

Lectio Divina



English | November 2024 | ocarm.org

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¹ Tile - Church of Rio Tinto - Gondomar - Portugal (*Henrique Matos - Photo CC BY-SA 4.0*
https://ca.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nuno_%C3%81lvares_Pereira#/media/Fitxer:Azulejo_Church_Rio_Tinto_01.jpg).

Friday, November 1, 2024

All Saints Day

Listening to the Text

- Opening Prayer:

Lord, the meaning of our life is to seek your Word, which came to us in the person of Christ. Make me capable of welcoming what is new in the Gospel of the Beatitudes, so that I may change my life. I would know nothing about you were it not for the light of the words spoken by your Son Jesus, who came to tell us of your marvels. When I am weak, if I go to Him, the Word of God, then I become strong. When I act foolishly, the wisdom of his Gospel restores me to relish God and the kindness of his love. He guides me to the paths of life. When some deformity appears in me, I reflect on his Word and the image of my personality becomes beautiful. When solitude tries to make me dry, my spiritual marriage to him makes my life fruitful. When I discover some sadness or unhappiness in myself, the thought of Him, my only good, opens the way to joy. Therese of the Child Jesus has a saying that sums up the desire for holiness as an intense search for God and a listening to others: «If you are nothing, remember that Jesus is all. You must therefore lose your little nothing into his infinite all and think of nothing else but this uniquely lovable all...» (Letters, 87, to Marie Guérin).

- Reading the Gospel: Matthew 5: 1-12a

¹ Seeing the crowds, he went onto the mountain. And when he was seated his disciples came to him. ² Then he began to speak. This is what he taught them: ³How blessed are the poor in spirit: the kingdom of Heaven is theirs. ⁴ Blessed are the gentle: they shall have the earth as inheritance. ⁵ Blessed are those who mourn: they shall be comforted. ⁶ Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for uprightness: they shall have their fill. ⁷ Blessed are the merciful: they shall have mercy shown them. ⁸ Blessed are the pure in heart: they shall see God. ⁹Blessed are the peacemakers: they shall be recognized as children of God. ¹⁰Blessed are those who are persecuted in the cause of uprightness:the kingdom of Heaven is theirs. ¹¹ Blessed are you when people abuse you and persecute you and speak all kinds of calumny against you falsely on my account. ¹²Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven; this is how they persecuted the prophets before you.

- A Moment of Prayerful Silence:

It is important to be able to listen in deep silence so that the word of Christ may speak to us and so that the Word made flesh may dwell in us and us in him. It is only in silent hearts that the Word of God can take root and, on this Solemnity of All Saints, become flesh in us.

Light Shed on the Word (Lectio)

- The Context:

Jesus' words on the Beatitudes that Matthew drew from his sources, were condensed in short and isolated phrases, and the Evangelist has placed them in a broader context, which Biblical scholars call the "*Sermon on the Mount*" (chapters 5-7). This sermon is considered like the statutes or *Magna Carta* that Jesus gave to the community as a normative and binding word that defines a Christian.

The many themes contained in this long sermon are not to be seen as collection of exhortations, but rather as a clear and radical indication of the new attitude of the disciples towards God, oneself and the brothers and sisters. Some expressions used by Jesus may seem exaggerated, but they are used to stress reality and thus are realistic in the context although not so in a literary sense: for instance in vv.29-30: «*If your right eye should be your downfall, tear it out and throw it away; for it will do you less harm to lose one part of yourself than to have your whole body thrown into hell. And if your right hand should be your downfall, cut it off and throw it away, for it will do you less harm to lose one part of yourself than to have your whole body go to hell*». This manner of speaking indicates the effect desired to be created in the reader, who must correctly understand Jesus' words so as not to distort their meaning.

Our focus, for liturgical reasons, will be on the first part of the "*Sermon on the Mount*," that is the part dealing with the proclamation of the Beatitudes (Mt 5: 1-12).

- Some Details:

Matthew invites the reader to listen to the beatitudes proclaimed by Jesus with a rich concentration of details. First, he indicates the place where Jesus proclaims his sermon: "Jesus went onto the mountain" (5: 1). That is why exegetes call this the "sermon on the mount" even though Luke places this sermon on level ground (Lk 6: 20-26). The geographic location of the "mountain" could be a veiled reference to an episode in the OT quite like ours: that is, when Moses proclaims the Decalogue on mount Sinai. It is possible that Matthew wishes to present Jesus as the new Moses who proclaims the new law.

Another detail that strikes us is the physical posture of Jesus as he proclaims his words: "*when he was seated*." This posture confers upon him a note of authority in the legislative sense. The disciples and the "crowd" gather around him: this detail shows what Jesus had to say was for all to hear. We note that Jesus' words do not present impossible matters, nor are they addressed to a special group of people, nor do they mean to establish a code of ethics exclusively for his inner circle. Jesus' demands are concrete, binding and decisively radical.

Someone branded Jesus' sermon as follows: «For me, this is the most important text in the history of humankind. It is addressed to all, believers and non, and after twenty centuries it is still the only light still shining in the darkness of violence, fear and solitude in which the West finds itself because of its pride and selfishness» (Gilbert Cesbron).

The word “blessed” (in Greek makarioi) in our context does not say “softly” but cries out happiness found throughout the Bible. For instance, in the OT, those called “*blessed*” are those who live out the precepts of Wisdom (Sir 25: 7-10). The prayerful person of the Psalms defines “*blessed*” as those who “*fear,*” or more precisely those who love the Lord, expressing this love in the observance of the precepts contained in the word of God (Sal 1: 1; 128: 1).

Matthew’s originality lies in adding a secondary phrase that specifies each beatitude: for instance, the main assertion “*blessed are the poor in spirit*” is clarified by an added phrase “*for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*” Another difference with the OT is that Jesus’ words proclaim a saving blessedness here and now and without any limitations. For Jesus, all can attain happiness on condition that they remain united to Him.

- The First Three Beatitudes:
- The first cry concerns the poor: “How blessed are the poor in spirit, the kingdom of heaven is theirs.”

The reader may be shocked: how can the poor be happy? In the Bible, the poor are those who empty themselves of themselves and above all renounce the presumption of building their own present and future alone, and thus leave room for and focus on God’s project and his Word. The poor, always in the biblical sense, is not someone closed in on himself, miserable, negative, but someone who nurtures being open to God and to others. God is all his/her treasure. We could say with St. Teresa of Avila: happy are those who experience that “God alone suffices!”, meaning that they are rich in God.

A great modern spiritual author described poverty as follows: «As long as one does not empty one’s heart, God cannot fill it with himself. As you empty your heart, so does the Lord fill it. Poverty is emptiness, not only in what concerns the future but also the past. Not a regret or memory, not a worry or wish! God is not in the past, God is not in the future: He is in the present! Leave your past to God, leave your future to God. Your poverty is to live the present, the Presence of God who is Eternity» (Divo Barsotti).

This is the first beatitude, not just because it is the first of many, but because it seems to encapsulate all the others in their diversity.

- Blessed are those who mourn; they shall be comforted.”

One can mourn because of a great pain or suffering. This underlines the fact that we are dealing with a serious situation even though the motives or the cause are not mentioned. If we wish to identify today “those who mourn” we could think of all the Christians who hold dear the demands of the kingdom and suffer because of many negative aspects in the Church; rather than focus on holiness, the Church presents divisions and lacerations. They may also be those who suffer because of their sins and inconsistencies and who, in some way, slow down their conversion. To these, only God can bring the news of “consolation.”

- “Blessed are the gentle, they shall have the earth as inheritance.”

The third beatitude is about gentleness. This is a quality that is not so popular

today. Rather, for many it has a negative connotation and is taken for weakness or the kind of imperturbability that knows how to control calculatingly one's own emotions. What does the word "gentle" mean in the Bible? The gentle are remembered as those who enjoy great peace (Ps 37: 10), are happy, blessed and loved by God. They are also contrasted with evildoers, the ungodly and sinners. Thus, the OT gives us a wealth of meanings that do not allow for one single definition.

In the NT the first time we meet the word is in Matthew 11: 29: "Learn from me because I am gentle and humble of heart." A second time is in Mt 21: 5, when Matthew describes Jesus' entry into Jerusalem and cites the prophet Zechariah 2: 9: "Behold your servant comes to you gentle." Truly, Matthew's Gospel may be described as the Gospel of gentleness.

Paul too says that gentleness is an identifying quality of the Christian. In 2 Corinthians 10: 1 he exhorts believers "I urge you by the gentleness and forbearance of Christ." In Galatians 5: 22 gentleness is considered one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit in the heart of believers and consists in being meek, moderate, slow to punish, kind and patient towards others. Again, in Ephesians 4: 32 and Colossians 3: 12 gentleness is an attitude that is part of the Christian and a sign of the new man in Christ.

Finally, an eloquent witness comes from 1 Peter 3: 3-4: "Your adornment should be not an exterior one, consisting of braided hair or gold jewelry or fine clothing, but the interior disposition of the heart, consisting in the imperishable quality of a gentle and peaceful spirit, so precious in the sight of God."

How does Jesus use the word "gentle"? A truly enlightening definition is the one given by the gentle person of Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini "The gentle person, according to the beatitudes, is one who, in spite of the fervor of his/her feelings, remains docile and calm, not possessive, interiorly free, always extremely respectful of the mystery of freedom, imitating God in this respect who does everything with respect for the person, and urges the person to obedience without ever using violence. Gentleness is opposed to all forms of material or moral arrogance, it gains the victory of peace over war, of dialogue over imposition."

To this wise interpretation we add that of another famous exegete: "The gentleness spoken of in the beatitudes is none other than that aspect of humility that manifests itself in practical affability in one's dealings with the other. Such gentleness finds its image and its perfect model in the person of Jesus, gentle and humble of heart. Truly, such gentleness seems to us like a form of charity, patient and delicately attentive towards others" (Jacques Dupont).

The Word Enlightens Me (To Meditate)

- Am I able to accept those little signs of poverty in my regard? For instance, the poverty of poor health and little indispositions? Do I make exorbitant demands?
- Am I able to accept some aspect of my poverty and fragility?

- Do I pray like a poor person, as one who asks with humility the grace of God, his pardon and his mercy?
- Inspired by Jesus' message concerning gentleness, do I renounce violence, vengeance, and a vengeful spirit?
- Do I encourage, in families and in my place of work, a spirit of kindness, gentleness and peace?
- Do I pay back any small malice, insinuations or offensive allusions with evil?
- Do I look after the weakest who cannot defend themselves? Am I patient with old people? Do I welcome lonely strangers who are often exploited at work?

To Pray

- Psalm 23:

The Psalm seems to rotate around the title "The Lord is my shepherd." The saints are the image of the flock on the way: they are accompanied by the goodness and loyalty of God, until they finally reach the house of the Father (L. Alonso Schökel, *I salmi della fiducia*, Dehoniana libri, Bologna 2006, 54)

Yahweh is my shepherd, I lack nothing.

In grassy meadows he lets me lie. By tranquil streams he leads me to restore my spirit.

He guides me in paths of saving justice as befits his name. Even were I to walk in a ravine as dark as death

I should fear no danger, for you are at my side. Your staff and your crook are there to soothe me.

You prepare a table for me under the eyes of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil;

my cup brims over.

Kindness and faithful love pursue me every day of my life.

I make my home in the house of Yahweh for all time to come.

Closing Prayer:

Lord Jesus, you show us the way of the beatitudes so that we may come to that happiness that is fullness of life and thus holiness. We are all called to holiness, but the only treasure of the saints is God. Your Word, Lord, calls saints all those who in baptism were chosen by your love of a Father, to be conformed to Christ. Grant, Lord, that by your grace we may achieve this conformity to Jesus Christ. We thank you, Lord, for the saints you have placed on our way and who manifest your love. We ask for your pardon if we have tarnished your face in us and denied our calling to be saints.

