covenant, an example of the Kingdom of God. Therefore He insists in hospitality, sharing, communion, and acceptance of the excluded. This insistence of Jesus is found in the advice that He gave to his disciples when He sent them out on mission. At the time of Jesus there were other movements which, like Jesus, were looking for a new way to live and to live together. John the Baptist, the Pharisees and others for example. They also formed communities of disciples (Jn 1: 35; Lk 11: 1; Ac 19: 3) and they had their missionaries (Mt 23: 15). But as we will see there was a great difference.

- Luke 10: 1-3: The Mission. Jesus sends out the disciples to the places where He wanted to go. The disciple is the spokesperson of Jesus. He is not the owner of the Good News. He sends them out two by two. That favors reciprocal help, because the mission is not individual, but rather it is a community mission.
- Luke 10: 2-3: Co-responsibility. The first task is to pray in order that God sends laborers. All the disciples must feel that they are responsible for the mission. This is why I should pray to the Father for the continuity of the mission. Jesus sends out his disciples as lambs in the middle of wolves. The mission is a difficult and dangerous task because the system in which the disciples lived, and in which we live, was and continues to be contrary to the reorganization of living communities.
- Luke 10: 4-6: Hospitality. Contrary to the other missionaries, the disciples of Jesus should not take anything with them, no haversack, no sandals; but they should take peace. This means that they have to trust in the hospitality of the people. This is because the disciple who goes without anything, taking only peace, indicates that he trusts in people. He thinks that he will be welcomed, and people will feel respected and confirmed. By means of this practice the disciple criticizes the laws of exclusion and recovers the ancient values of life in a community. Do not greet anybody on the way means that no time should be lost with things which do not belong to the mission.
- Luke 10: 7: Sharing. The disciples should not go from house to house, but they should remain in the same house. That is, that they should live together with others in a stable way, participate in the life and work of the people and live from what they receive in exchange, because the laborer deserves his wages. This means that they should trust the sharing. Thus, by means of this new practice, they recover an ancient tradition of the people, criticizing a culture of accumulation which characterized the politics of the Roman Empire and they announced a new model of living together.
- Luke 10: 8: Communion around the table. When the Pharisees went on mission, they got ready. They thought that they could not trust the food the people would give them and that it was not always ritually "pure." For this reason, they took with them a haversack, a purse and money to be able to

get their own food. Thus, instead of helping to overcome divisions, the observance of the laws of purity weakened the living out of the community values even more. The disciples of Jesus should eat whatever the people offered them. They could not live separated, eating their own food. This means that they should accept sharing around the table. They should not be afraid to lose legal purity in contact with the people. Acting in that way, they criticize the laws which are in force, and they announce a new access to purity, that it is intimacy with God.

- Luke 10: 9a: The acceptance of the excluded. The disciples have to take care of the sick, cure the lepers and cast out devils (Mt 10: 8). That means that they should accept those who were excluded within the community. This practice of solidarity criticizes the society that excluded many and indicates concrete ways for changing this. This is what the pastoral ministry with the excluded, migrants and marginalized does today.
- Luke 10: 9b: The coming of the Kingdom. If these requests are respected, then the disciples can and should shout out to all parts of the world: The Kingdom of God has arrived! To proclaim the Kingdom is not, in the first place, to teach truth and doctrine, but to lead toward a new way of living and living together as brothers and sisters starting from the Good News which Jesus has proclaimed to us: God is Father and Mother of all of us.

Personal Questions

- Hospitality, sharing, communion, welcoming, and acceptance of the excluded: are pillars which support community life. How does this take place in my community?
- What does it mean for me to be Christian? In an interview on TV a person answered as follows to the journalist: "I am a Christian, I try to live the Gospel, but I do not participate in the community of the Church." And the journalist commented: "Then do you consider yourself a football player without a team!" Is this my case?

Concluding Prayer

All your creatures shall thank you, Yahweh, and your faithful shall bless you. They shall speak of the glory of your kingship and tell of your might. (Ps 145: 10-11)

Saturday, October 19, 2024

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Lord,
our help and guide, make your love the foundation of our lives.
May our love for you express itself in our eagerness to do good for others.

You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading - Luke 12: 8-12

Jesus said to his disciples: 'I tell you, if anyone openly declares himself for me in the presence of human beings, the Son of man will declare himself for him in the presence of God's angels. But anyone who disowns me in the presence of human beings will be disowned in the presence of God's angels.

'Everyone who says a word against the Son of man will be forgiven, but no one who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will be forgiven. 'When they take you before synagogues and magistrates and authorities, do not worry about how to defend yourselves or what to say, because when the time comes, the Holy Spirit will teach you what you should say.'

Reflection

- Context. While Jesus is on the way toward Jerusalem, we read in Luke, chapter 11, that precedes our passage, presenting Him as having the intention to reveal the abyss of the merciful acting of God and at the same time the profound misery hidden in the heart of man. Particularly in revealing this to those who have the task of being witnesses of the Word and of the work of the Holy Spirit in the world. Jesus presents such realities with a series of reflections which provoke effects in the reader, such as to feel attracted by the force of his Word to the point of feeling judged interiorly and detached from all desires of greatness which shake and agitate man (9: 46). The reader identifies himself with various attitudes that the teaching of Jesus arouses. Above all, he recognizes himself as follower of Christ in the disciple and sent to precede him in the role of messenger of the kingdom, in the one who hesitates somewhat in following him, and in the Pharisee or doctor of the Law, a slave of their interpretations and lifestyle. In summary, the course of the reader in chapter 11 is characterized by this encounter with the teaching of Jesus who reveals to him the intimacy of God, the mercy of God's heart, and the truth of his being a man.

In chapter 12, Jesus opposes the perverted judgment of man to the goodness of God who always gives with superabundance. Man's life enters into play here. It is necessary to be attentive to the perversion of the human judgment and to the hypocrisy that distorts values in order to privilege only one's own interests and advantages more than being interested in life, that life which is accepted gratuitously. The Word of God gives the reader an appeal on how to face the question regarding life: man will be judged on his behavior at the time of threats. It is necessary to be concerned with the men who can "kill the body" but rather to have at heart the fear of God who judges and corrects. But Jesus does not promise the disciples that they will be free from threats and persecutions, but He assures them that they will have God's help at the moments of difficulty.

- To know how to recognize Jesus. The courageous commitment to recognize the friendship of Jesus publicly implies as a consequence a personal

communion with Him at the moment of his return to judge the world. At the same time, the betrayal in “who will deny me”, the one who is afraid to confess and recognize Jesus publicly, condemns himself. The reader is invited to reflect on the crucial importance of Jesus in the history of salvation. It is necessary to decide to be either with Jesus or against Him and of his Word of Grace. This decision, to recognize or to reject Jesus, depends is critical to our salvation. Luke makes it evident that the communion that Jesus gives at the present time to his disciples will be confirmed and will become perfect at the moment of his coming in glory (“he will come in his glory and of the Father and of the angels”: 9: 26). The call to the Christian community is very evident. Even if it has been exposed to the hostility of the world, it is indispensable not to cease to give a courageous witness of Jesus, of communion with him, to value and not to be ashamed to show one is a Christian.

- Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Here Luke understands blasphemy as offensive speaking or speaking against. This verb was applied to Jesus when in 5: 21 He had forgiven sins. The question presented in this passage may give rise in the reader to some difficulty: is blasphemy against the Son of man less grave or serious than the one against the Holy Spirit? The language of Jesus may seem rather strong for the reader of the Gospel of Luke. Through the Gospel he has seen Jesus as showing the behavior of God who goes to look for sinners, who is demanding but who knows how to wait for the moment of return to Him, when the sinner attains maturity. In Mark and Matthew blasphemy against the Spirit is the lack of recognizing the power of God in the exorcisms of Jesus. But in Luke it may mean the deliberate and known rejection of the prophetic Spirit that is working in the actions and teaching of Jesus, that is to say, a rejection of the encounter with the merciful acting of salvation with the Father. The lack of recognition of the divine origin of the mission of Jesus, the direct offenses to the person of Jesus, may be forgiven, but anyone who denies the acting of the Holy Spirit in the mission of Jesus will not be forgiven. It is not a question of an opposition between the person of Jesus and the Holy Spirit, or of some contrasting symbol of two diverse periods of history, that of Jesus and that of the community after the Passover, but rather, the evangelist wants to definitively show that to reject the Holy Spirit in the mission of Jesus is equal to blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

Personal Questions

- Are you aware that to be a Christian requires the need to face difficulties, deceit, dangers, and even to risk one’s own life to give witness of one’s own friendship with Jesus?
- Do you become embarrassed of being a Christian? Are you more concerned about the judgments of men, their approval, are these more important for you or that of losing your friendship with Christ?

Concluding Prayer

Yahweh our Lord,
how majestic is your name throughout the world!

Whoever keeps singing of your majesty higher than the heavens, even through the mouths of children, or of babes in arms. (Ps 8: 1-2)

Sunday, October 20, 2024

29th Sunday of Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

God of peace and forgiveness, You have given us Christ as an example of total service, even to giving us His very life; grant us to find favor in Your sight that we may share the cup of Your will to its dregs and live in the generous and fruitful service of each other.