Saturday, November 2, 2024

All Souls Day

LECTIO

- Opening Prayer

Spirit of God, come from the four corners of the earth and breathe on these dead persons so that they may rise again (Ez 37: 9). Come Holy Spirit, breathe on our minds, hearts and souls so that we may become a new creation in Christ, firstborn into life eternal. Amen.

- Gospel Reading: John 6: 37-40

Jesus said to them, "All that the Father gives me will come to me; and him who comes to me I will not cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me; and this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me but raise it up at the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him should have eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day."

- Prayerful Silent Time

That the Word of God may enter into our hearts and enlighten our life.

MEDITATIO

- In John's Gospel, the basic perspective concerning Jesus and his mission is that the Word made flesh is sent by the Father into the world to give us life and to save that which was lost. The world, however, rejects the Word incarnate. The prologue of the Gospel presents us with this thought (Jn 1: 1-18), which the Evangelist will gradually elaborate in the Gospel story. The synoptic Gospels also, in their own way, proclaim the same news. One need only think of the parables of the lost sheep and the lost drachma (Lk 15: 1-10); or the declaration: I did not come to call the just, but sinners (Mk 2: 17).

This thought is also found in this passage: I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent (Jn 6: 38). This is the will of my Father, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him should have eternal life (Jn 6: 40). The key words in John's Gospel are: see and believe. To see, implies and automatically means to believe in the Son sent by the Father. This attitude of faith brings the believer to possess eternal life. In John's Gospel, the salvation of the world is already fulfilled by the first coming of Christ through the incarnation and the resurrection of the one who allows himself to be lifted up on the cross. The second coming of Christ on the last day will be a completion of this mystery of salvation.

Today's Gospel is taken from the section that speaks of the mystery of Jesus (Jn 1-12). The text takes us, for the second time in John's Gospel, to Galilee, at the time of the Passover: After this, Jesus went across the sea of Galilee... it was near the Passover, the feast of the Jews (Jn 6: 1, 4). A great crowd followed him, (Jn 6: 2) and Jesus seeing the crowd that followed him, multiplies the loaves. The crowd want to proclaim him king, but Jesus disappears and goes

up to the mountain alone (Jn 6: 15). After a brief pause that allows us to contemplate the Lord walking on the waters (Jn 6: 16-21), the story continues the next day (Jn 6: 22), and the crowd goes on waiting for and seeking out Jesus. Then comes the discourse on the bread of life and Jesus' warning to obtain the food that will last forever (Jn 6: 27). Jesus defines himself as the bread of life and makes reference to the manna given to the people of God through Moses, as a figure of the true bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world (Jn 6: 30-36). This is the context within which the words of Jesus are pronounced and that we are using for our Lectio (Jn 6: 37-40). In this context, too, we come across a new kind of opposition and a new rejection of the revelation of the Christ as the bread of life (Jn 6: 41-66).

Jesus' words concerning everyone who goes to him, echo God's invitation to take part in the benefits of the banquet of the covenant (Is 55: 1-3). Jesus does not reject those who come to him, rather he gives them eternal life. In fact, his mission is to seek and save the lost ones (Lk 19: 27). We are reminded of this in the story of the meeting of Jesus with the Samaritan woman by Jacob's well (Jn 4: 1-42). Jesus does not reject the Samaritan woman, but begins a 'pastoral' dialogue with the woman who comes to the well to draw material water and there finds the man, the prophet and the Messiah who promises to give her the water of eternal life (Jn 4: 13-15). In our passage we find the same structure: on the one hand the people seek material bread and on the other Jesus gives them a long spiritual discourse on the bread of life. The witness of Jesus who eats the bread of God's will (Jn 4: 34) echoes the teaching of the Master in this Gospel passage (Jn 6: 38).

At the last supper, Jesus takes up this discourse again in chapter 17. It is he who gives eternal life (Jn 17: 2), preserves and watches over all those whom the Father has given to him. Of these none is lost except the son of perdition (Jn 17: 12-13).

- A Few Questions

to guide our meditation and practice.

- The Word made flesh is sent into the world by the Father to give us life, but the world rejects the incarnate Word. Do I welcome into my life the Divine Word who gives eternal life? How?
- I came down from heaven not to do my will, but the will of him who sent me (Jn 6: 38). In Jesus we see obedience to the will of the Father. Do I internalise this virtue in my life and live it out daily?
- Anyone who sees the Son and believes in him will have eternal life (Jn 6: 40). Who is Jesus for me? Do I try to see him with the eyes of faith, listen to his words, contemplate his way of being? What does eternal life mean for me?

ORATIO

- Psalm 23

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.

- Closing Prayer

O God, who at the table of your word and of the bread of life nourish us so that we may grow in love, grant that we may welcome your message into our heart so that we may become yeast and instruments of salvation in the world. Through Christ our Lord. Amen

CONTEMPLATIO

Contemplation is knowing how to adhere with one's mind and heart to the Lord who by his Word transforms us into new beings who always do his will. "Knowing these things, you will be blessed if you do them." (Jn 13: 17)

Sunday, November 3, 2024

Thirty-First Sunday of Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father,
Your love never fails.
Hear our call.
Keep us from danger
and provide for all our needs.
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 - Mark 12: 28b-34

One of the scribes came to Jesus and asked him, "Which is the first of all the commandments?" Jesus replied, "The first is this: Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is Lord alone! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is this: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these." The scribe said to him, "Well said, teacher. You are right in saying, He is One and there is no other than he. And to love him with all your heart, with all your understanding, with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is worth more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices." And when Jesus

saw that he answered with understanding, he said to him, "You are not far from the Kingdom of God." And no one dared to ask him any more questions.

Reflection

The Gospel today presents a beautiful conversation between Jesus and a doctor of the Law. The doctor wants to know from Jesus which is the first of all the commandments. Today, many people want to know what is most important in religion. Some say: to be baptized. Others, to pray. Others say: to go to Mass or to participate in worship on Sunday. Others say: to love your neighbor! Others are worried about the appearance or the changes or tasks in the Church.

- Mark 12: 28: The question of the doctor of the Law. A doctor of the Law, who had seen the debate of Jesus with the Sadducees (Mk 12: 23-27), was pleased with Jesus' response, and he perceives in Him a great intelligence and wants to take advantage of this occasion to ask Him a question: "Which is the first one of all the commandments?" At that time the Jews had an enormous number of norms which regulated, in practice, the observance of the Ten Commandments of the Law of God. Some said: "All these norms have the same value, because they all come from God. It does not belong to us to introduce distinctions in the things of God." Others would say, "Some Laws are more important than others, that is why they oblige more!" The doctor wanted to know Jesus' opinion.
- Mark 12: 29-31: Jesus' response. Jesus responds by quoting a passage of the Bible to say that the first commandment is "to love God with all your heart, with all your mind and with all your strength!" (Dt 6: 4-5). At the time of Jesus, the pious Jews made of this text of Deuteronomy a prayer which they recited three times a day: in the morning, at noon and in the evening. It was also one of the four verses written in the phylacteries (tefillin) that men (mostly) wore. Among them it was known as today we know the Our Father. And Jesus adds, quoting the Bible again, "the second one is this: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other more important commandment than this one." (Lev 19: 18). A brief and profound response! It is the summary of all that Jesus has taught about God and about life (Mt 7: 12).
- Mark 12: 32-33: The answer of the doctor of the Law. The doctor agrees with Jesus and draws this conclusion: "To love Him with all your heart, with all your understanding and strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself; this is far more important than any burnt offering or sacrifice." In other words, the commandment of love is more important than the commandments related to worship and sacrifice in the Temple. This affirmation was already used by the prophets of the Old Testament (Hos 6:6; Ps 40: 6-8; Ps 51: 16-17). Today, we would say that the practice of love is more important than novenas, promises, Masses, prayers, and processions.
- Mark 12: 34: The summary of the Kingdom. Jesus confirms the conclusion reached by the doctor and says, "You are not far from the Kingdom of God!" In fact, the Kingdom of God consists in recognizing that love toward God is equal to the love of neighbor. Because if God is Father, we all are sisters and

brothers and should show this in practice, living in community. "On these two commandments depend the Law and the prophets" (Mt 22: 4). The disciples must keep in mind, fix in their memory, in their intelligence, in the heart, in their hands and feet this important law of love: God is only attained through the total gift of self to our neighbor!

- The first and most important commandment. The most important and first commandment was and will always be: "to love God with all your heart, with all your mind and with all your strength" (Mk 12: 30). In the measure in which the people of God, throughout the centuries, have deepened the meaning and the importance of the love of God, it has become aware that God's love is true and real only in the measure in which it is made concrete in the love to neighbor. And thus, the second commandment which asks for the love for neighbor, is similar to the first commandment of God's love (Mt 22: 39; Mk 12: 31). "Anyone who says I love God, and hates his brother, is a liar" (1 Jn 4: 20). "On these two commandments hang the whole Law and the Prophets." (Mt 22: 40).

Personal Questions

- There are different kinds of love, some incomplete. There is love that is possessive: "I love my spouse, you can't have him/her." There is the love that wants to share the one/thing loved: "I love these candies! Have some!" There is love that begets obligation: "I have to take care of my cat." And there is the love that brings total service, as one does to a new baby: no one questions why the baby is upset, or advises the baby to eat less, but only responds with complete service at the moment.
- Which form of love do I give to God, really and truly, and which form of love would my friends, neighbors, or community say I give?
- Of these types of love, which do I have for the people around me? Is it different for the people I see but don't know personally? What should it be, and am I honest in my self-evaluation?
- I am on my way to the last Sunday Mass today. Someone approaches and needs my help. Do I miss Mass and help, or avoid the person so I can make it to Mass? How does your answer fit with these commandments from Jesus?

Concluding Prayer

Direct me in Your ways, Yahweh,
and teach me Your paths.

Encourage me to walk in Your truth and teach me
since You are the God who saves me. (Ps 25: 4-5)

Monday, November 4, 2024

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

God of power and mercy,
only with Your help can we offer You fitting service and praise.
May we live the faith we profess and trust Your promise of eternal life.
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 14: 12-14

Jesus said to His host, "When you give a lunch or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relations or rich neighbors, in case they invite you back and so repay you. No, when you have a party, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and then you will be blessed, for they have no means to repay you and so you will be repaid when the upright rise again."

Reflection

The Gospel today continues to present the teaching Jesus was giving on different themes, all related to curing in the setting of a banquet: a cure during a meal (Lk 14: 1-6), advice not to take the places of honor (Lk 14: 7-12), and advice to invite the excluded (Lk 14: 12-14). This organization of Jesus' words around a particular word, for example, table or banquet, helps one to understand the method used by the first Christians to keep the words of Jesus in their memory.

- Luke 14: 12: Interested invitation. Jesus is eating in the house of a Pharisee who has invited Him (Lk 14: 1). The invitation to share at table is the theme of the teaching of today's Gospel. There are different types of invitations: the interested invitations for the benefit of oneself and disinterested invitations for the benefit of others. Jesus says, "When you give a lunch or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relations or rich neighbors, in case they invite you back and so repay you." That was the normal custom of the people: to invite friends, brothers and relatives to eat. Nobody would sit at table with unknown people. They would sit around the table only with people who were their friends. That was the custom of the Jews. Even now we also act in the same way. Jesus thinks differently and orders us to invite unknown people. These were invitations which nobody made.
- Luke 14: 13-14: Disinterested invitation. Jesus says "On the contrary, when you have a party, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind; then you will be blessed, for they have no means to repay you. So you will be repaid when the upright rise again." Jesus orders them and us to break the closed circle and asks us to invite the excluded, the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. This was not the custom then and it is not today either. But Jesus insists, "Invite these people." Why? Because in the disinterested invitation, addressed to excluded and marginalized persons, there is a source of happiness: "And then you will be blessed for they have no means to repay you." This is a strange type of happiness, a different happiness! You will be blessed for they have no means to repay you. It is the happiness that comes from doing a totally

gratuitous gesture, without asking for anything. Jesus says that this is the happiness which God will give us in the Resurrection; the happiness of the Resurrection which He will give us not only at the end of history, but even now. To act in this way is to catch a glimpse of the happiness in the Resurrection!