Gospel Reading – Mark 10: 35-45

The Context:

This episode comes straight after the third prediction of the Passion (Mk 10: 32-34). As on the occasions of the other predictions, the disciples' reaction is not positive: two of them are worried about who is going to be first in the Kingdom and the others become indignant. This tells us that the disciples had difficulty accepting the painful destiny of their Master and understanding the mystery of the Kingdom. The two who come with a request – James and John – are brothers and are part of the group of friends of Jesus (Mk 1: 19-20). Their nickname is *boanerges* ("sons of thunder" Mk 3: 17). They were a little impetuous.

The Text:

James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to Jesus and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." He replied, "What do you wish me to do for you?" They answered him, "Grant that in your glory we may sit one at your right and the other at your left." Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Can you drink the cup that I drink or be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" They said to him, "We can." Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink, you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized; but to sit at my right or at my left is not mine to give but is for those for whom it has been prepared." When the ten heard this, they became indignant at James and John. Jesus summoned them and said to them, "You know that those who are recognized as rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones make their authority over them felt. But it shall not be so among you. Rather, whoever wishes to be great among you will be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you will be the slave of all. For the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many."

A Moment of Silent Prayer

to re-read the text with our heart and to recognize in the words and structure, the presence of the mystery of the living God.

Some Questions

to see the important points in the text and begin to assimilate them.

- Why were the disciples so anxious to take the first places?
- Does Jesus' reply make sense?
- What does Jesus mean by the cup to drink and the baptism to be baptized?
- On what does Jesus base service in the community?

Some Deepening of the Reading

"Grant us to sit, one at Your right hand and one at Your left, in Your glory"

Even though they were careful in the way they phrased their question, they were quite ambitious. According to tradition, they may have been cousins of Jesus, and therefore – according to Eastern law – they had a special right, as members of the family. In any case, it is clear they have understood nothing about what Jesus was about to do. He was on the way to the ignominy of the cross, and they still had not understood Him. Jesus' true power did not consist in distributing places of honor, but in asking them to share His tragic destiny: "Are you able to drink the cup that I drink?"

"The cup that I drink you will drink"

The dialogue concerning the cup and the baptism (vv. 38-39) is obviously parallel. But it is not easy to understand how the two disciples can drink the cup and be baptized, unless one thinks of the martyrdom both of them suffered later. By these two images, Jesus seems to evoke His violent death, which He foretells as an absolute obligation of fidelity to the Father. The reply to their request to sit next to Him is evasive: but we can understand that it means that their way is not the right way to obtain the request.

"The ten began to be indignant"

Clearly they too share the same ambition. However, this verse seems to be an editorial addition to connect two episodes, which originally were not placed together. This changes the subject completely. But the fact that their indignation is recorded is probably based on some other episode where the disciples do not appear in a good light and is therefore authentic.

"Those who are supposed to rule over the Gentiles lord it over them... But it shall not be so among you"

Jesus is referring to political leaders of His time, and really this is also the style of political leadership in all times. On the other hand, the community of disciples must be ruled by service. Two terms express this service in a gradual manner. Jesus first speaks of "servant" (*diakonos*) and then of "slave" (*doulos*). One cannot choose whom one will serve: one must be a slave of all, thus overturning the worldly order.

"For the Son of man also..."

Here we find the basis of the constitutional law of the community: to follow the Master's style, by giving, like Him, one's life in the spirit of service; thus becoming

truly “lords” through the gift of one’s life, not by just pretending. It is difficult to interpret “ransom” or redemption, as Fr. X. Léon Dufour says, we can understand this well when we reflect on the words that Jesus speaks at the Last Supper. Then Jesus’ whole life appears in the light of “ransom,” of fidelity to the very end for the freedom of humankind. He deprives Himself of freedom so that He can give freedom, to ransom those who have no freedom. Thus, the statutes of the community of disciples is characterized by service, by a lack of ambition, by a life given and destined for the ransom of others.

Psalm 33 (32)

A Prayer for Justice and Peace

Sing to Him a new song, play skillfully on the strings, with loud shouts. For the word of the Lord is upright; and all His work is done in faithfulness. He loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of the steadfast love of the Lord. By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath of His mouth.

He gathered the waters of the sea as in a bottle; He put the deeps in storehouses.

Let all the earth fear the Lord, let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him! For He spoke, and it came to be;

He commanded, and it stood firm.

The Lord brings the counsel of the nations to nothing; He frustrates the plans of the peoples. The counsel of the Lord stands for ever, the thoughts of His heart to all generations.

Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, the people whom He has chosen as His heritage! The Lord looks down from heaven,

He sees all the sons of men; from where He sits enthroned

He looks forth on all the inhabitants of the earth, He who fashions the hearts of them all, and observes all their deeds.

Closing Prayer

Lord our God, keep Your Son’s disciples from the easy ways of popularity, of cheap glory, and lead them to the ways of the poor and scourged of the earth, so that they may recognize in their faces the face of the Master and Redeemer.

Give them eyes to see possible ways of peace and solidarity; ears to hear the requests for meaning and salvation of so many people who seek; enrich their hearts with generous fidelity and a sensitivity and understanding so that they may walk along the way and be true and sincere witnesses to the glory that shines in the crucified resurrected and victorious One. Who lives and reigns gloriously with You, Father, forever and ever. Amen.

Monday, October 21, 2024

Opening Prayer

Almighty and everlasting God, our source of power and inspiration, give us strength and joy in serving you as followers of Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading - Luke 12: 13-21

A man in the crowd said to him, 'Master, tell my brother to give me a share of our inheritance.' He said to him, 'My friend, who appointed me your judge, or the arbitrator of your claims?' Then He said to them, 'Watch, and be on your guard against avarice of any kind, for life does not consist in possessions, even when someone has more than he needs.'

Then He told them a parable, 'There was once a rich man who, having had a good harvest from his land, thought to himself, "What am I to do? I have not enough room to store my crops." Then he said, "This is what I will do: I will pull down my barns and build bigger ones, and store all my grain and my goods in them, and I will say to my soul: My soul, you have plenty of good things laid by for many years to come; take things easy, eat, drink, have a good time." But God said to him, "Fool! This very night the demand will be made for your soul; and this hoard of yours, whose will it be then?" So it is when someone stores up treasure for himself instead of becoming rich in the sight of God.'

Reflection

The episode in today's gospel is found only in the Gospel of Luke and does not have a parallel in the other Gospels. It forms part of the long description of Jesus' trip from Galilee to Jerusalem (Lk 9: 51 to 19: 28) in which Luke places most of the information which he collected concerning Jesus which is not found in the other three Gospels (cf. Lk 1: 2-3). The gospel today gives the response of Jesus to the person who asked Him to be the mediator in the distribution of an inheritance.

- Luke 12: 13: *A request to distribute an inheritance.* "One from the crowd told Jesus: Master, tell my brother to give me a share of our inheritance." Up until today, the distribution of an inheritance among the living relatives is always a delicate question and, many times, it is the occasion of disputes and of tensions without end. At that time, the inheritance also had something to do with the identity of the person (1 K 21: 1-3) and with survival (Num 27: 1-11; 36: 1-12). The greatest problem was the distribution of the land among the sons of the deceased father. If the family was numerous, there was a danger that the inheritance would be divided into small pieces of land which would not have guaranteed survival of all. For this reason, in order to avoid the breaking up or disintegration of the inheritance and to carry on the name of the family, the firstborn or eldest received double of what the other sons received (Dt 21: 17. cf. 2Kgs 2: 11).
- Luke 12: 14-15: *Response of Jesus: attention to greed, to cupidity.* "Jesus answers: My friend, who appointed me your judge or the arbitrator of your claims?" In the response of Jesus appears the knowledge which He has of His mission. Jesus does not feel sent by God to respond to the request to be arbitrator between the relatives who argue or quarrel among themselves

concerning the distribution of the inheritance. But the request of this man leads Him to the mission to orientate persons, because *“Watch, and be on your guard against avarice of any kind, for life does not consist in possessions, even when someone has more than he needs.”* It was part of his mission to clarify the sense of life. The value of life does not consist in having many things, but rather in being rich for God (Lk 12: 21). Because when gain occupies the heart, it does not know how to distribute the inheritance in an equitable way and with peace.

- Luke 12: 16-19: *The parable that makes one think on the sense of life.* Then Jesus told a parable to help persons to reflect on the sense of life: *“There was a rich man who having had a good harvest from his land, thought to himself: What am I to do? I have not enough room to store my crops.” The rich man was very obsessed by the concern of his goods which had increased in an unforeseen way because of an abundant harvest. He thinks only of accumulating in order to guarantee a life without worries. He says: This is what I will do. I will pull down my barns and build bigger ones, and store all my grain and my goods in them and I will say to my soul: My soul, now you have plenty of good things laid for many years to come, take things easy, eat, drink, have a good time.”*
- Luke 12: 20: *The first conclusion of the parable.* *“But God said to him: ‘Fool! This very night the demand will be made for your soul, and this hoard of yours, whose will it be then?’ So it is when someone stores up treasures for himself instead of becoming rich in the sight of God.”* Death is an important key to discovering the true sense of life. It makes all things relative, because it shows what perishes and what remains. Anyone who only seeks to have, and forgets to be, loses everything at the hour of death. Here we have a thought which appears very frequently in the books of wisdom: Why accumulate great quantities of goods in this life if you do not know what will become of them and if you do not know what the heirs will do with what you will leave them. (Qo 2: 12, 18-19, 21).
- Luke 12: 21: *second conclusion of the parable.* *“So it is with someone who stores up treasures for himself instead of becoming rich in the sight of God.”* How can one become rich for God? Jesus gives several suggestions and advice: Anyone who wants to be first, let him be last (Mt 20: 27; Mk 9: 35; 10: 44); it is better to give than to receive (Ac 20: 35); the greatest is the smallest (Mt 18: 4; 23: 11; Lk 9: 48) he/she who loses his/her life will save it (Mt 10: 39; 16: 25; Mk 8: 35; Lk 9: 24).

Personal Questions

- The man asked Jesus to help Him in the distribution of his inheritance. And you, what do you ask Jesus in your prayer?
- Consumerism creates needs and awakens in us the desire of gaining. What do you do so as not to be a victim of gain brought about by consumerism?

Concluding Prayer

Acclaim Yahweh, all the earth, serve Yahweh with gladness, come into his presence with songs of joy! (Ps 100: 1-2)

Tuesday, October 22, 2024

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Almighty and everlasting God,
our source of power and inspiration, give us strength and joy in serving you as followers of Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading - Luke 12: 35-38

Jesus said to his disciples: 'See that you have your belts done up and your lamps lit. Belike people waiting for their master to return from the wedding feast, ready to open the door as soon as he comes and knocks.

Blessed those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes. In truth I tell you, he will do up his belt, sit them down at table and wait on them.

It may be in the second watch that he comes, or in the third, but blessed are those servants if he finds them ready.

Reflection

By means of this parable, the Gospel today exhorts us to be vigilant.

- Luke 12: 35: Exhortation to be vigilant, watchful. "Be ready and have your belts done up and your lamps lit." To gird oneself meant to take a cloth or a cord and put it around the robe. To be girded meant to be ready, prepared for immediate action. Before the flight from Egypt, at the moment of celebrating the Passover, the Israelites had to gird themselves, that is be prepared, ready to be able to leave immediately (Ex 12: 11). When someone goes to work, to fight or to execute a task he girds himself (Ct 3: 8). In the letter of Paul to the Ephesians he describes the armor of God and he says that your waist must be girded with the cord of truth (Ep 6: 14). The lamps should be lit, because to watch is the task to be carried out during the day as well as during the night. Without light one cannot go in the darkness of the night.
- Luke 12: 36: A parable. In order to explain what it means to be girded; Jesus tells a brief parable. "Be like people waiting for their master to return from the wedding feast, ready to open the door as soon as he comes and knocks." The task of waiting for the arrival of the master demands constant and permanent vigilance, especially during the night, because one does not know at what time the master will return. The employee has to always be attentive and vigilant.
- Luke 12: 37: Promise of happiness. "Blessed those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes; In truth I tell you, he will do up his belt, sit them

down at table and wait on them.” Here in this promise of happiness, things turn upside down. The master becomes the employee and begins to serve the employee who becomes the master. At the Last Supper Jesus teaches that even though He is Lord and Master, He became the servant of all (Jn 13: 4-17). The happiness promised has something to do with the future, with happiness at the end of time, as opposed to what Jesus promised in the other parable when He said: “Which of you, with a servant ploughing or minding sheep, would say to him when he returned from the fields, come and have your meal at once? Would he not be more likely to say, ‘Get my supper ready; fasten your belt and wait on me while I eat and drink. You yourself can eat and drink afterwards? Must he be grateful to the servant for doing what he was told? So with you, when you have done all you have been told to do, say, ‘we are useless servants; we have done no more than our duty’” (Lk 17: 7-10).

- Luke 12: 38: He repeats the promise of happiness. “And if he comes at midnight, or at dawn, and finds those servants ready, blessed are they!” He repeats the promise of happiness which requires total vigilance. The master could return at midnight, at three o’clock in the morning, or at any other moment. The employee must be girded, ready to be able to do his work immediately.

Personal Questions

- We are employees of God. We should be girded, ready, attentive, and vigilant twenty-four hours a day. Do you succeed to do this? How do you do it?
- The promise of future happiness is the opposite of the present. What does this reveal to us of the goodness of God for us, for me?

Concluding Prayer

I am listening. What is God's message? Yahweh's message is peace for his people.

His saving help is near for those who fear him, his glory will dwell in our land. (Ps 85: 8-9)

Wednesday, October 23, 2024

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Almighty and everlasting God,
our source of power and inspiration, give us strength and joy in serving you as followers of Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading - Luke 12: 39-48

Jesus said to his disciples. 'You may be quite sure of this, that if the householder had known at what time the burglar would come, he would not have let anyone break through the wall of his house. You too must stand ready, because the Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect.'

Peter said, 'Lord, do you mean this parable for us, or for everyone?'

The Lord replied, 'Who, then, is the wise and trustworthy steward whom the master will place over his household to give them at the proper time their allowance of food?'

Blessed that servant if his master's arrival finds him doing exactly that. I tell you truly, he will put him in charge of everything that he owns. But if the servant says to himself, "My master is taking his time coming," and sets about beating the menservants and the servant-girls, and eating and drinking and getting drunk, his master will come on a day he does not expect and at an hour he does not know. The master will cut him off and send him to the same fate as the unfaithful.

'The servant who knows what his master wants but has got nothing ready and done nothing in accord with those wishes, will be given a great many strokes of the lash.

The one who did not know but has acted in such a way that he deserves a beating, will be given fewer strokes. When someone is given a great deal, a great deal will be demanded of that person; when someone is entrusted with a great deal, of that person even more will be expected.

Reflection

Today's Gospel presents again the exhortation to vigilance with two other parables. Yesterday, it was the parable of the Master and the servant (Lk 12: 36-38). Today, the first parable is the one of the householder and the burglar (Lk 12: 39-40) and the other one speaks of the master and the steward (Lk 12: 41-47).
Luke 12: 39-40: The parable of the householder and of the burglar. You may be quite sure of this, that if the householder had known at what time the burglar would come, he would not have let anyone break through the walls of the house. You too must stand ready, because the son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect. So just as the householder does not know at what hour the burglar will come, in the same way, no one knows the hour when the Son of Man will arrive. Jesus says this very clearly: "But as for that day or hour, nobody knows it, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son. No one but the Father!" (Mk 13: 32). Today many people live worried about the end of the world. On the streets of the cities, we see written on the walls: Jesus will return! There are even persons who are in anguish because of the proximity of the end of the world, and they commit suicide. But time goes by and the end of the world does not arrive! Many times the affirmation "Jesus will return" is used to frighten people and oblige them to go to church! After waiting and speculation about the coming of Jesus, many people no longer perceive the presence in our midst, in the most common things of life, or in daily events. What is important is not to know the hour of the end of the world, but rather being capable of perceiving the coming of Jesus who is already present in our midst in the person of the poor (cf Mt 25: 40) and in so many other ways and events of everyday life.

Luke 12: 41: Peter's question. "Then, Peter said, Lord, do you mean this parable for us, or for everyone? The reason for this question asked by Peter is not clearly understood. It recalls another episode, in which Jesus responds to a similar question saying: "To you it is granted to understand the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven, but to them it is not granted" (Mt 13: 10-11; Lk 8: 9-10).

Luke 12: 42-48^a: The parable of the householder and the steward. In the response to Peter's question, Jesus formulates another question in the form of a parable: "Who then is the wise and trustworthy steward whom the master will place over his household to give them at the proper time their allowance of food?" Immediately after, Jesus himself gives the response in the parable: the good steward is the one who carries out his mission of servant, he does not use the goods received for his own advantage and is always vigilant and attentive. Perhaps this is an indirect response to Peter's question, as if He would say: "Peter, the parable is really for you! It is up to you to know how to administer well the mission which God has given you: to coordinate the communities. In this sense, the response is also valid for each one of us. And here the final warning acquires much sense: "When someone is given a great deal, a great deal will be demanded of that person; when someone is entrusted with a great deal, of that person even more will be expected."

The coming of the Son of Man and the end of this world. The same problems existed in the Christian communities of the first centuries. Many people of the communities said that the end of this world was close at hand and that Jesus would return afterwards. Some from the community of Thessalonica in Greece, basing themselves in Paul's preaching said: "Jesus will return!" (1 Th 4: 13-18; 2 Th 2: 2). And because of this, there were even persons who no longer worked, because they thought that the coming would be within a few days or few weeks. Why work if Jesus would return? (cf 2 Th 3: 11). Paul responds that it was not so simple as it seemed, and to those who did not work he would warn: "He who does not work has no right to eat!" Others remained looking up to Heaven, waiting for the return of Jesus on the clouds (cf. Ac 1: 11). And others did not like to wait (2 P 3: 4-9).