It is the Kingdom which will be confirmed. The advice which Jesus gives us in the Gospel today recalls the sending out of the seventy-two on the mission to announce the Kingdom (Lk 10: 1-9). Among the different recommendations given on that occasion, as signs of the presence of the Kingdom, there is: (a) the invitation to the table and (b) the acceptance of the excluded: "Whenever you go into a town, where they make you welcome, eat what is put before you, cure those who are sick and say, the Kingdom of God is very near to you!" (Lk 10: 8-9) Here, in these recommendations, Jesus orders the transgression of that norm of legal purity which prevented fraternal living together.

Personal Questions

- An interested or disinterested invitation: which of these takes place in my life?
- If you invited people in a disinterested way, would this cause some difficulties? Which ones?

Concluding Prayer

Yahweh, my heart is not haughty, I do not set my sights too high.
I have taken no part in great affairs, in wonders beyond my scope.
No, I hold myself in quiet and silence, like a little child in its mother's arms, like a little child, so I keep myself. (Ps 131: 1-2)

Tuesday, November 5, 2024

Opening Prayer

God of power and mercy,
only with your help
can we offer you fitting service and praise.
May we live the faith we profess
and trust your promise of eternal life.
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 14: 15-24

One of those gathered round the table said to Jesus, 'Blessed is anyone who will share the meal in the kingdom of God!' But he said to him, 'There was a man who gave a great banquet, and he invited a large number of people. When the time for the banquet came, he sent his servant to say to those who had been

invited, "Come along: everything is ready now." But all alike started to make excuses.

The first said, "I have bought a piece of land and must go and see it. Please accept my apologies."

Another said, "I have bought five yoke of oxen and am on my way to try them out. Please accept my apologies."

Yet another said, "I have just got married and so am unable to come."

The servant returned and reported this to his master. Then the householder, in a rage, said to his servant, "Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in here the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame."

"Sir," said the servant, "your orders have been carried out and there is still room."

Then the master said to his servant, "Go to the open roads and the hedgerows and press people to come in, to make sure my house is full; because, I tell you, not one of those who were invited shall have a taste of my banquet."

Reflection

The Gospel today continues the reflection around themes linked to the table and the invitation. Jesus tells the parable of the banquet. Many people had been invited, but the majority did not go. The master of the feast was indignant because of the absence of those who had been invited and then sent his servants to call the poor, the crippled the blind and the lame. And even after that, there was still place. Then he ordered his servant to invite everybody, until his house was full. This parable was a light for the communities of the time of Luke.

In the communities at the time of Luke there were Christians, who had come from Judaism and Christians who came from the Gentiles, called pagans. Notwithstanding the difference in race, class and gender, they lived profoundly the ideal of sharing and of communion (Ac 2: 42; 4: 32; 5: 12). But there were many difficulties because some norms of legal purity prevented the Jews to eat with the pagans. And even after they had entered into the Christian community, some of them kept this old custom of not sitting at table with a pagan. This is the reason why Peter had a conflict with the community of Jerusalem because he entered into the house of Cornelius, a pagan and for having eaten with him (Ac 11: 3). Before these problems of the communities, Luke kept a series of words of Jesus regarding the banquet. (Lk 14: 1-24). The parable on which we are meditating is an image of what was happening in the communities.

- Luke 14: 15: *Blessed are those who will eat the bread of the Kingdom of God.* Jesus had finished telling two parables: one on the choice of places (Lk 14: 7-11), and the other on the choice of the guests who were invited (Lk 14: 12-14). While listening to this parable someone who was at table with Jesus must have picked up the importance of the teaching of Jesus and must have said: "*Blessed are those who eat the bread of the Kingdom of God!*" The Jews compared the future time of the Messiah to a banquet, characterized by gratitude and communion (Is 25: 6; 55: 1-2; Sal 22: 27). Hunger, poverty and the lack of so many things made the people hope that in the future they would obtain what they were lacking and did not have at present. The hope of the

Messianic goods, usually experienced in banquets, was a perspective of the end of time.

- Luke 14: 16-20: *The great banquet is ready.* Jesus responds with a parable. *There was a man who gave a great banquet and he invited a great number of people.* But the duty of each one prevents the guests from accepting the invitation. The first one says: "I have bought a piece of land and must go and see it!" The second "I have bought five yoke of oxen and am on my way to try them out!" The third one: "I have just got married and so am unable to come!" In the limits of the law those persons had the right not to accept the invitation (cf. Dt 20: 5-7).
- Luke 14: 21-22: *The invitation remains, it is not cancelled.* The master of the banquet was indignant in seeing that his invitation had not been accepted. In last instance, the one who is indignant is precisely Jesus because the norms of the strict observance of the law, reduced the space for people to be able to live the gratuity of an invitation to the house of friends, an invitation characterized by the fraternal spirit and by sharing. Thus the master of the feast orders the servants to invite the poor, the blind, the crippled, the lame. Those who were normally excluded because they were considered unclean, are now invited to sit around the table of the banquet.
- Luke 14: 23-24: *There is still place.* The room is not full. There is still place. Then, the master of the house ordered the servants to invite those passing on the street. Those are the pagans. They are also invited to sit around the table. Thus, in the banquet of the parable of Jesus, everybody sits around the same table, Jews and pagans. At the time of Luke, there were many problems which prevented the realization of this ideal of the common banquet. By means of the parable; Luke shows that the practice of the banquet came precisely from Jesus.

After the destruction of Jerusalem, in the year 70, the Pharisees took over the government in the Synagogues, demanding the rigid fulfilment of the norms which identified them as the Jewish people. The Jews who converted to Christianity were considered a threat, because they destroyed the walls which separated Israel from other people. The Pharisees tried to oblige them to abandon the faith in Jesus. And because they did not succeed, they drove them away from the Synagogues. All this brought about a slow and progressive separation between the Jews and the Christians which was a source of great suffering, especially for the converted Jews (Rm 9: 1-5). In the parable, Luke indicates very clearly that these converted Jews were not unfaithful to their people. All the contrary! They are the ones who are invited and accept the invitation. They are the true continuators of Israel. Those who were unfaithful were those who did not accept the invitation and did not want to recognize Jesus the Messiah (Lk 22: 66; Ac 13: 27).

Personal Questions

- In general, which are the persons who are invited and which are the persons who in general are not invited to our feasts?

- Which are the reasons which today limit the participation of persons in society and in the Church? And which are the reasons that some give to exclude themselves from the community? Are they just reasons?

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)

Wednesday, November 6, 2024

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

God of power and mercy, only with your help can we offer you fitting service and praise.

May we live the faith we profess and trust your promise of eternal life.

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 14: 25-33

Great crowds accompanied Jesus on his way and he turned and spoke to them. 'Anyone who comes to me without hating father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters, yes and his own life too, cannot be my disciple. No one who does not carry his cross and come after me can be my disciple.

'And indeed, which of you here, intending to build a tower, would not first sit down and work out the cost to see if he had enough to complete it? Otherwise, if he laid the foundation and then found himself unable to finish the work, anyone who saw it would start making fun of him and saying, "Here is someone who started to build and was unable to finish."

Or again, what king marching to war against another king would not first sit down and consider whether with ten thousand men he could stand up to the other who was advancing against him with twenty thousand? If not, then while the other king was still a long way off, he would send envoys to sue for peace. So in the same way, none of you can be my disciple without giving up all that he owns.

Reflection

The Gospel today speaks about discipleship and presents the conditions to be a disciple of Jesus. Jesus is on the way to Jerusalem, where he will die soon on the Cross. This is the context in which Jesus speaks about discipleship.

- Luke 14: 25: An example of catechesis.

The Gospel today is a beautiful example of how Luke transforms the words of

Jesus into catechesis for the people of the communities. He says: "Great crowds accompanied him. He turned and spoke to them." Jesus speaks to the great crowd, that is, he speaks to all, also to the persons of the communities at the time of Luke, and today he speaks for us. In the teaching which follows, Jesus gives the conditions for those who want to be his disciples.

- Luke 14: 25-26: First condition: to hate father and mother.

Some diminish the force of the word to hate and translate it as "to prefer Jesus to one's own parents." The original text uses the expression "to hate one's parents." In another place Jesus orders to love and respect parents (Lk 18, 20). How can this contradiction be explained? But is it a contradiction? At the time of Jesus the social and economic situation led the families to close themselves up in self and this prevented them to fulfil the law of ransom or liberation (goel), that is to help the brothers and sisters of the community (clan) who were threatened to lose their land or to become slaves (cf. Dt 15, 1-18; Lv 25, 23-43). Closed up in themselves the families weakened the life in the community. Jesus wants to reconstruct the life in community. This is why he asks to put an end to the restricted vision of the small family which closes up in itself and asks the family to open itself and to be united among themselves in a large family, in community. This is the sense of hating father and mother, and wife, sons, sisters and brothers. Jesus himself, when his parents of his small family wanted to take him back to Nazareth, he does not respond to their request. He ignores or hates their petition and extends his family saying: "Behold, my mother and my brothers! Anyone who does the will of God, is my brother, sister and mother" (Mk 3, 20-21.31-35). The family bonds of union cannot prevent the formation of the Community. This is the first condition.

- Luke 14: 27: Second condition: to carry the cross.

"No one who does not carry his cross and come after me can be my disciple." In order to understand well the importance of this second requirement we have to look at the context in which Luke places this word of Jesus. Jesus is going toward Jerusalem to be crucified and to die. To follow Jesus and to carry the cross means to go with him up to Jerusalem to be crucified with him. This recalls the attitude of the women who "followed and served him when he was still in Galilee and many others who went up to Jerusalem with him" (Mk 15, 41). This also reminds us of Paul's phrase in the Letter to the Galatians: "But as for me, it is out of the question that I should boast at all, except of the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (Ga 6,14)

- Luke 14: 28-32: Two parables.

Both of these parables have the same objective: that persons may think well before taking a decision. In the first parable he says: "Which of you here, intending to build a tower, would not first sit down and work out the cost to see if he had enough to complete it? Otherwise, if he laid the foundation and then found himself unable to finish the work, anyone who saw it would start making fun of him and saying: Here is someone who started to build and was unable to finish!" This parable needs no explanation. It speaks for itself: let

each one reflect well on his/her way of following Jesus and ask him/herself if he/she values well the conditions before taking the decision to become a disciple of Jesus.

The second parable: Or again, which king marching to war against another king would not first sit down and consider whether with ten thousand men he could stand up to the other who was advancing against him with twenty thousand?. If not, then while the other king was still a long way off, he would send envoys to sue for peace.” This parable has the same purpose of the one before. Some ask: “How is it that Jesus uses an example of war?” The question is a pertinent one for us who today know the wars. The Second World War (1939-1945) caused the death to about 54 million persons! At that time, though, the wars were as commercial concurrence between enterprises which today struggle among themselves to obtain the greatest profit or gain.

- Luke 14: 33: Conclusion for discipleship.

The conclusion is only one: to be Christian, to follow Jesus. Is something serious. For many people today, to be Christian is not a personal choice, and neither is it a decision for life, but a simple cultural phenomenon. They do not even think of making a choice. Anyone who is born a Brazilian is a Brazilian. He who is born Japanese is Japanese. He does not have to choose. He is born like that and will die like that. Many people are Christians because they were born like that and they die like that, without ever having had the idea of choosing or of assuming that which they are already by birth.