In general, the Christians lived expecting the imminent coming of Jesus. Jesus would come for the Final Judgment to end the unjust history of this world here below and to inaugurate a new phase of history, the definitive phase of the New Heavens and the New Earth. They thought that it would take place after one or two generations. Many people would still be alive when Jesus would appear glorious in Heaven (1 Th 4: 16-17; Mk 9: 1). Others, tired of waiting would say: "He will never come back!" (2 P 3: 4). Even up until today, the final return of Jesus has not yet taken place! How can this delay be understood? We are not aware that Jesus has already returned, and that He is in our midst: "Look, I am with you always, yes, till the end of time." (Mt 28: 20). He is already at our side in the struggle for justice, for peace and for life. The plenitude and the fullness has not been attained, but an example or guarantee of the Kingdom is already in our midst. This is why, we wait with firm hope for the total liberation of humanity and of nature (Rm 8: 22-25). And when we wait and we struggle, we say rightly: "He is already in our midst!" (Mt 25: 40).

Personal Questions

- The response of Jesus to Peter serves also for us, for me. Am I a good administrator of the mission which I have received?
- What do I do in order to be always vigilant?

Concluding Prayer

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

Thursday, October 24, 2024

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Almighty and everlasting God,
our source of power and inspiration, give us strength and joy in serving you as followers of Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading - Luke 12: 49-53

Jesus said to his disciples: 'I have come to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were blazing already!

There is a baptism I must still receive, and what constraint I am under until it is completed! 'Do you suppose that I am here to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. For from now on, a household of five will be divided: three against two and two against three; father opposed to son, son to father, mother to daughter, daughter to mother, mother-in-law to daughter-in-law, daughter-in-law to mother-in-law.'

Reflection

The Gospel today gives us some phrases of Jesus. The first one on bringing fire to the earth is only in Luke's Gospel. The others have more or less parallel phrases in Matthew. This leads us to the problem of the origin of the composition of these two Gospels for which much ink has already been used throughout the past two centuries. This problem will only be solved fully when we will be able to speak with Matthew and Luke, after our resurrection.

- Luke 12: 49-50: Jesus has come to bring fire on earth. "I have come to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were blazing already! There is a baptism I must still receive, and what constraint I am under until it is completed!" The image of fire is frequently mentioned in the Bible and does not have just one meaning. It could be the image of devastation and punishment, but it can also be the image of purification and illumination (Is 1: 25; Zc 13: 9). It can also express protection as it appears in Isaiah: "Should you pass through fire, you

will not suffer” (Is 43: 2). John the Baptist baptized with water, but after him Jesus baptized with fire (Lk 3: 16). Here the image of fire is associated to the action of the Holy Spirit who descends at Pentecost as the image of the tongues of fire (Ac 2: 2-4). Images and symbols never have an obligatory sense, totally defined, which does not allow some divergence. In this case it would be neither image nor symbol. It is proper to the symbol to arouse the imagination of the listeners and onlookers. Leaving freedom to the listeners, the image of fire combined with the image of baptism indicates the direction toward which Jesus wants people to turn their imagination. Baptism is associated with the water and it is always the expression of a commitment. At another point, Baptism appears like the symbol of the commitment of Jesus with his Passion: “Can you be baptized with the baptism with which I will be baptized?” (Mc 10: 38-39).

- Luke 12: 51-53: Jesus has come to bring division. Jesus always speaks of peace (Mt 5: 9; Mk 9: 50; Lk 1: 79; 10: 5; 19: 38; 24: 36; Jn 14: 27; 16: 33; 20: 21, 26). So how can we understand the phrase in today’s Gospel which seems to say the contrary? “Do you think that I am here to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division.” This affirmation does not mean that Jesus himself is in favor of division. No! Jesus did not want division. But the announcement of truth that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah becomes a reason for much division among the Jews. In the same family or community, some were in favor and others were radically against. In this sense, the Good News of Jesus was really a source of division, a “sign of contradiction” (Lk 2: 34), or as Jesus said: “from now on a household will be divided, father opposed to son, son to father, mother to daughter, daughter to mother, mother-in-law to daughter-in-law, daughter-in-law to mother-in-law.” That is what was happening in the families and in the communities. Much division and much discussion as a consequence of the Good News among the Jews of that time, with some accepting and others denying. The same thing could be applied to the announcement of fraternity as a supreme value of humanity living together. Not all agreed with this announcement because they preferred to maintain their privileges. And for this reason, they were not afraid to persecute those who announced sharing and fraternity. This was the division which arose which was at the origin of the Passion and death of Jesus. Jesus wants the union of all in truth (cf. Jn 17: 17-23). It is like this even now. Many times where the Church is renewed, the call of the Good News becomes a “sign of contradiction” and division. Persons who lived very comfortably for years in the routine of their Christian life do not want to be disturbed or bothered by the “innovations” of Vatican Council II. Disturbed by changes, they use all their intelligence to find arguments to defend their own opinions and to condemn the changes, considering them contrary to what they think is their true faith.

Personal Questions

- Seeking union Jesus was the cause of division. Does this happen with you today?
- How do I react before the changes in the Church?

Concluding Prayer

Shout for joy, you upright; praise comes well from the honest. Give thanks to Yahweh on the lyre, play for Him on the ten-stringed lyre. (Ps 33: 1-2)

Friday, October 25, 2024

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Almighty and everlasting God,
our source of power and inspiration, give us strength and joy in serving you as followers of Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading - Luke 12: 54-59

Jesus said again to the crowds, 'When you see a cloud looming up in the west you say at once that rain is coming, and so it does. And when the wind is from the south you say it's going to be hot, and it is. Hypocrites! You know how to interpret the face of the earth and the sky. How is it you do not know how to interpret these times? 'Why not judge for yourselves what is upright? For example: when you are going to court with your opponent, make an effort to settle with him on the way, or he may drag you before the judge and the judge hand you over to the officer and the officer have you thrown into prison. I tell you, you will not get out till you have paid the very last penny.'

Reflection

The Gospel today presents the call on the part of Jesus to learn to read the signs of the times. This was the text which inspired the Pope John XXIII to convoke the Church to be more attentive to the signs of time and to better perceive the calls of God in the events of the history of humanity.

- Luke 12: 54-55: Everybody knows how to interpret the face of the earth and of the sky... "When you see a cloud looming up in the west you say at once that rain is coming, and so it does. And when the wind is from the south you say it's going to be hot and it is." Jesus reports a universal human experience. Everybody in his own country or region, knows how to read the face of the sky and of the earth. The body itself understands when there is threat of rain or when the time begins to change. They may say "It will rain." Jesus refers to the contemplation of nature since it is one of the most important sources of knowledge and of experience which He himself had of God. It was the contemplation of nature that helped his discovery of new aspects of faith and in the history of His people. For example, rain which falls on the good and the bad, and the sun which rises on the upright and on the unjust, helped Him to formulate one of the revolutionary messages: "Love your enemies!" (Mt 5,

43-45).

- Luke 12: 56-57: ..., but they do not know how to read the signs of the time. And Jesus draws the conclusion for his contemporaries and for all of us: "Hypocrites!" You know how to interpret the face of the earth and the sky. How is it you do not know how to interpret these times? Why not judge for yourselves what is upright? Saint Augustine said that nature, creation, is the first book that God wrote. Through nature, God speaks to us. Sin mixes up the letters of the book of nature, and because of this, we have not succeeded in reading God's message printed in the things of nature and in the facts of life. The bible is the second book of God, it was written not to occupy or substitute life but to help us interpret nature and life and to learn again to discover the calls of God in the facts of life. "Why not judge for yourselves what is upright?" Sharing among ourselves what we see in nature, we will be able to discover God's call in life.
- Luke 12: 58-59: To know how to draw lessons for life. "When you are going to court with your opponent, make an effort to settle with him on the way, or he may drag you before the judge and the judge will hand you over to the officer and the officer will have you thrown into prison. I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the very last penny." One of the points on which Jesus insists most is reconciliation. At that time there were many tensions and conflicts among the radical groups which had different tendencies, without dialogue: Zelots, Essenes, Pharisees, Sadducees, and Herodians... No one wanted to give in before others. The words of Jesus on reconciliation which require acceptance and understanding enlighten this situation, because the only sin which God does not forgive is our lack of forgiveness toward others (Mt 6: 14). This is why He advises to seek reconciliation before it is too late! When the time of judgment comes, it will be too late. When there is still time try to change life, behavior, and way of thinking, and seek to act justly (cf. Mt 5: 25-26; Col 3: 13; Ep 4: 32; Mk 11: 25).

Personal Questions

- Read the signs of the Times. When I listen or read the news on TV or in the newspaper am I concerned with perceiving God's call in these facts?
- Reconciliation: to be reconciled is the most insistent request of Jesus. Do I try to collaborate in reconciliation between persons, the races, the people, the tendencies?

Concluding Prayer

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. (Ps 24: 1-2)

Saturday, October 26, 2024

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Almighty and everlasting God,
our source of power and inspiration, give us strength and joy in serving You as
followers of Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God,
for ever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading - Luke 13: 1-9

Some people told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with the blood of their sacrifices. He said to them in reply, "Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were greater sinners than all other Galileans? By no means! But I tell you, if you do not repent, you will all perish as they did! Or those eighteen people who were killed when the tower at Siloam fell on them— do you think they were more guilty than everyone else who lived in Jerusalem? By no means! But I tell you, if you do not repent, you will all perish as they did!" And he told them this parable: "There once was a person who had a fig tree planted in his orchard, and when he came in search of fruit on it but found none, he said to the gardener, 'For three years now I have come in search of fruit on this fig tree but have found none. So cut it down. Why should it exhaust the soil?' He said to him in reply, 'Sir, leave it for this year also, and I shall cultivate the ground around it and fertilize it; it may bear fruit in the future. If not you can cut it down.'"