Personal Questions

- To be a Christian is something serious. I have to think out well my way of following Jesus. How does this take place in my life?
- “To hate one’s parents,” community or family! How do I put together these two things? Am I capable to harmonize them?

Concluding Prayer

Yahweh is my light and my salvation, whom should I fear? Yahweh is the fortress of my life, whom should I dread? (Ps 27: 1)

Thursday, November 7, 2024

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

God of power and mercy, only with your help can we offer you fitting service and praise. May we live the faith we profess and trust your promise of eternal life.

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 15: 1-10

The tax collectors and sinners, however, were all crowding round to listen to Jesus, and the Pharisees and scribes complained saying, 'This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.'

So he told them this parable: 'Which one of you with a hundred sheep, if he lost one, would fail to leave the ninety-nine in the desert and go after the missing one till he found it? And when he found it, would he not joyfully take it on his shoulders and then, when he got home, call together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, "Rejoice with me, I have found my sheep that was lost."

In the same way, I tell you, there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner repenting than over ninety-nine upright people who have no need of repentance.

'Or again, what woman with ten drachmas would not, if she lost one, light a lamp and sweep out the house and search thoroughly till she found it? And then, when she had found it, call together her friends and neighbors, saying to them, "Rejoice with me, I have found the drachma I lost."

In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing among the angels of God over one repentant sinner.'

Reflection

The Gospel today presents the first one of three parables united among themselves by one same word. It is a question of three things which were lost: the lost sheep (Lk 15: 3-7), the lost drachma (Lk 15: 8-10), and the lost son (Lk 15: 11-32). The three parables are addressed to the Pharisees and to the Doctors of the Law who criticized Jesus (Lk 15: 1-3). That is, they are addressed to the Pharisee and to the Scribe or doctor of the Law which is in each one of us.

- Luke 15: 1-3: Those to whom the parables are addressed. The first three verses describe the context in which the three parables were pronounced: "At that time, the tax collectors and sinners were all crowding round to listen to him. The Pharisees and Scribes complained." On one side there were the tax collectors and the sinners: on the other the Pharisees and the Doctors of the Law. Luke speaks exaggerating somewhat: "The tax collectors and the sinners were all crowding round to listen to Jesus." There was something in Jesus which attracted them. It is the word of Jesus which attracts them (cf. Is 50: 4). They want to listen to him. This is a sign that they do not feel condemned, but rather they feel accepted by him. The criticism of the Pharisees and the Scribes is the following: "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them!" When sending out the seventy-two disciples (Lk 10: 1-9), Jesus had ordered them to accept the excluded, the sick, the possessed (Mt 10: 8; Lk 10: 9) and to gather them for the banquet (Lk 10: 8). Luke 15: 4: The Parable of the lost sheep. The parable of the lost sheep begins with a question: "Which one of you with a hundred sheep, if he lost one, would fail to leave the ninety-nine in the desert and go after the missing one till he found it?" Before giving a

response, Jesus must have looked around to see who was listening to him to see how they would have answered. The question is formulated in such a way that the response can only be a positive one: "Yes, he will go after the lost sheep!" And you, how would you answer? Would you leave the ninety-nine in the field to go and look for the only one which got lost? Who would do this? Probably, the majority would have answered: "Jesus, who among us? Nobody would do such an absurd thing. The proverb says: "Better one bird in the hand than one hundred flying around!"

- Luke 15: 5-7: Jesus interprets the parable of the lost sheep. Now, in the parable the shepherd does that which nobody would do: to leave everything and to go and look for the lost sheep. God alone can assume such an attitude! Jesus wants that we become aware, conscious of the Pharisee or the Scribe which is in each one of us, The Pharisees and the Scribes abandoned the sinners and excluded them. They would have never gone to look for the lost sheep. They would have allowed it to get lost in the desert. They preferred the ninety-nine. But Jesus places himself in the place of the sheep which got lost and, which in that context of the official religion, would fall into despair, without the hope of being accepted. Jesus makes them and us know: "If you feel that you are a lost sinner, remember that for God you are worth more than the other ninety-nine sheep. And in case that you are converted, know that there will be "greater joy in heaven for a sinner who is converted, than for ninety-nine just who do not need conversion."
- Luke 15: 8-10: Parable of the lost drachma. The second Parable: "Or again, what woman with ten drachmas would not, if she lost one, light a lamp and sweep out the house and search thoroughly till she found it? And then, when she had found it, call together her friends and neighbors saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, I have found the drachma I lost. In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing among the angels of God over one repentant sinner.'" God rejoices with us. The angels rejoice with us. The parable serves to communicate hope to those who were threatened with despair because of the official religion. This message recalls what God tells us in the Book of the Prophet Isaiah: "Look, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands!" (Is 49: 16). "Since I regard you as precious, since you are honoured and I love you!" (Is 43: 4).

Personal Questions

- Would you go out to look for the lost sheep?
- Do you think that today the Church is faithful to this parable of Jesus?

Concluding Prayer

Seek 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)

Friday, November 8, 2024

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

God of power and mercy, only with your help can we offer you fitting service and praise.

May we live the faith we profess and trust your promise of eternal life.

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 16: 1-8

Jesus said to his disciples, 'There was a rich man, and he had a steward who was denounced to him for being wasteful with his property. He called for the man and said, "What is this I hear about you? Draw me up an account of your stewardship because you are not to be my steward any longer."

Then the steward said to himself, "Now that my master is taking the stewardship from me, what am I to do? Dig? I am not strong enough. Go begging? I should be too ashamed. Ah, I know what I will do to make sure that when I am dismissed from office there will be some to welcome me into their homes."

'Then he called his master's debtors one by one. To the first he said, "How much do you owe my master?" "One hundred measures of oil," he said. The steward said, "Here, take your bond; sit down and quickly write fifty." To another he said, "And you, sir, how much do you owe?" "One hundred measures of wheat," he said. The steward said, "Here, take your bond and write eighty."

'The master praised the dishonest steward for his astuteness. For the children of this world are more astute in dealing with their own kind than are the children of light.'

Reflection

Today the Gospel presents a parable that concerns administration of goods which is found only in Luke's Gospel. It is called the parable of the dishonest steward. It is a disconcerting parable. Luke says: "The master praised the dishonest steward for his astuteness." The master is Jesus himself and not the administrator or steward. How is that Jesus praises a corrupt employee?

- Luke 16: 1-2: The steward is threatened to lose his job. "There was a rich man, and he had a steward, who was denounced to him for being wasteful with his property. He called for the man and said, 'What is this I hear about you? Draw me up an account of your stewardship because you are not to be my steward anymore.'" This example taken from the world of business and of work speaks for itself. It refers to the existing corruption. The master discovers the corruption and decides to send away the dishonest steward. The steward, unexpectedly, finds himself in an emergency, obliged by the unforeseen circumstances to find a way out to be able to survive. When God becomes

present in the life of a person, unexpectedly everything changes, and the person finds himself/herself in an emergency. The person must make a decision and find a way out.

- Luke 16: 3-4: What to do? Which is the way out? “Then the steward said to himself, now that my master is taking the stewardship from me what am I to do? Dig? I am not strong enough. Go begging? I should be too ashamed.” He begins to reflect to find a way out. He analyses, one by one, the possible alternatives: to dig or work the land to survive, he feels that he does not have the strength to do this, and to beg, he would feel ashamed. He analyses things and calculates well the possible alternatives. “Ah, I know what I will do to make sure that when I am dismissed from office there will be some to welcome me into their homes.” It is a question of trying to guarantee his future. The steward is coherent with his way of thinking and living.
- Luke 16: 5-7: Execution of the solution he found. “Then he called his master’s debtors, one by one, and said to the first one: How much do you owe my master? One hundred measures of oil, he said. The steward said, ‘Here, take your bond, sit down and quickly write fifty. Then he said to another one, and you, sir, how much do you owe? ‘One hundred measures of wheat’, he answered. The steward said, ‘Here take your bond and write eighty.’” In his total lack of ethics, the steward was coherent. The criteria of his action are not honesty and justice, nor the good of the master whom he depends on to live and to survive, but it is his own interest. He wants to have the guarantee that there will be someone who will receive him in his house.
- Luke 16: 8: The Master praises the dishonest steward. And look this is the disconcerting conclusion: “The Master praises the dishonest steward for his astuteness: For the children of this world are more astute in dealing with their own kind than are the children of light.” The word Master or Lord indicates Jesus and not the rich man. The latter would never praise a dishonest employee working with him in the service and that now he robs even more, 50 measures of oil and 20 sacks of wheat! In the parable the one who extends the praise is Jesus. He certainly does not praise the theft, but the presence of spirit of the steward. He knew how to calculate things well and finds a way out, when unexpectedly he finds himself without a job. In this way the children of this world know how to be experts in their own things, and in the same way, the children of light should learn from them to be experts in the solution to their problems, using the criteria of the Kingdom and not the criteria of this world. “Be cunning as serpents and innocent as doves” (Mt 10: 16).

Personal Questions

- Am I coherent?
- Which criteria do I use in the solution of my problems?

Concluding Prayer

One thing I ask of Yahweh, one thing I seek: to dwell in Yahweh's house all the days of my life, to enjoy the sweetness of Yahweh, to seek out his temple. (Ps 27: 4)

Saturday, November 9, 2024

Dedication of the Lateran Basilica

Opening Prayer

God of power and mercy, protect us from all harm. Give us freedom of spirit and health in mind and body to do your work on earth.

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 - John 2: 13-22

When the time of the Jewish Passover was near Jesus went up to Jerusalem, and in the Temple he found people selling cattle and sheep and doves, and the money changers sitting there.

Making a whip out of cord, he drove them all out of the Temple, sheep and cattle as well, scattered the money changers' coins, knocked their tables over and said to the dove sellers, 'Take all this out of here and stop using my Father's house as a market.'

Then his disciples remembered the words of scripture: I am eaten up with zeal for your house.

The Jews intervened and said, 'What sign can you show us that you should act like this?' Jesus answered, 'Destroy this Temple, and in three days I will raise it up.'

The Jews replied, 'It has taken forty-six years to build this Temple: are you going to raise it up again in three days?' But he was speaking of the Temple that was his body, and when Jesus rose from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the scripture and what he had said.

Reflection

- Context.

Our passage contains a clear and unmistakable teaching of Jesus in the Temple. Previously John the Baptist had given witness of Jesus saying that He was the Messiah (1: 29); the first disciples, on the indication of the Baptist, have recognized him as the Lamb of God, a quality of the Messiah: to inaugurate a new Passover and covenant, to bring about the definitive liberation of man (Jn 1: 35-51); in Cana, Jesus works a first sign to show his glory (Jn 2: 1-12): the glory becomes visible, it can be contemplated, therefore, it manifests itself. It is the glory of the Father present in the person of Jesus, and which manifests itself at the beginning of his activity, in this way, anticipating his "hour" (17: 1). In what way is his glory manifested? God restores gratuitously with man a new relationship; he unites him intimately to him giving him the capacity to love

like He loves, through the Spirit who purifies the heart of man and makes him son of God. But it is necessary to recognize the immutable love of God, manifested in Jesus, responding with faith, with a personal adherence. Jesus and the Temple. Now Jesus is in Jerusalem, in the Temple fulfilling the prophecy of Malachi (Ml 3: 1-3), he proclaims himself Messiah. Such a presence of Jesus is above all his teaching that produces tension. Now, the reader understands how the great disputes with the Jews always take place in the Temple; in this place Jesus pronounces his substantial denunciations; his task is to lead the people outside the Temple (2: 15; 10: 4). In last instance Jesus was condemned because he represented a danger for the Temple and for the people. Jesus goes to Jerusalem on the occasion of the Passover of the Jews: it is clamorous to manifest himself in public and to reveal to all that he is the Messiah. During that feast Jerusalem is full of pilgrims who have come from all parts and therefore his actions would have had a great effect in the whole of Palestine. When he arrived in Jerusalem he immediately is seen in the Temple where there are a number of people selling cattle, sheep and doves and the money changers sitting there. The encounter in the Temple is not with persons who seek God but dealers of the sacred: the amount paid to be able to open a stand to be able to sell was given to the high priest. Jesus chooses this occasion (the Passover) this place (the Temple) to give a sign. He takes a whip, an instrument which was a symbol of the Messiah who punishes vices and evil practices, and he drives out everybody from the Temple, together with the cattle and sheep. Worthy to be noted is his act against those selling the doves (v. 15). The dove was an animal used for the propitiatory holocausts (Lv 9: 14-17), in the sacrifices of expiation and of purification (Lv 12: 8; 15: 14, 29), especially if those who offered it were poor (Lv 5: 7; 14: 22, 30ff). The sellers, those who sold the doves, that is to say, sold reconciliation with God for money.