Reflection

The Gospel today gives us information which is only found in Luke's Gospel. There are no parallel passages in the other Gospels. We are meditating on the long journey from Galilee to Jerusalem and which takes almost half of Luke's Gospel, from chapter 9 to chapter 19 (Lk 9: 51 to 19: 28). In this part Luke places most of the information on the life and teaching of Jesus (Lk 1: 1-4).

- Luke 13: 1: The event which requires an explanation. "At that time some people arrived and told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with that of their sacrifices." When we read the newspaper or watch the news on TV, we receive much information, but we do not always understand all its meaning. We listen to everything, but we really do not know what to do with so much information and news. There are terrible news items, such as tsunami, terrorism, wars, hunger, violence, crime, attacks, etc. This is how the news of the horrible massacre which Pilate, the Roman Governor, ordered regarding some Samaritan pilgrims had reached Jesus. Such news upsets us, throws us off. And one asks, "What can I do?" To assuage their conscience, many defend themselves and say, "It is their fault! They do not work! They are lazy people!"
- Luke 13: 2-3: Jesus' response. Jesus has a different opinion. "Do you suppose that those Galileans were worse sinners than any others that this should have happened to them? I tell you 'no,' but unless you repent you will all perish as they did. Or those eighteen on whom the tower at Siloam fell, killing them all? Do you suppose that they were worse offenders than all the other people

living in Jerusalem? I tell you 'no, but unless you repent you will perish as they did.'" He seeks to invite to conversion and to change.

- Luke 13: 4-5: Jesus comments on another situation. "Or those eighteen on whom the tower of Siloam fell, killing them all; do you believe they were worse offenders than all the other people in Jerusalem?"
- It must have been a disaster which was much discussed in the city. A thunderstorm knocked down the tower of Siloam killing eighteen people who were seeking shelter under it. The typical comment was "punishment from God!" Jesus repeats, "I tell you 'no', but unless you repent you will perish as they did." They were not converted, they did not change, and forty years later Jerusalem was destroyed and many people died, being killed in the Temple like the Samaritans and many people died under the debris or rubble of the walls of the city. Jesus tried to warn them, but the request for peace was not accepted: "Jerusalem, Jerusalem!" (Lk 13: 34).
- Luke 13: 6-9: A parable to make people think and discover God's project. "A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came looking for fruit on it but found none. He said to his vinedresser, "for three years now I have been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and finding none." Then he said to the vinedresser, "Cut it down; why should it be taking up the ground?" "Sir," the man replied, "leave it one more year and give me time to dig round it and manure it; it may bear fruit next year; if not, then you can cut it down." Many times the vine is used to indicate God's affection for His people, or to indicate the lack of response on the part of the people to God's love (Is 5: 1-7; 27: 2-5; Jer 2: 21; 8: 13; Ex 19: 10-14; Hos 10: 1-8; Mic 7: 1; Jn 15: 1-6). In the parable, the landlord of the vine is God, the Father. The vinedresser who intercedes on behalf of the vine is Jesus. He pleads with the Father to extend the space, the time of conversion.

Personal Questions

- God's people, God's vineyard. I am part of this vineyard. If I apply this parable to myself, what conclusion do I draw?
- What do I do with the news that I receive? Do I seek to form a critical opinion, or do I continue to have the opinion of the majority and of the mass media?
- In today's world, there are not only the traditional news sources with their political agendas, but there is also social media – Facebook, Twitter, blogs, etc. They also reinforce each other. One will pick up stories or ideas from another and spin it. Do I have the skill to discern truth from these outlets? What can I do or learn to be able to find the truth in world events?

Concluding Prayer

Who is like Yahweh our God? His throne is set on high,
but He stoops to look down on heaven and earth. He raises the poor from the
dust,
He lifts the needy from the dunghill. (Ps 113: 5-7)

Sunday, October 27, 2024

30th 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 silence in us 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 on the way to 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 10: 46-52

A Key to the Reading:

This Sunday's Gospel tells the story of the healing of Bartimaeus, the blind man from Jericho (Mk 10: 46-52). This story includes a long instruction from Jesus to His disciples (Mk 8: 22 to 10: 52). Mark places the healing of the anonymous blind man at the beginning of this instruction (Mk 8: 22-26). Then, at the end, he tells us of the healing of the blind man from Jericho. As we shall see, the two healings are symbols of what went on between Jesus and His disciples. They point to the process and purpose of the slow learning by the disciples. They describe a starting point (the anonymous blind man) and an end point (Bartimaeus) of Jesus' instruction to His disciples and to all of us.

As we read, we shall try to look at the attitudes of Jesus, the blind Bartimaeus and the people of Jericho, and at all that each of them says and does. As you read and meditate on the text, think that you are looking into a mirror. Which image of you is it reflecting: that of Jesus, of the blind Bartimaeus, or of the people?

A Division of the Text as a Help to the Reading:

- Mark 10:46: The description of the context of the episode
- Mark 10:47: The cry of the poor
- Mark 10:48: The reaction of the people to the cry of the poor
- Mark 10:49-50: Jesus' reaction to the cry of the poor
- Mark 10: 51-52: The conversation between Jesus and the blind man and his healing

Text:

As Jesus was leaving Jericho with his disciples and a sizable crowd, Bartimaeus, a blind man, the son of Timaeus, sat by the roadside begging. On hearing that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, "Jesus, son of David, have pity on me." And many rebuked him, telling him to be silent. But he kept calling out all the more, "Son of David, have pity on me." Jesus stopped and said, "Call him." So they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take courage; get up, Jesus is calling you." He threw aside his cloak, sprang up, and came to Jesus. Jesus said to him in reply, "What do you want me to do for you?" The blind man replied to him, "Master, I want to see." Jesus told him, "Go your way; your faith has saved you." Immediately he received his sight and followed him on the way.

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 did you like best in this text? Why?
- What is Jesus' attitude: what does He say and do?
- What is the attitude of the people of Jericho: what do they say and do?
- What is Bartimaeus' attitude: what does he say and do?
- What lesson can we learn from the healing of the blind Bartimaeus?

For Those Who Wish to Go Deeper Into the Theme

The Context of Jesus' Long Instruction to His Disciples:

The healing of the anonymous blind man at the beginning of the instruction, takes place in two phases (Mk 8: 22-26). In the first phase the blind man begins to perceive things, but barely. He sees people as if they were trees (Mk 8: 24). In the second phase, after the second trial, he begins to understand better. The disciples were like the anonymous blind man: they accepted Jesus as Messiah, but they could not accept the cross (Mk 8: 31-33). They were people who saw people as trees. Their faith in Jesus was not strong. They continued to be blind! When Jesus insisted on service and the giving of one's life (Mk 8: 31, 34; 9: 31; 10: 33-34), among themselves they insisted on knowing who was the most important (Mk 9: 34), and they continued to ask for the first places in the Kingdom, one on the right and the other on the left of the throne (Mk 10: 35-37). This shows that the dominant ideology of the time had taken deep root in their mentality. After living with Jesus for a number of years, they had not yet been renewed enough to see things and people. They looked at Jesus with the eyes of the past. They wanted Him to be what they imagined He should be: a glorious Messiah (Mk 8: 32). But the aim of Jesus' instruction was that His disciples might be like the blind Bartimaeus who accepted Jesus as He was, a faith that Peter did not have as yet. Thus Bartimaeus is a model for the disciples of Jesus' time and for the community of Mark's time as well as for all of us.

A Commentary on the Text:

- Mark 10: 46-47: The description of the context of the episode: The cry of the poor

At last, after a long walk, Jesus and His disciples come to Jericho, the last stop before going up to Jerusalem. The blind Bartimaeus is sitting by the side of the road. He cannot take part in the procession that accompanies Jesus. He is blind. He can see nothing. But he shouts, calling for the Lord's help: "Son of David! Have pity on me!" The expression "Son of David" was the most common title that people ascribed to the Messiah (Mt 21: 9; Mk 11: 10). But Jesus did not like this title. He criticized and questioned the attitude of the doctors of the law who taught the people that the Messiah would be the Son of David (Mk 12: 35-37).

- Mark 10: 48: The reaction of the people to the cry of the poor

The cry of the poor feels uncomfortable, unpleasant. Those who were following the procession with Jesus try to keep Bartimaeus quiet. But "he shouted all the louder!" Today too the cry of the poor feels uncomfortable. Today there are millions who shout: migrants, prisoners, hungry people, sick people, those marginalized and oppressed, the unemployed, without wages, without a home, without a roof, without land, who never feel loved! Their shouts are silenced, in our homes, in the churches, in world organizations. Only those who open their eyes to what is happening in the world will listen to them. But many are those who have stopped listening. They've gotten used to the situation. Others try to silence the cries, as they tried with the blind man from Jericho. But they cannot silence the cry of the poor. God listens to them (Ex 2: 23-24; 3: 7). God says: "You will not ill-treat widows or orphans; if you ill-treat them in any way and they make an appeal to Me for help, I shall certainly hear their appeal!" (Ex 22: 21).

- Mark 10:49-50: Jesus' reaction to the cry of the poor

What does Jesus do? How does God hear this cry? Jesus stops and orders the blind man to be brought to Him. Those who wanted to silence him, to silence the uncomfortable cry of the poor, now, at Jesus' request, see themselves bound to act in such a way as to bring the poor to Jesus. Bartimaeus leaves everything and goes to Jesus. Not that he possessed much, just a cloak. It is all he has to cover his body (cf. Ex 22: 25-26). It is his security, his solid land!

- Mark 10: 51-52: *The conversation between Jesus and the blind man and his healing*

Jesus asks: "What do you want Me to do for you?" It is not enough to shout. One must know what one is shouting for! The blind man answers: "My teacher! Let me see again!" Bartimaeus addressed Jesus in a manner not at all common, even as we have seen, with the title "Son of David" that Jesus did not like (Mk 12: 35-37). But Bartimaeus has more faith in Jesus than in the ideas and titles concerning Jesus. Not so the others present. They do not see what is necessary, like Peter (Mk 8: 32). Bartimaeus knows how to give his life by accepting Jesus without any conditions. Jesus says to him: "Go! Your faith has saved you!" At once his sight was restored. He leaves everything and

follows Jesus (Mk 10: 52). His healing is the result of his faith in Jesus (Mk 10: 46-52). Now healed, Bartimaeus follows Jesus and goes with him up to Jerusalem and to Calvary! He becomes a model disciple for Peter and for all of us: to put our faith more in Jesus than in our ideas about Jesus!

Further Information:

The Context of the Journey to Jerusalem

Jesus and His disciples are on the way to Jerusalem (Mk 10: 32). Jesus goes before them. He is in a hurry. He knows that they will kill Him. The prophet Isaiah had foretold this (Is 50: 4-6; 53: 1-10). His death is not something that will come about through blind destiny or an established plan, but as a consequence of an assumed duty, of a mission received from the Father together with those excluded of His time. Jesus warns the disciples three times concerning the torture and death that await Him in Jerusalem (Mk 8: 31; 9: 31; 10: 33). The disciple must follow His master, even to suffering with Him (Mk 8: 34-35). The disciples are taken aback and go with Him full of fear (Mk 9: 32).

They do not understand what is happening. Suffering was not part of the idea they had of the Messiah (Mk 8: 32-33; Mt 16: 22). Not only did some of them not understand, but they kept on cherishing personal ambitions. James and John ask for a place in the glory of His Kingdom, one on the right hand and one on the left of Jesus (Mk 10: 35-37). They want to go beyond Peter! They do not understand Jesus' plan. They are only concerned with their own interests. This reflects the fights and tensions that existed in the communities of Mark's time and that exist even now in our communities. Jesus reacts decisively: "You do not know what you are asking!" (Mk 10: 38) He asks them if they are capable of drinking the cup that He will drink and receive the baptism that He will receive. The cup is the cup of suffering, and the baptism is the baptism of blood. Jesus wants to know whether rather than taking a place of honor they will be willing to give their lives even to death. They answer, "We can" (Mk 8: 39).

This seems to be an answer that comes from their lips because a few days later they abandon Jesus and leave Him alone at the hour of suffering (Mk 14: 50). They have but a little critical conscience; they do not see His personal reality. In His instruction to the disciples, Jesus stresses the exercise of authority (cf. Mk 9: 33-35). In those days, those who held power paid no attention to the people. They acted according to their ideas (cf. Mk 6: 17-29). The Roman Empire controlled the world and kept it submissive by force and thus, by means of tributes, taxes and customs, was able to concentrate the wealth of the people in the hands of a few in Rome. Society was characterized by the exercise of repression and the abuse of power. Jesus thinks otherwise. He says: "Among you this is not to happen. No, anyone who wants to become great among you must be your servant!" (Mk 10: 43). He tells them to avoid privileges and rivalry. He turns the system upside-down and stresses service as a means of overcoming personal ambition. Finally, He gives His own life in witness of what He said: "The Son of Man Himself came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many" (Mk 10: 45).

Faith is a Force that Transforms People

The Good News of the Kingdom says that Jesus is like a fertilizer. He makes the seed of life grow in people, a seed hidden like fire under the embers of observance, lifeless. Jesus blows on the embers and the fire glows, the Kingdom is revealed and people rejoice. The condition is always the same: faith in Jesus. When fear takes hold of a person, faith disappears and hope is extinguished. During His moment of torment, Jesus scolds His disciples for their lack of faith (Mk 4: 40). They do not believe, because they are afraid (Mk 4: 41). Jesus could not work miracles in Nazareth because people there did not believe (Mk 6: 6). They did not believe because Jesus did not measure up to their ideas of how He should be (Mk 6: 2-3). It is precisely lack of faith that prevents the disciples from driving out the "dumb spirit" who ill-treats a sick child (Mk 9: 17). Jesus criticizes them: "Faithless generation!" (Mk 9: 19). Then He tells them how to re-ignite faith: "This is the kind that can only be driven out by prayer" (Mk 9: 29). Jesus urged people to have faith in Him and consequently created trust in others (Mk 5: 34,36; 7: 25-29; 9: 23-29; 10: 52; 12: 34, 41-44). Throughout Mark's Gospel, faith in Jesus and in His word is like a force that transforms people. It enables people to have their sins forgiven (Mk 2: 5), to overcome suffering (Mk 4: 40), to have the power to heal and purify themselves (Mk 5: 34). Faith obtains the victory over death, as when the twelve-year-old daughter of Jairus enkindles in her father faith in Jesus and His words (Mk 5: 36). Faith makes Bartimaeus jump for joy: "Your faith has saved you!" (Mk 10: 52) If you say to the mountain, "Be pulled up and thrown into the sea," the mountain will fall into the sea, but one must not doubt in one's heart (Mk 11: 23-24). "Because all things are possible for those who believe!" (Mk 9: 23) "Have faith in God!" (Mk 11: 22). Thanks to His words and actions, Jesus arouses in people a dormant force that people are not aware of possessing. This is what happens to Jairus (Mk 5: 36), to the woman with the hemorrhage (Mk 5: 34), to the father with an epileptic son (Mk 9: 23-24), to the blind Bartimaeus (Mk 10: 52), and to many other people. Because of their faith in Jesus they enabled a new life to grow in them and in others. The healing of Bartimaeus (Mk 10: 46-52) clarifies a very important aspect of Jesus' long instruction to His disciples. Bartimaeus had called Jesus by His messianic title of "Son of David!" (Mk 10: 47). Jesus did not like this title (Mk 12: 35-37). But even though he called Jesus by a title that was not quite correct, Bartimaeus had faith and was healed! Not so Peter who no longer believed in the ideas of Jesus. Bartimaeus changed his mind, was converted, left everything behind and followed Jesus on His journey to Calvary! (Mk 10: 52). A full understanding of the following of Jesus is not obtained through theoretical instruction, but through a practical commitment, journeying with Him along the way of service from Galilee to Jerusalem. Anyone who tries to hang on to Peter's idea, that is, that of the glorious Messiah without the cross, will not understand Jesus and will never be truly a disciple. Anyone who wants to believe in Jesus and is willing "to give his/her life" (Mk 8: 35), accept "to be last" (Mk 9: 35), "drink the cup and carry the cross" (Mk 10: 38), like Bartimaeus, even with ideas that are not entirely correct, will have the power "to follow Jesus along the way" (Mk 10: 52). It is in the certainty of being able to walk with Jesus that we find the source of courage and the seed of the victory of the cross.

Praying with Psalm 31 (30)

In You, Yahweh, I Have Taken Refuge!

In You, Yahweh, I have taken refuge, let me never be put to shame,
in Your saving justice deliver me, rescue me, turn Your ear to me, make haste.
Be for me a rock-fastness, a fortified citadel to save me.

You are my rock, my rampart;

true to Your name, lead me and guide me! Draw me out of the net they have
spread for me, for You are my refuge;

into Your hands I commit my spirit,

by You have I been redeemed. God of truth, You hate those who serve useless
idols;

but my trust is in Yahweh:

I will delight and rejoice in Your faithful love! You, who have seen my misery,
and witnessed the miseries of my soul, have not handed me over to the enemy,
but have given me freedom to roam at large.

Take pity on me, Yahweh, for I am in trouble. Vexation is gnawing away my eyes,
my soul deep within me.

For my life is worn out with sorrow, and my years with sighs.

My strength gives way under my misery, and my bones are all wasted away.

The sheer number of my enemies makes me contemptible, loathsome to my
neighbors,

and my friends shrink from me in horror.

When people see me in the street they take to their heels. I have no more place
in their hearts than a corpse,
or something lost.

All I hear is slander -- terror wherever I turn -- as they plot together against me,
scheming to take my life.

But my trust is in You, Yahweh; I say, 'You are my God,'

every moment of my life is in Your hands,

rescue me from the clutches of my foes who pursue me; let Your face shine on
Your servant,

save me in Your faithful love.

I call on You, Yahweh,

so let disgrace fall not on me, but on the wicked.

Let them go down to Sheol in silence, muzzles on their lying mouths,
which speak arrogantly against the upright in pride and contempt.

Yahweh, what quantities of good things You have in store for those who fear
You,

and bestow on those who make You their refuge, for all humanity to see.

Safe in Your presence You hide them,

far from human plotting, shielding them in Your tent, far from contentious
tongues.