- The house of my Father.

The expression wants to indicate that Jesus in his actions behaves as a Son. He represents the Father in the world. They have transformed the worship of God into a market, a place for trading. The Temple is no longer the place of encounter with God, but a market where the presence of money is in force. Worship has become the pretext to gain more. Jesus attacks the central institution of Israel, the temple: the symbol of the people and of the election. He denounces that the Temple has been deprived of its historical function: to be the sign of the dwelling of God in the midst of his people. The first reaction to Jesus' action comes from the disciples who associate this to Psalm 69: 10: "I am eaten up with zeal for your house." The second reaction comes from the high priests who respond in the name of those selling in the Temple: "What sign can you show us that you should act like this?" (v. 18). They have asked him for a sign; he gives them that of his death: "Destroy this Temple and in three days I will raise it up" (v. 19). Jesus is the Temple that assures of the presence of God in the world, the presence of his love; the death on the cross will make of him the only and definite Temple of God. The Temple constructed by the hands of man has fallen into decay; Jesus will be the one to substitute it, because He is now the presence of God in the world; the Father is present in Him.

Personal Questions

- Have you understood that the sign of love of God for you is no longer the temple but a Person: Jesus crucified?
- Do you not know that this sign is turned to you personally to bring about your definitive liberation?

Concluding Prayer

God is both refuge and strength for us, a help always ready in trouble; so we shall not be afraid though the earth be in turmoil, though mountains tumble into the depths of the sea. (Ps 46: 1-2)

Sunday, November 10, 2024

32nd Sunday of Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

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

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

Gospel Reading – Mark 12: 38-44

A Key to the Reading:

The Gospel text of this Sunday presents us with two opposing but connected facts: on the one hand we have Jesus criticizing the Scribes who used religion to exploit poor widows, and, on the other hand, we have the example of the poor widow who gave to the Temple even what she had to live on. These facts are relevant even today!

A Division of the Text to Help With the Reading:

- Mark 12: 38-40: Jesus criticizes the exploitation of the Scribes
- Mark 12: 41-42: Jesus watches people who place their alms in the treasury of the Temple

- Mark 12: 43-44: Jesus reveals the value of the poor widow's action

Text:

³⁸ In his teaching he said, 'Beware of the scribes who like to walk about in long robes, to be greeted respectfully in the market squares, ³⁹ to take the front seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets; ⁴⁰ these are the men who devour the property of widows and for show offer long prayers. The more severe will be the sentence they receive.'

⁴¹ He sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the treasury, and many of the rich put in a great deal. ⁴² A poor widow came and put in two small coins, the equivalent of a penny. ⁴³ Then he called his disciples and said to them, 'In truth I tell you, this poor widow has put more in than all who have contributed to the treasury; ⁴⁴ for they have all put in money they could spare, but she in her poverty has put in everything she possessed, all she had to live on.'

A Moment of Prayerful Silence

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

Some Questions

to help us in our personal reflection.

- What pleased or struck you most in this text? Why?
- What does Jesus criticize and what does he praise in the doctors of the Law?
- What social and religious imbalances of that period do we find in the text?
- How is it that the two coins of the widow are of more value than the great amount put in by the rich? Look carefully at the text and see what follows: "Why does Jesus praise the poor widow?"
- What message does this text convey to us today?

To Go Deeper Into the Theme

- Yesterday's and Today's Context:

The context in Jesus' time. Mark's text 12: 38-44 recounts the last part of Jesus' activities in Jerusalem (Mk 11: 1 to 12: 44). Those were very intense days, full of conflicts: the driving out of the sellers in the Temple (Mk 11: 12-26), and many discussions with the authorities: (Mk 11: 27 to 12: 12), with the Pharisees, with the Herodians and the Sadducees (Mk 12: 13-27) and with the doctors of the Law (Mk 12: 28-37). This Sunday's text (Mk 12: 38-44) reports a final word of criticism by Jesus concerning the bad behavior of the doctors of the Law (Mk 12: 38-40) and a word of praise for the good behavior of the widow. Almost at the end of his activities in Jerusalem, Jesus sits in front of the treasury where people were putting their alms for the Temple. Jesus draws the disciples' attention to the action of a poor widow and teaches them the value of sharing (Mk 12: 41-44).

- The Context in Mark's Time.

During the first forty years of the Church's history, from the 30's to the 70's, the Christian communities, for the most part, were made up of poor people (1 Cor 1: 26). Later some rich people or those who had various problems joined them. The social tensions that existed in the Roman Empire, began to be felt also in the life of the communities. For instance, divisions came to the fore when the communities came together to celebrate the supper (1Cor 11: 20- 22), or when they met together (James 2: 1-4). Thus, the teaching concerning the action of the widow was very real for them. It was like looking into a mirror, because Jesus compares the behaviour of the rich with that of the poor.

- Today's Context.

Jesus praises the poor widow because she could share more than the rich people did. Many poor today do the same. People say: The poor never allow another poor person to die of hunger. But sometimes even this is not true. Donna Cícera, a poor lady who went from the country to the periphery of a great city used to say: "In the country, I was very poor, but I always had something to share with another poor person who knocked on my door. Now that I am in the city, when I see a poor person who knocks on my door, I hide for shame because I have nothing to share!" Thus we see on the one hand rich people who have everything, and on the other poor people who have almost nothing to share, and yet share the little they have.

A Commentary on the Text:

- Mark 12: 38-40: *Jesus criticizes the doctors of the Law.*

Jesus draws his disciples' attention to the hypocritical and exploiting behaviour of some doctors of the Law. "Doctors" or Scribes were those who taught people the Law of God. But they taught it only by word because their lives witnessed to the opposite. They liked going about the squares wearing long tunics, accepting the greetings of people, taking first places in the synagogues and places of honour at banquets. In other words, they were people who wished to appear important. They used their knowledge and their profession as a means for climbing the social ladder and of enriching themselves, and not for serving. They liked to visit widows and recite long prayers in exchange for money! Jesus ends by saying: "The more severe will be the sentence they receive!"

- Mark 12: 41-42: *The almsgiving of the widow.*

Jesus and the disciples were seated in front of the treasury of the Temple and watched people placing their alms in the treasury. The poor gave a few cents, the rich put in bills of great value. The treasury became full. All gave something for the upkeep of the cult, to support the priests and for the maintenance of the Temple. Some of the money was used to help the poor, since in those days there was no social security. The poor depended on public charity. The most needy among the poor were the orphans and widows. They had nothing. They completely depended on the charity of others. But even though they had nothing, they made an effort to share with others the little they had. Thus, a very poor widow places her alms in the treasury, just a few

cents!

- Mark 12: 43-44: *Jesus shows us where to find God's will.*

What is of greater value: the few cents of the widow or the thousand coins of the rich? For the disciples, the thousand coins of the rich were far more useful to perform acts of charity than the widow's few cents. They thought that peoples' problems could be solved by means of a lot of money. On the occasion of the multiplication of the loaves, they said to Jesus: "Are we to go and spend two hundred denarii on bread for them to eat?" (Mk 6: 37) Indeed, for those who think this way, the two cents of the widow are of no use. But Jesus says: "This poor widow has put more in than all who have contributed to the treasury." Jesus has different criteria. In calling the attention of the disciples to the action of the widow, he teaches them and us where we must look for the manifestation of God's will, that is, in sharing. If today we shared the goods that God has placed in the universe for the whole of humanity, there would be neither poverty nor hunger. There would be enough for all and there would be some left over for others.

Further Information: Almsgiving, Sharing, Wealth

The practice of almsgiving was very important for the Jews. It was considered a "good work" (Mt 6: 1-4), because the law of the Old Testament said: "*There will never cease to be poor people in the country, and that is why I am giving you this command: Always be open handed with your brother, and with anyone in your country who is in need and poor*" (Dt 15: 11). Alms placed in the treasury, whether for the cult or for the maintenance of the Temple or for those in need, orphans and widows, were considered an act pleasing to God. Almsgiving was a way of sharing with others, a way of recognizing that all goods and gifts belong to God and that we are but administrators of these gifts, so that there may be an abundance in this life for all.

It was from the book of Exodus that the people of Israel learnt the importance of almsgiving, of sharing. The forty years' journey in the desert was necessary to overcome the desire for accumulation that came from the Pharaoh of Egypt and that was well implanted in the minds of the people. It is easy to leave Pharaoh's country. It is difficult to free oneself of Pharaoh's mentality. The ideology of the great is false and deceiving. It was necessary to experience hunger in the desert to learn that what is necessary for life is for all. This is what the Manna teaches: "No one who had collected more had too much, no one who had collected less had too little" (Ex 16: 18).

But the tendency to accumulate was there all the time and was very strong. And it constantly reappears in the human heart. It is precisely because of this tendency to accumulate that the great empires in the history of humanity were formed. The desire to possess and to accumulate is at the very heart of the ideology of these human empires or kingdoms. Jesus points to the conversion required to enter the Kingdom of God. He says to the rich young man: "Go and sell what you own and give the money to the poor" (Mk 10: 21). This same requirement is echoed in the other Gospels: "Sell your possessions and give to those in need. Get yourselves purses that do not wear out, treasure that will not fail you, in heaven where no thief can reach it and no moth destroy it" (Lk 12: 33-

34; Mt 6: 9-20). Then Jesus adds the reason for this demand: *“For wherever your treasure is, that is where your heart will be too.”*

The practice of sharing, of almsgiving and of solidarity is one of the marks of the Spirit of Jesus, given to us on Pentecost (Acts 2: 1-13), and that he wishes to make present in the communities. The result of the outpouring of the Spirit is precisely this: *“None of the members was ever in want, as all those who owned land or houses would sell them, and bring the money from the sale of them, to present it to the apostles”* (Acts 4: 34-35^a; 2: 44-45). These alms received by the apostles were not accumulated but were rather *“then distributed to any who might be in need”* (Acts 4: 35b; 2: 45).

On the one hand, the coming of rich people into the communities made it possible to expand Christianity, because these offered better conditions to the missionary movement. However, on the other hand, the accumulation of goods blocked the movement of solidarity and of sharing inspired by the force of the Spirit of Pentecost. James wishes to help such people to understand that they had gone the wrong way: *“Well now you rich! Lament, weep for the miseries that are coming to you. Your wealth is rotting, your clothes are all moth-eaten.”* (Jm 5: 1-3). We all need to become students of that poor widow who shared what she had to live on, so as to learn the way to the Kingdom (Mk 12: 41-44).

Praying a Psalm 62 (61)

God is Strength and Love

In God alone there is rest for my soul, from him comes my safety; he alone is my rock, my safety, my stronghold so that I stand unshaken. How much longer will you set on a victim, all together, intent on murder, like a rampart already leaning over, a wall already damaged?

Trickery is their only plan, deception their only pleasure, with lies on their lips they pronounce a blessing, with a curse in their hearts. Rest in God alone, my soul! He is the source of my hope. He alone is my rock, my safety, my stronghold, so that I stand unwavering.