Blessed be Yahweh

who works for me miracles of His faithful love (in a fortified city)! In a state of terror I cried,
"I have been cut off from Your sight!"
Yet You heard my plea for help when I cried out to You.

Love Yahweh, all His faithful:
Yahweh protects His loyal servants,
but He repays the arrogant with interest. Be brave, take heart,
all who put your hope in Yahweh.

Final Prayer

Lord Jesus, we thank You 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 what 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, October 28, 2024

Saints Simon and Jude, Apostles

Opening Prayer

Almighty and ever-living God, strengthen our faith, hope, and love.
May we do with loving hearts what you ask of us and come to share the life you promise.
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

Now it happened in those days that Jesus went onto the mountain to pray; and he spent the whole night in prayer to God.

When day came he summoned his disciples and picked out twelve of them; he called them 'apostles': Simon whom he called Peter, and his brother Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Simon called the Zealot, Judas son of James, and Judas Iscariot who became a traitor.

He then came down with them and stopped at a piece of level ground where there was a large gathering of his disciples, with a great crowd of people from all parts of Judaea and Jerusalem and the coastal region of Tyre and Sidon who had come to hear him and to be cured of their diseases. People tormented by unclean spirits were also cured, and everyone in the crowd was trying to touch him because power came out of him that cured them all.

Reflection

Today the Gospel speaks about two facts: (a) to describe the choice of the twelve Apostles (Lk 6: 12-16) and (b) it informs that an immense crowd wanted to meet Jesus to listen to him, to touch him and to be cured (Lk 6: 17-19).

- Luke 6: 12-13: Jesus spends the night in prayer and chooses the twelve apostles. Before the definitive choice of the twelve Apostles, Jesus goes up to the mountain and there spends the whole night in prayer. He prays in order to know whom to choose, and he chooses the Twelve, whose names are given in the Gospels. And then they received the title of Apostles. Apostle means one sent, missionary. They were called to carry out a mission, the same mission that Jesus received from the Father (Jn 20: 21). Mark concretizes the mission and says that Jesus called them to be with him and to send them out on mission (Mk 3: 14).
- Luke 6: 14-16: The names of the twelve Apostles. With little 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). Many of these names come from the Old Testament: Simon is the name of one of the sons of the Patriarch Jacob (Gn 29: 33). James (Giacomo) is the same name as Jacob (Gn 25: 26). Judas is the name of the other son of Jacob (Gn 35: 23). Matthew even if he had the name of Levi (Mk 2: 14), the other son of Jacob (Gn 35: 23). Of the twelve Apostles, seven have the name which comes from the time of the Patriarchs: two times Simon, two times James, two times Judas, and one time Levi! That reveals the wisdom of the pedagogy of the people. By the names of the Patriarchs and the 'Matriarchs', given to the sons and daughters, people maintained alive the tradition of the ancients and helped their own children not to lose their identity. Which are the names that we give today to our sons and daughters?
- Luke 6: 17-19: Jesus comes down from the mountain and people look for him. Coming down from the mountain with the twelve, Jesus encounters an immense crowd of people who was seeking to listen to his word and to touch him because they knew that from him came out a force of life. In this great crowd there were Jews and foreigners, people from Judaea and from Tyre and Sidon. They were abandoned, disoriented. Jesus accepts all those who seek him, Jews and Pagans! This is one of the themes preferred by Luke who writes for the converted Pagans.
- The persons called by Jesus are a consolation for us. The first Christians remembered and recorded the names of the Twelve Apostles and of the other men and women who followed Jesus closely. The Twelve, called by Jesus to form the first community with him, were not saints. They were common persons, like all of us. They had their virtues and their defects. The Gospels tell us very little about the temperament and the character of each one of them. But what they say, even if it is not much is a reason of consolation for us.
 - Peter was a generous person and full of enthusiasm (Mk 14: 29, 31; Mt 14: 28-29), but in the moment of danger and of taking a decision, his heart becomes small and he turns back (Mt 14: 30; Mk 14: 66-72). He even got to be Satan for Jesus (Mk 8: 33). Jesus calls him Pietra- Rock (Pietro). Peter of himself was not Rock, he becomes Rock (*roccia*), 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” (Mc 3: 17). John seemed to have a certain jealousy. He wanted Jesus only for his group (Mk 9: 38).
- Philip had a certain welcoming way. He knew how to get others in contact with Jesus (Jn 1: 45-46), but he was not too practical in solving problems (Jn 12: 20-22; 6, 7). Sometimes he was very naïve. There was a moment when Jesus lost 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 and two fish (Jn 6: 8-9).
- Bartholomew seems to be the same as Nathanael. He was from that place and could not admit that something good could come from Nazareth (Jn 1: 46).
- Thomas was capable to maintain his 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 recognize his error (Jn 20: 26-28). He was generous, ready to die with Jesus (Jn 11: 16).
- Mathew or Levi he was the Publican, the tax collector, like Zacchaeus (Mt 9: 9; Lk 19: 2). They were persons committed in the oppressing system of the time.
- Simon, instead seems belonged to the movement which was radically opposed to the system that the Roman Empire imposed on the Jewish people. This is why they also called it Zelots (Lk 6: 15). The group of the Zelots succeeded in provoking an armed revolt against the Romans.
- Judas was the one who was in charge of the money of the group (Jn 13: 29). He betrayed Jesus.
- James of Alphaeus and Judas Thadeus, of these two the Gospels say nothing except the name.

Personal Questions

- Jesus spends the whole night in prayer to know whom to choose, and he chooses these twelve. What conclusions do you draw from this gesture of Jesus?
- The first Christians remembered the names of the twelve Apostles who were at the origin of their community. Do you remember the names of the persons who are at the origin of the community to which you belong? Do you remember the name of some catechist or professor who was significant for your Christian formation? What do you especially remember about them: the content of what they taught you or the witness that they gave you?

Concluding Prayer

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

Tuesday, October 29, 2024

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Almighty and ever-living God, strengthen our faith, hope, and love.
May we do with loving hearts what you ask of us and come to share the life you promise.

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 13: 18-21

Jesus went on to say, 'What is the kingdom of God like? What shall I compare it with? It is like a mustard seed which a man took and threw into his garden: it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air sheltered in its branches.' Again, He said, 'What shall I compare the kingdom of God with? It is like the yeast a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour till it was leavened all through.'

Reflection

- Context. Along the road that leads Him to Jerusalem, Jesus is surrounded by “thousands” of persons (11: 29) who crowd around him. The reason for such attraction from the crowds is the Word of Jesus. In chapter 12 one can notice how the people who listen to his Word alternate: the disciples (12: 1-12), the crowd (vv. 13-21), the disciples (vv. 22-53), the crowds (vv. 54-59). The scandal of death is the dominating theme of Luke 13: 1-35. In the first part it is spoken about as the death of all (vv. 1-9), in the second part, the death of Jesus (vv. 31-35) and then to the death avoided by sinners because their conversion is expected. But there is another theme together with the dominant one: the salvation given to men. The cure of the woman who was bent, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan had held during eighteen years, is liberated by Jesus. And in the center of this chapter 13 we find two parables that constitute the overall theme: the Kingdom of God as compared to the “mustard seed” and to the “leaven or yeast.”
- The Kingdom of God is similar to a mustard seed. Such a seed is very common in Palestine and particularly close to the Lake of Galilee. It is especially known because it is particularly small. In Luke 17: 6, Jesus uses such an image to express the hope that He has for the disciples that they have at least a small

seed of faith: "If you had faith like a mustard seed..." This parable, which is very simple, confronts two diverse moments in the story of the seed: the moment when it is sown in the earth (the modest beginnings) and when it becomes a tree (the final miracle). Therefore, the purpose of this account is to narrate the extraordinary growth of a seed that is thrown in one's own garden, and to this follows an amazing growth as it becomes a tree. Like this seed, the Kingdom of God also has its story. The Kingdom of God is the seed thrown into the garden, the place that in the New Testament is the place of the agony and the burial of Jesus (Jn 18: 1, 26; 19: 41). Then it follows the moment of growth and concludes with becoming a tree open to all.

- The Kingdom of God is similar to yeast. Yeast is put into three measures of flour. In the Hebrew culture yeast was considered a factor of corruption so much so that it was eliminated from their houses, in order not to contaminate the feast at Passover which begins with the week of the unleavened dough. In the ears of the Jews the use of this negative element, to describe the Kingdom of God, was a reason to be disturbed. But the reader is able to discover the convincing force: it is sufficient to put a very small quantity of yeast in three measures of flour in order to get a big amount of dough. Jesus announces that this yeast, hidden or that has disappeared in three measures of flour, after a certain amount of time, leavens the whole dough.
- The effects of the text on the reader. What do these two parables communicate to us? The Kingdom of God, compared by Jesus to a seed that becomes a tree, is close to the story of God as a story of his Word: it is hidden in human history, and it is growing; Luke thinks of the Word of God (the Kingdom of God in our midst) is already developing but it has not as yet become a tree. Jesus and the Holy Spirit are supporting this growth of the Word. The image of yeast completes the frame of the seed. The yeast is the Gospel that is working in the world, as in the ecclesial communities and in the individual believers.

Personal Questions

- Are you aware that the Kingdom of God is present in our midst and that it grows mysteriously and extends itself in the history of every person, and in the Church?
- The Kingdom is a humble reality, hidden, poor and silent, immersed between the competition and pleasures of life. Have you understood from the two parables, that you will not be able to get a glimpse of the Kingdom if you do not have an attitude of humble and silent listening?

Concluding Prayer

How blessed are all who fear Yahweh, who walk in his ways! Your own labors will yield you a living, happy and prosperous will you be. (Ps 128: 1-2)

Wednesday, October 30, 2024

Opening Prayer

Almighty and ever-living God, strengthen our faith, hope, and love.

May we do with loving hearts what You ask of us and come to share the life You promise.

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 13: 22-30

Jesus passed through towns and villages, teaching as he went and making his way to Jerusalem. Someone asked him, "Lord, will only a few people be saved?" He answered them, "Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I tell you, will attempt to enter but will not be strong enough. After the master of the house has arisen and locked the door, then will you stand outside knocking and saying, 'Lord, open the door for us.' He will say to you in reply, 'I do not know where you are from.' And you will say, 'We ate and drank in your company and you taught in our streets.' Then he will say to you, 'I do not know where you are from. Depart from me, all you evildoers!' And there will be wailing and grinding of teeth when you see Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and all the prophets in the Kingdom of God and you yourselves cast out. And people will come from the east and the west and from the north and the south and will recline at table in the Kingdom of God. For behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last."

Reflection

The Gospel today narrates an episode that took place along the road that Jesus was going through from Galilee to Jerusalem, the description of which occupies one third of Luke's Gospel (Lk 9: 51 to 19: 28).

- Luke 13: 22: The journey toward Jerusalem. "Through towns and villages He went teaching, making His way to Jerusalem." More than once Luke mentions that Jesus is on the way toward Jerusalem. During ten chapters he describes the journey to Jerusalem (Lk 9: 51 to 19: 28). Luke constantly recalls that Jesus is on the way toward Jerusalem (Lk 9: 51, 53, 57; 10:1, 38; 11: 1; 13: 22, 33; 14: 25; 17: 11; 18: 31; 18: 37; 19: 1, 11, 28). What is clear and definitive from the beginning is the destiny or end of the journey: Jerusalem, the capital city where Jesus suffers His Passion and dies (Lk 9: 31, 51). But Luke rarely tells us about the places through which Jesus passed. This he says only at the beginning of the journey (Lk 9: 51), in the middle (Lk 17: 11) and at the end (Lk 18: 35; 19: 1), and thus we know something about the places through which Jesus was passing. In this way, Luke suggests the following teaching: the objective of our life should be clear, and we should assume it decidedly as Jesus did. We have to walk; we cannot stop. The places through which we have to pass are not always clear and definitive. What is certain is the objective: Jerusalem, where the "exodus" awaits us (Lk 9: 31), the Passion,

Death, and the Resurrection.

- Luke 13: 23: The question regarding the number of those who are saved. Along the road all kinds of things happen: information on the massacre and the disasters (Lk 13: 1-5), the parable (Lk 13: 6-9, 18-21), discussions (Lk 13: 10-13) and, in today's Gospel, a question from the people: "Sir will there be only a few saved?" It is always the same question concerning salvation!
- Luke 13: 24-25: The narrow door. Jesus says that the door is narrow: "Try your hardest to enter by the narrow door, because I tell you, many will try to enter but will not succeed." Does Jesus, perhaps, says this to fill us with fear and to oblige us to observe the Law as the Pharisees taught? What does this narrow door signify? About which door is He speaking? In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus suggests that the entrance into the Kingdom has eight doors. These are the eight categories of people of the Beatitudes: (a) the poor in spirit, (b) the meek, (c) the afflicted, (d) the hungry and thirsty for justice, (e) the merciful, (f) the pure of heart, (g) the peacemakers and (h) those persecuted for justice (Mt 5: 3-10). Luke reduces them to four categories: (a) the poor, (b) the hungry, (c) those who are sad and (d) those who are persecuted (Lk 6: 20-22). Only those who belong to one of these categories mentioned in the Beatitudes will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. This is the narrow door. It is the new view of the salvation which Jesus communicates to us. There is no other door! It is a question of the conversion which Jesus asks of us. And He insists: "Try your hardest to enter by the narrow door, because I tell you many will try to enter and will not succeed. Once the master of the house has got up and locked the door, you may find yourself standing outside knocking on the door, saying 'Lord, open to us', but He will answer, 'I do not know where you come from.'" Concerning the hour of judgment, now is the favorable time for conversion, to change our opinion, our view of salvation and to enter into one of the eight categories.
- Luke 13: 26-28: The tragic misunderstanding. God responds to the one who knocks at the door: "I do not know where you come from." But they insist and argue, "We have eaten and we drank in Your presence, You taught on our streets!" It is not sufficient to have eaten with Jesus, to have participated in the multiplication of the loaves and to have listened to His teachings on the streets of the cities and villages! It is not sufficient to be in Church and to have participated in catechism class. God will answer, "I do not know where you come from; away from Me, all evil doers!" This is a tragic misunderstanding and a total lack of conversion. Jesus considers unjust what others consider just and pleasing to God. It is a totally new way of seeing our salvation. The door is truly narrow.
- Luke 13: 29-30: The key that explains the misunderstanding. "People from east and west, from north and south, will come and sit down at the feast in the Kingdom of God. Look, there are those now last who will be the first, and those now first who will be last." It is a matter of the great change which takes place with the coming of God down to us in Jesus. All people will have access and will pass through the narrow door.

Personal Questions

- To have a clear objective and to travel toward Jerusalem: are the objectives of my life clear or do I allow myself to be blown around by the wind of public opinion?
- The narrow door. What idea do I have of God, of life, and of salvation?
- If “only those who belong to one of these categories mentioned in the Beatitudes will enter the Kingdom of Heaven”, what of the Commandments? What constitutes belonging to one of these categories? Is there a “more perfect” belonging in some ways than in others? How does it all come together?

Concluding Prayer

All Your creatures shall thank You, Yahweh, and Your faithful shall bless You. They shall speak of the glory of Your kingship and tell of Your might. (Ps 145: 10-11)

Thursday, October 31, 2024

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Almighty and ever-living God, strengthen our faith, hope and love. May we do with loving hearts what you ask of us and come to share the life you promise. 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 13: 31-35

Some Pharisees came up to Jesus and, 'Go away,' they said. 'Leave this place, because Herod means to kill you.' He replied, '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. But for today and tomorrow and the next day I must go on, since it would not be right for a prophet to die outside Jerusalem. 'Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you that kill the prophets and stone those who are sent to you! How often have I longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you refused! Look! Your house will be left to you. Yes, I promise you, you shall not see me till the time comes when you are saying: Blessed is he who is coming in the name of the Lord!'

Reflection

The Gospel today makes us feel the threatening and dangerous context in which Jesus lived and worked. Herod, as he had killed John the Baptist, wanted to kill Jesus.

- Luke 13: 31: The warning of the Pharisees to Jesus - “Just at that time some Pharisees came up. “Go away,” they said. “Leave this place because Herod

means to kill you.” It is important to notice that Jesus receives the warning of the Pharisees. Sometimes, the Pharisees are together with the group of Herod wanting to kill Jesus (Mk 3: 6; 12: 13). But here they are in solidarity with Jesus and want to avoid his death. At that time the power of the king was absolute. He did not render an account to anyone of his way of governing. Herod had already killed John the Baptist and now he wanted to finish also with Jesus.

- Luke 13: 32-33: The response of Jesus – He replied “You may go and give that fox this message, ‘Look! Today and tomorrow I drive out evils and heal and on the third day I attain my end.’” Jesus’ response is very clear and courageous. He calls Herod: fox. To announce the Kingdom Jesus does not depend on the permission of the political authority. He sends a message informing that he continues his work today and tomorrow and that he will have finished only day after tomorrow, that is on the third day. In this response is discovered all the liberty to the power which wanted to prevent him from carrying out the mission received from the Father. Therefore, the one who determines the time and the hour is God and not Herod. At the same time, in the response there arises also a certain symbolism connected to the death and resurrection on the third day in Jerusalem. This is to indicate that he will not die in Galilee, but in Jerusalem, capital of his people, and that he will resurrect on the third day.
- Luke 13: 34-35: Admonishment of Jesus to Jerusalem – “Jerusalem. Jerusalem. Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those who are sent to you! How often have I longed to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings and you refused!” This admonishment of Jesus on the capital of his people recalls the long and sad story of the resistance of the authority to God’s calls which reached through so many prophets and wise men. At another moment Jesus speaks of the prophets persecuted and killed from Abel to Zechariah (Lk 11: 51). Reaching Jerusalem a short time before his death, looking toward the city from the top of the Mountain of Olives, Jesus weeps on it, because it does not recognize the time in which God comes to visit it” (Lk 19: 44).

Personal Questions

- Jesus qualifies the public power with the name of fox. Can your political power deserve to be qualified like this?
- Jesus tried many times to convert the people of Jerusalem, but the religious authority resisted. And you, how many times do you resist?

Concluding Prayer

Yahweh and his strength, tirelessly seek his presence! Remember the marvels he has done, his wonders, the judgements he has spoken. (Ps 105: 4-5)