In God is my safety and my glory, the rock of my strength.

In God is my refuge; trust in him, you people, at all times. Pour out your hearts to him, God is a refuge for us.

Ordinary people are a mere puff of wind, important people a delusion; set both on the scales together, and they are lighter than a puff of wind. Put no trust in extortion, no empty hopes in robbery; however, much wealth may multiply, do not set your heart on it.

Once God has spoken, twice have I heard this: Strength belongs to God, to you, Lord, faithful love; and you repay everyone as their deeds deserve.

Final Prayer

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

Monday, November 11, 2024

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

God of power and mercy, protect us from all harm. Give us freedom of spirit and health in mind and body to do your work on earth. 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 17: 1-6

Jesus said to His disciples, "scandals are sure to come, but alas for the one through whom they occur! It would be better for such a person to be thrown into the sea with a millstone round the neck than to be the downfall of a single one of these little ones.

Keep watch on yourselves! If your brother does something wrong, rebuke him and, if he is sorry, forgive him.

And if he wrongs you seven times a day and seven times comes back to you and says, 'I am sorry,' you must forgive him."

The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith." The Lord replied, "If you had faith like a mustard seed you could say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it would obey you."

Reflection

Today the Gospel gives us three different words of Jesus. One on how to avoid causing scandal or scandalizing the little ones, the other one on the importance of pardon and a third one on faith in God which we should have.

- Luke 17: 1-2: First word: To avoid scandal. "Jesus said to His disciples: "It is unavoidable that there are scandals, but alas for the one through whom they occur. It would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a millstone around the neck than to be the downfall of one of these little ones." To cause scandal means to make people trip and fall. At the level of faith, it means that which drives away the person from the right path. To scandalize the little ones means to be the cause of their drawing away from God and to make them lose their faith in God. Anyone who does this deserves the following sentence: "A millstone round the neck and to be thrown into the sea!" Why such severity? Because Jesus identifies Himself with the little ones who are the poor (Mt 25: 40, 45). They are those He prefers and the first ones to whom the Good News will be given (cf. Lk 4: 18). Anyone who touches them touches Jesus! Because of our way of living faith, we Christians throughout the centuries have been the cause of why the little ones have many times drawn away from the Church and have gone towards other religions. They have not been able any longer to

believe, as the Apostle said in the Letter to the Romans quoting the Prophet Isaiah: "In fact, it is your fault that the name of God is held in contempt among the nations." (Rm 2: 24; Is 52: 5; Ez 36: 22). Up to what point are we guilty? Is it our fault? Do we also deserve the millstone around the neck?

- Luke 17: 3-4: Second word: Forgive your brother. "If your brother does something wrong rebuke him and, if he is sorry, forgive him. And if he wrongs you seven times a day and seven times comes back to you and says, 'I am sorry,' you must forgive him." Seven times a day! This is not little! Jesus asks very much! In the Gospel of Matthew, He says that we should forgive seventy times seven! (Mt 18: 22). Forgiveness and reconciliation are some of the themes on which Jesus insists the most. The grace to be able to forgive persons and to reconcile them among themselves and with God was granted to Peter (Mt 16: 19), to the Apostles (Jn 20: 23), and to the community (Mt 18: 18). The parable on the need to forgive our neighbor leaves no doubt: if we do not forgive our brothers we cannot receive pardon from God (Mt 18: 22-35; 6: 12, 15; Mk 11: 26). There is no proportion between the pardon that we receive from God and the pardon that we have to offer to our neighbor. The pardon with which God forgives us gratuitously is like ten thousand talents compared to one hundred denarii (Mt 18: 23- 35). It is estimated that ten thousand talents are 174 tons of gold. One hundred denarii are not more than 30 grams of gold.
- Luke 17: 5-6: Third word: Increase our faith. "The apostles said to the Lord: 'Increase our faith!'" The Lord answered: If you had faith like a mustard seed you could say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea', and it would obey you." In this context in Luke, the question of the apostles seems to be motivated by the order of Jesus to forgive, in one day, up to seventy times seven the brother or the sister who sins against us. It is not easy to forgive. It is only with great faith in God that it is possible to reach the point of having such a great love that it makes it possible for us to forgive, in one day, up to seventy times seven the brother who sins against us. Humanly speaking, in the eyes of the world, to forgive in this way is foolish and a scandal. However, for us this attitude is the expression of divine wisdom which forgives us infinitely much more. Paul said: "We announce Christ crucified: a stumbling block for the Jews and foolishness for the gentiles (I Co 1: 23).

Personal Questions

- In my life, have I been a cause of scandal for my neighbor? Have others been a cause of scandal for me?
- Am I capable to forgive seven times a day my brother or my sister who offends me, or even seventy times seven times a day?

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)

Tuesday, November 12, 2024

Opening Prayer

God of power and mercy, protect us from all harm. Give us freedom of spirit and health in mind and body to do your work on earth.

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 17: 7-10

Jesus 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."

Reflection

The Gospel today narrates the parable which is found only in Luke's Gospel, and has no parallel in the other Gospels. The parable wants to teach that our life has to be characterized by an attitude of service. It begins with three questions and at the end Jesus himself gives the answer.

- Luke 17: 7-9: The three questions of Jesus. It treats of three questions taken from daily life, and therefore, the auditors have to think each one on his own experience to give a response according to that experience. The first question: "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?'" All will answer: "No!" Second question: "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?'" All will answer: "Yes! Certainly!" Third question: "Must he be grateful to the servant for doing what he was told?" All will answer "No!" The way in which Jesus asks the questions, people become aware in which way he wants to orientate our thought. He wants us to be servants to one another.
- Luke 17: 10: The response of Jesus. At the end Jesus himself draws a conclusion which was already implicit in the questions: "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.'" Jesus himself has given us example when he said: "The Son of Man has not come to be served, but to serve" (Mk 10: 45). Service is a theme which Luke likes. Service represents the form in which the poor in the time of Jesus, the anawim, were waiting for the Messiah: not like a king and glorious Messiah, high priest or judge, but rather as the Servant of Yahweh, announced by Isaiah (Is 42: 1-9). Mary, the Mother of Jesus, says to the Angel: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord, may it be done to me according to your word!" (Lk 1: 38). In Nazareth, Jesus presents himself as the Servant described

by Isaiah (Lk 4: 18-19 and Is 61: 1-2). In Baptism and in the Transfiguration, he was confirmed by the Father who quotes the words addressed by God to the Servant (Lk 3: 22; 9: 35 e Is 42: 1). Jesus asks his followers: "Anyone who wants to be first among you must be your slave" (Mt 20: 27). Useless servants! This is the definition of the Christian. Paul speaks about this to the members of the community of Corinth when he writes: "I did the planting, Apollos did the watering, but God gave growth. In this neither the planter nor the waterer counts for anything, only God who gave growth" (1 Co 3: 6-7). Paul and Apollos are nothing; only simple instruments, "Servants." The only one who counts is God, He alone! (1 Co 3: 7).

- To serve and to be served. Here in this text, the servant serves the master and not the master the servant. But in the other text of Jesus the contrary is said: "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" (Lk 12: 37). In this text, the master serves the servant and not the servant the master. In the first text, Jesus spoke in the present. In the second text, Jesus is speaking in the future. This contrast is another way of saying: the one who is ready to lose his life out of love for Jesus and the Gospel will find it (Mt 10: 39; 16: 25). Anyone who serves God in this present life will be served by God in the future life!

Personal Questions

- How do I define my life?
- Do I ask myself the three questions of Jesus? Do I live, perhaps, like a useless servant?

Concluding Prayer

The lives of the just are in Yahweh's care, their birthright will endure forever. Yahweh guides a strong man's steps and keeps them firm; and takes pleasure in him. (Ps 37: 18, 23)

Wednesday, November 13, 2024

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

God of power and mercy, protect us from all harm.
Give us freedom of spirit and health in mind and body to do your work on earth.
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 17: 11-19

Now it happened that on the way to Jerusalem Jesus was travelling in the borderlands of Samaria and Galilee.

As he entered one of the villages, ten men suffering from a virulent skin-disease came to meet him. They stood some way off and called to him, 'Jesus! Master! Take pity on us.'

When he saw them he said, 'Go and show yourselves to the priests.' Now as they were going away they were cleansed.

Finding himself cured, one of them turned back praising God at the top of his voice and threw himself prostrate at the feet of Jesus and thanked him. The man was a Samaritan.

This led Jesus to say, 'Were not all ten made clean? The other nine, where are they? It seems that no one has come back to give praise to God, except this foreigner.' And he said to the man, 'Stand up and go on your way. Your faith has saved you.'

Reflection

In today's Gospel, Luke gives an account of the cure of the ten lepers, of whom only one thanked Jesus. And he was a Samaritan! Gratitude is another theme which is very typical of Luke: to live in an attitude of gratitude and to praise God for everything which we receive from Him. This is why Luke says many times that people were admired and praised God for the things that Jesus did (Lk 2: 28, 38; 5: 25, 26; 7: 16; 13: 13; 17: 15, 18; 18: 43; 19: 37; etc). The Gospel of Luke gives us several canticles and hymns which express this experience of gratitude and of thanksgiving (Lk 1: 46-55; 1: 68-79; 2: 29-32).

- Luke 17: 11: Jesus on his way to Jerusalem. Luke recalls that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem, passing through Samaria to go to Galilee. From the beginning of his journey (Lk 9: 52) up until now (Lk 17: 11), Jesus walks through Samaria. It is only now that he is leaving Samaria, passing through Galilee to reach Jerusalem. That means that the important teachings given in these last chapters from the 9th to the 17th were all given on a territory which was not Jewish. To hear that must have been a great joy for Luke's communities, which were from Paganism. Jesus the pilgrim continues his journey toward Jerusalem. He continues to eliminate the differences or inequalities which men have created. He continues on the long and painful road of the periphery toward the capital city, from a religion closed up in itself toward an open religion which knows how to accept others as brothers and sisters, sons and daughters of the same Father. This openness is manifested also in the acceptance given to the ten lepers.
- Luke 17: 12-13: The calling out of the lepers. Ten lepers went close to Jesus; they stopped at a distance and called out: "Jesus, Master! Take pity on us!" The leper was a person who was excluded; was marginalized and despised; and had no right to live with the family. According to the law of purity, lepers had to go around with torn clothes and uncombed hair, calling out: "Impure! Impure!" (Lv 13: 45-46). For the lepers to look for a cure meant the same thing as to seek purity in order to be able to be integrated again into the community. They could not get close to others (Lv 13: 45-46). Anyone who was touched by a leper became unclean and that prevented him from being able to address himself

to God. By means of crying out they expressed their faith in Jesus who could cure them and give them back purity. To obtain purity meant to feel again accepted by God and be able to address him to receive the blessings promised to Abraham.

- Luke 17: 44). The priest had to verify the cure and bear witness to the purity of the one who had been cured (Lv 14: 1-32). The response of Jesus demanded great faith on the part of the lepers. They had to go to the priest as if they had already been cured, when in reality their bodies continued to be covered with leprosy. But they believed in Jesus' word and went to the priest. And it happened that, along the way, the cure took place. They were purified. This cure recalls the story of the purification of Naaman from Syria (2 Kgs 5: 9-10). The prophet Elisha orders the man to go and wash in the Jordan. Naaman had to believe in the word of the prophet. Jesus orders the ten lepers to present themselves to the priests. They should believe in the word of Jesus.
- Luke 17: 15-16: Reaction of the Samaritan. "One of them, seeing himself cured, turned back praising God at the top of his voice; and threw himself prostrate at the feet of Jesus and thanked him. The man was a Samaritan." Why did the others not return? Why only the Samaritan? According to the opinion of the Jews of Jerusalem, the Samaritan did not observe the law as he should. Among the Jews there was the tendency to observe the law to be able to merit or deserve or acquire justice. Thanks to the observance, they already had accumulated merits and credit before God. Gratitude and gratuity do not form part of the vocabulary of the persons who live their relationship with God in this way. Perhaps this is the reason why they do not thank God for the benefits received. In the parable of yesterday's Gospel, Jesus had formulated the same question: "Must he be grateful to the servant for doing what he was told?" (Lk 17: 9) And the answer was: "No!" The Samaritan represents the persons who have a clear conscience that we, human beings, have no merits or rights before God. Everything is grace, beginning from the gift of one's own life!
- Luke 17: 17-19: The final observation of Jesus. Jesus observes: "Were not all ten made clean? The other nine, where are they? It seems that no one has come back to give praise to God except this foreigner?" For Jesus, to thank the others for the benefit received is a way of rendering praise that is due to God. On this point, the Samaritans gave a lesson to the Jews. Today the poor are those who carry out the role of the Samaritan and help us to rediscover this dimension of gratuity of life. Everything that we receive should be considered as a gift from God who comes to us through the brother and the sister.
- The welcome given to the Samaritan in the Gospel of Luke. For Luke, the place which Jesus gave to the Samaritans is the same as that which the communities had to reserve for the pagans. Jesus presents a Samaritan as a model of gratitude (Lk 17: 17-19) and of love toward neighbor (Lk 10: 30-33). This must have been quite shocking, because for the Jews, the Samaritans or pagans were the same thing. They could have no access inside the Temple of Jerusalem, nor participate in the worship. They were considered as bearers of impurity, they were impure from birth, from the cradle. For Luke, instead the Good News of Jesus is addressed in the first place to the persons of these groups who were considered unworthy to receive it. The salvation of God which reaches us through Jesus is purely a gift. It does not depend on the

merits of anyone.

Personal Questions

- And you, do you generally thank persons? Do you thank out of conviction or simply because of custom? And in prayer: do you give thanks or do you forget?
- To live with gratitude is a sign of the presence of the Kingdom in our midst. How can we transmit to others the importance of living in gratitude and in gratuity?

Concluding Prayer

Yahweh is my shepherd, I lack nothing. In grassy meadows he lets me lie. By tranquil streams he leads me. (Ps 23: 1-2)

Thursday, November 14, 2024

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

God of power and mercy, protect us from all harm. Give us freedom of spirit and health in mind and body to do your work on earth.

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 17: 20-25

Asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was to come, Jesus gave them this answer, 'The coming of the kingdom of God does not admit of observation and there will be no one to say, "Look, it is here! Look, it is there!" For look, the kingdom of God is among you.'

He said to the disciples, 'A time will come when you will long to see one of the days of the Son of man and will not see it.

They will say to you, "Look, it is there!" or, "Look, it is here!" Make no move; do not set off in pursuit; for as the lightning flashing from one part of heaven lights up the other, so will be the Son of man when his Day comes. But first he is destined to suffer grievously and be rejected by this generation.

Reflection

Today's Gospel gives us the discussion between Jesus and the Pharisees on the coming of the Kingdom. The Gospel today and that of the following days deal with the coming of the end of time.

- Luke 17: 20-21: The Kingdom is among you. "Asked when the Kingdom of God was to come?" Jesus answered: "The coming of the Kingdom of God does not admit of observation and there will be no one to say, 'Look, it is here! Look, it

is there! For look, the Kingdom of God is among you!" The Pharisees thought that the Kingdom could come only after people would have reached the perfect observance of the Law of God. For them, the coming of the Kingdom would be the reward of God for the good behavior of people, and the Messiah would have come in a very solemn way as a king, received by his people. Jesus says the contrary. The coming of the Kingdom cannot be observed as the coming of an earthly king is observed. For Jesus, the Kingdom of God has already come! It is already among us, independently of our effort or merit. Jesus sees things in a different way. He has another way of reading life. He prefers the Samaritan who lives with gratitude to the nine who think that they merit the good that they receive from God (Lk 17: 17-19).

- Luke 17: 22-24: The signs to recognize the coming of the Son of Man. "A time will come when you will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man and will not see it. They will say to you, 'Look it is there! or Look, it is here!' Make no move, do not set off in pursuit; for as the lightning flashing from one part of heaven lights up the other, so will be the Son of Man when his Day comes." In this affirmation of Jesus there are elements that are taken from the apocalyptic vision of history, quite common in the first centuries and after Jesus. The apocalyptic vision of history has the following characteristic: in the time of great persecutions and of oppression, the poor have the impression that God loses control of history. They feel lost, without a horizon and without any hope of liberation. In those moments of apparent absence of God, prophecy assumes the form of apocalypse. The apocalyptic, seek to enlighten the desperate situation with the light of faith to help the people not to lose hope and to continue to have courage on the way. To show that God does not lose control of history, they describe the different stages of the realization of the project of God through history. Begun in a determinate significant moment in the past, this project of God advances, stage after stage, through the situations lived by the poor, until the final victory is obtained at the end of history. In this way, the apocalyptic place the present moment like a stage which has already been foreseen in the overall project of God. Generally, the last stage, before the coming of the end is represented like a moment of suffering and of crisis, of which many have tried to profit to deceive people saying: "They will tell you: Look it is here, or look it is there; do not move, do not follow them. Because like lightning flashing from one part of heaven lights up the other, so will be the Son of man when his Day comes." Having the eyes of faith which Jesus communicates, the poor can perceive that the Kingdom is already among them (Lk 17: 21), like lightning, without any doubt. The coming of the Kingdom brings with it its own evidence and does not depend on the forecast or prediction of others.
- Luke 17: 25: By the Cross up to the Glory. "But first he is destined to suffer grievously and be rejected by this generation." Always the same warning: the Cross, scandal for the Jews and foolishness for the Greek, but for us the expression of the wisdom and the power of God (1 Co 1: 18, 23). The path toward the glory passes through the Cross. The life of Jesus is our canon, it is the canonical norm for all of us.

Personal Questions

- Jesus said: "The Kingdom is in your midst!" Have you already found some sign of the Kingdom in your life, in the life of your nation or in the life of your community?
- The cross in our life. Suffering. How do you consider or see suffering? What do you do about it?

Concluding Prayer

He keeps faith forever, gives justice to the oppressed, gives food to the hungry; Yahweh sets prisoners free. (Ps 146: 6-7)

Friday, November 15, 2024

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

God of power and mercy, protect us from all harm. Give us freedom of spirit and health in mind and body to do your work on earth.

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 17: 26-37

Jesus said to his disciples: 'As it was in Noah's day, so will it also be in the days of the Son of man. People were eating and drinking, marrying wives and husbands, right up to the day Noah went into the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all.

It will be the same as it was in Lot's day: people were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building, but the day Lot left Sodom, it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and it destroyed them all. It will be the same when the day comes for the Son of man to be revealed.

'When that Day comes, no one on the housetop, with his possessions in the house, must come down to collect them, nor must anyone in the fields turn back. Remember Lot's wife. Anyone who tries to preserve his life will lose it; and anyone who loses it will keep it safe.

I tell you, on that night, when two are in one bed, one will be taken, the other left; when two women are grinding corn together, one will be taken, the other left.'

The disciples spoke up and asked, 'Where, Lord?' He said, 'Where the body is, there too will the vultures gather.'

Reflection

Today's Gospel continues the reflection on the coming of the end of time and presents to us the words of Jesus about how to prepare ourselves for the

coming of the Kingdom. This was an affair which produced much discussion at that time. God is the one who determines the hour of the coming of the end of time. But the time of God (*kairós*) is not measured according to the time of our clock (*chronos*). For God one day can be equal to one thousand years, and one thousand years equal to one day (Ps 90: 4; 2 Pt 3: 8). The time of God goes by invisibly in our time, but independently of us and of our time. We cannot interfere in time, but we have to be prepared for the moment in which the hour of God becomes present in our time. It could be today; it could be in one thousand years. What gives us security is not to know the hour of the end of the world, but the certainty of the presence of the Words of Jesus present in our life. The world will pass, but the word of God will never pass (cf. Is 40: 7-8).

- Luke 17: 26-29: “As it was in the day of Noah and of Lot. Life goes by normally: eating, drinking, getting married, buying, selling, sowing, harvesting. Routine can include so much that we do not succeed to think about anything else. And the consumerism of the neo-liberal system contributes to increase in many of us that total lack of attention to the more profound dimensions of life. We allow the moths to enter into the beam of faith which holds up the more profound dimensions of life. When the storm destroys the house, many of us blame the carpenter: “It was badly made!” In reality, it crumbled down due to our continual lack of attention. The reference to the destruction of Sodom, as a figure of what will happen at the end of time, is a reference to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in the years 70’s AD (cf. Mk 13: 14).
- Luke 17: 30-32: So it will also be in the days of the Son of Man. “So it will be in the days when the Son of Man will reveal himself.” It is difficult for us to imagine the suffering and the trauma that the destruction of Jerusalem caused in the communities, both of the Jews and of the Christians. In order to help them to understand and to face this suffering Jesus uses a comparison taken from life: “When that Day comes, no one on the housetop, with his possessions in the house, must come down to collect them, nor must anyone in the fields turn back.” The destruction will take place so rapidly that it is not worth while to go down to look for something in the house (Mk 13: 15-16). “Remember Lot’s wife” (cf. Gn 19: 26), that is do not look back, do not lose time, decide and advance, go ahead: it is a question of life or death.
- Luke 17: 33: To lose one’s life in order to save it. “Anyone who tries to preserve his life will lose it, and anyone who loses it will keep it safe.” Only the person who has been capable of giving himself/herself completely to others will feel totally fulfilled in life. Anyone who preserves life for self alone loses it. This advice of Jesus is the confirmation of the most profound human experience: the source of life is found in the gift of life. In giving one receives. “In all truth I tell you: unless a wheat grain falls into the earth and dies, it remains only a single grain, but if it dies it yields a rich harvest” (Jn 12: 24). The motivation which Mark’s Gospel adds is important: “for my sake and for the sake of the Gospel” (Mk 8: 35). Saying that no one is capable of preserving his life by his own efforts, Jesus recalls the Psalm in which it is said that nobody is capable of paying the price for the ransom of his life: “No one can redeem himself or pay his own ransom to God. The price for himself is too high, it can never be that he will live on forever and avoid the sight of the abyss.” (Ps 49: 8-10).
- Luke 17: 34-36: Vigilance. “I tell you, on that night, when two are in one bed, one

will be taken, the other left; when two women are grinding corn together one will be taken, the other left." This recalls the parable of the ten Virgins. Five were prudent and five were foolish (Mt 25: 1-11). What is important is to be prepared. The words "One will be taken and the other left" recall the words of Paul to the Thessalonians (1 Th 4: 13-17), when he says that with the coming of the Son of Man, we will be taken to Heaven at the side of Jesus. These words "left behind" furnished the title of a terrible and dangerous romance of the fundamentalist extreme right of the United States: "Left Behind! This is a romance which has nothing to do with the real sense of the words of Jesus.

- Luke 17: 37: Where and when? "The disciples asked: Where, Lord?" "And Jesus answered: Where the body is, there too will the vultures gather." This is an enigmatic response. Some think that Jesus recalled the prophecy of Ezekiel, taken up in the Apocalypse, in which the prophet refers to the final victorious battle against the force of evil. The birds of prey or the vultures will be invited to eat the flesh of the bodies (Ez 39: 4, 17-20; Rv 19: 17-18). Others think that it is a question of the Valley of Jehoshaphat, where the final judgment will take place according to the prophecy of Joel (Ga 4: 2, 12). Others think that it is simply a question of a popular proverb which meant more or less what our proverb says: "Where there is smoke, there is also fire!"

Personal Questions

- Am I from the time of Noah or from the time of Lot?
- A Romance of the extreme right. How do I place myself before this political manipulation of the faith in Jesus?

Concluding Prayer

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

Saturday, November 16, 2024

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

God of power and mercy, protect us from all harm. Give us freedom of spirit and health in mind and body to do your work on earth.

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 18: 1-8

Jesus said to his disciples a parable about the need to pray continually and never lose heart. 'There was a judge in a certain town,' he said, 'who had neither

fear of God nor respect for anyone. In the same town there was also a widow who kept on coming to him and saying, "I want justice from you against my enemy!" For a long time, he refused, but at last he said to himself, "Even though I have neither fear of God nor respect for any human person, I must give this widow her just rights since she keeps pestering me, or she will come and slap me in the face." '

And the Lord said, 'You notice what the unjust judge has to say? Now, will not God see justice done to his elect if they keep calling to him day and night even though he still delays helping them?

I promise you, he will see justice done to them, and done speedily. But when the Son of man comes, will he find any faith on earth?'

Reflection

Today's Gospel presents an element which is very dear to Luke: Prayer. This is the second time that Luke gives us the words of Jesus to teach us to pray. The first time (Lk 11: 1-13), he taught us the Our Father and, by means of comparisons and parables, he taught that we have to pray insistently, without getting tired. Now, this second time, (Lk 18: 1-8), again he has recourse to a parable taken from life so as to teach us insistence in prayer. It is the parable of the widow who pestered the judge who was unscrupulous. The way in which he presents the parable is very didactic. In the first place, Luke presents a brief introduction which serves as the key for the reading. Then he narrates the parable. At the end, Jesus himself explains it:

- Luke 18: 1: The introduction. Luke presents the parable with the following phrase: "Then he told them a parable about the need to pray continually and never lose heart." The recommendation "to pray without losing heart" appears many times in the New Testament (1 Th 5, 17; Rm 12, 12; Ep 6, 18; etc). And it is a characteristic of the spirituality of the first Christian communities.
- Luke 18: 2-5: The parable. Then Jesus presents two personages of real life: a judge who had no consideration for God and no consideration for others, and a widow who struggles to obtain her rights from the judge. The simple fact of indicating these two personages reveals the critical conscience which he had regarding the society of his time. The parable presents the poor people who struggle in the tribunal to obtain their rights. The judge decides to pay attention to the widow and to do justice. The reason is the following: in order to free himself from the widow who is pestering him and to get rid of her. This is a quite interesting reason. But the widow obtained what she wanted! This is a fact of daily life, which Jesus uses to teach to pray.
- Luke 18: 6-8: the application. Jesus applies the parable: "You notice what the unjust judge has said. Now, will not God see justice done to his elect if they keep calling to him day and night even though he still delays to help them? Will he make them wait long? I tell you he will see justice done to them, and done speedily." If it had not been Jesus we would not have had the courage to compare Jesus to an unjust judge! And at the end Jesus expresses a doubt: "When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" Or rather, will we have the courage to wait, to have patience, even if God delays in doing what we ask him?

- Jesus in prayer. The first Christians had an image of Jesus in prayer, in permanent contact with the Father. In fact, the breathing of the life of Jesus was to do the Will of the Father (Jn 5: 19). Jesus prayed very much and insisted, in order that people and his disciples also pray. And this because it is in confronting oneself with God that truth emerges, and the person finds himself/herself in his/her whole reality and humility. Luke is the Evangelist who gives us more information on the life of prayer of Jesus. He presents Jesus in constant prayer. The following are some moments in which Jesus appears praying. You, all of you can complete the list:
 - When he was twelve years old and goes to the Temple, to the House of the Father (Lk 2: 46-50).
 - He prays when he is baptized and in assuming his mission (Lk 3: 21).
 - At the beginning of the mission, he spends forty days in the desert (Lk 4: 1-2).
 - At the hour of temptation, he faces the devil with the texts from Scripture (Lk 4: 3-12). Jesus used to participate in the celebration in the Synagogue on Saturday (Lk 4: 16)
 - He seeks solitude in the desert to pray (Lk 5: 16; 9: 18).
 - Before choosing the twelve Apostles, he spends the night in prayer (Lk 6: 12).
 - He prays before meals (Lk 9: 16; 24: 30).
 - He prays before the Passion and when facing reality (Lk 9: 18).
 - In time of crises, he goes up to the mountain and is transfigured when he prays (Lk 9: 28).
 - When he revealed the Gospel to the little ones he says: "Father, I thank you!" (Lk 10: 21)
 - In praying, he arouses in the Apostles the desire to pray (Lk 11: 1).
 - He prays for Peter so that he does not lose his faith (Lk 22: 32).
 - He celebrates the Paschal Supper with his disciples (Lk 22: 7-14).
 - In the Garden of Olives, he prays, even when sweating blood (Lk 22: 41-42).
 - In the anguish of the agony, he asks his friends to pray with him (Lk 22: 40, 46).
 - At the moment when he was being nailed to the Cross, he asks pardon for the murderers (Lk 23: 34).
 - At the hour of death he says: "Into your hands I commend my spirit!" (Lk 23: 46; Ps 31: 6)
 - Jesus dies crying out with the cry of the poor (Lk 23: 46).
- This long list indicates everything which follows. For Jesus prayer is intimately linked to life, to concrete facts, to the decisions which he had to take. In order to be able to be faithful to the project of the Father, he sought to remain alone with Him. He listened to Him. In difficult and decisive moments in his life, Jesus

recited Psalms. Just as any devout Jew, he knew them by heart. The recitation of the Psalms did not take away his creativity. Rather, Jesus himself created a Psalm which he transmitted to us: the Our Father. His life is a permanent prayer: "I always seek the will of the one who sent me!" (Jn 5: 19, 30) To him is applied what the Psalm says: "I am prayer!" (Ps 109: 4)

Personal Questions

- There are people who say that they do not know how to pray, but they speak with God the whole day! Do you know any such persons? Tell us. There are many ways in which today people express their devotion and pray. Which are they?
- What do these two parables teach us on prayer? What do they teach me regarding the way of seeing life and persons?

Concluding Prayer

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

Sunday, November 17, 2024

33rd Sunday of Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Shaddai, God of the mountain, You who make of our fragile life the rock of your dwelling place, lead our mind to strike the rock of the desert, so that water may gush to quench our thirst.

May the poverty of our feeling cover us as with a mantle in the darkness of the night and may it open our heart to hear the echo of silence until the dawn, wrapping us with the light of the new morning, may bring us, with the spent embers of the fire of the shepherds of the Absolute who have kept vigil for us close to the divine Master, the flavor of the holy memory.

Lectio

The Gospel Text: Mark 13: 24-32

²⁴ "But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, ²⁵ and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. ²⁶ And then they will see the Son of man coming in clouds with great power and glory. ²⁷ And then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

²⁸ "From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. ²⁹ So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. ³⁰ Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away before all these things take place. ³¹ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. ³²"But of that day or that hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father

A Moment of Silence:

Let the sound of the Word echo in us.

Meditatio

A Few Questions:

- *After that tribulation.* Life bears the signs of labour, the seal of a death pregnant with new life. Can we count ourselves among the elect gathered from the four winds?
- *The Son of man coming in the clouds.* Will we be capable of raising our eyes from our miserable things so as to see him coming on the horizon of our story?
- *From the fig tree learn:* We have so much to learn and we need not look far. Nature is the first book of God. Are we willing to go through its pages or do we tear its pages thinking that we own it?
- All things pass away, only the Word of God remains forever. How many are the vain words, the dreams and pleasures inexorably swallowed by time that carries away everything that has an end! Is the rock on which we have built our lives the rock of the Word of the living God?
- *Of that day or that hour no one knows.* it is not for us to know. The Father knows. Are we open to put our trust in him?

A Key to the Reading:

The great change of the cosmos described by Mark lies between metaphor and reality and proclaims the imminence of the end of time as an introduction to an immensely new world. The coming of the Son in the clouds opens up for humanity a heavenly dimension. He is not an intransigent judge, but a powerful Savior who appears in the splendor of divine glory to reunite the elect, to make them share in eternal life in the blessed reign of heaven. Mark does not mention a judgement, threat or sentence...so as to bring hope and increase the expectation, he proclaims the final victory.

- v. 24-25. After that tribulation the sun will be darkened... a new reality is contrasted with the great tribulation. The Evangelist thinks that the parousia is near at hand, even though the hour of its coming is uncertain. The confusion of the cosmos is described in terms typical of apocalyptic language, in a stylised and accurate form: the four elements are ranged two by two in a parallel manner. The reference to Is 13:10 is clear when he speaks of the sun and the moon being

darkened and to Is 34:4 when he speaks of the shaking of the powers in heaven.

- v. 26. Then they will see the Son of man coming in clouds with great power and glory. This is the peak of Mark's eschatological discourse. The time of expectation is over, this is the time for restoring everything in Christ. The end of the world is no more than the promise of the glorious parousia of the Son foreseen by Dn 7:13. The clouds point to the presence of God who in all his self-revelations uses clouds to come down to earth. The attributes of divine sovereignty, power and glory, mentioned by Jesus before the Sanhedrin (14:62), are not a threat to humankind, but the solemn proclamation of the messianic dignity that transcends the humanity of Christ.
- v. 27. And then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of heaven. By this first act of the Son of man, the meaning of the true parousia is made clear: the eschatological salvation of the people of God spread throughout the world. All the elect will be reunited. No one will be forgotten. There is no mention of punishment of enemies nor of punitive catastrophes, but only of unification. It will be the only place because from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven the angels will gather people around Christ. This, indeed, is a glorious meeting.
- v. 28. From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. The parable of the fig tree points to the certainty and nearness of the proclaimed events, especially the coming of the Son of man, prefigured in the imminent passion, death and resurrection. The imperative addressed to the listeners: Learn! reveals the implied meaning of the similitude: it is an invitation to penetrate deeply into the meaning of Jesus' words in order to understand God's plan for the world. When fig tree loses its leaves in late autumn, later than other plants, even past springtime, it announces the coming of summer.
- v. 29. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Human beings may know God's plan from the events that take place. What are the things that have to take place? Mark spoke of the abomination of desolation in v. 14. That is the sign, the sign of the end that is the parousia, the coming of the Son of man. Those things that are the beginning of woes will bring humankind to a new birth, because He is near, at the very gates.
- v. 30. Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away before these things take place. Many hypotheses have been put forward concerning the meaning of this generation. It is more a Christological expression than a chronological affirmation. The early Church kept affirming the uncertainty of the precise moment, even though it held on to the hope that the Lord would come soon. Every believer, in any age, who reads this passage, can think of him/herself as being part of this generation.
- v. 31. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. The certainty that the words of the Lord will never pass away, add

confidence to whoever reflects on the decline of the world and the things of the world. To build on the Word of God means that the abomination of desolation will not last and that the sun, moon and stars will not lose their splendour. The present time of God becomes for human beings the only way to their own being because, if in their speech the present never becomes the past, then they need not fear death.

- v. 32. But of that day or that hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. The end is certain, but the knowledge as to when it will come is reserved to the Father. Jesus never made any precise statement on this matter. Thus, anyone who pretends to have some presumed teaching of his own, he is lying. The end is one of the many unfathomable secrets that belong to the Father. The mission of the Son is to establish the kingdom, not the revelation of the fulfilment of human history. Thus Jesus shares deeply in our human condition. Through his voluntary kenosis, he even complies with the possibility of not knowing the day or the hour of the end of the world.

Reflections:

Tribulation is like daily bread in human life and it is the sign of the coming of the Son of God. A life pregnant with a new face, cannot not know the pain of childbirth. The children of the Most High, dispersed to the ends of the earth, far from one another, will be gathered from the four winds by the divine breath that breathes over the earth. The Son of man comes in the clouds whereas our eyes are fixed on the ground, on our puny works, lost between the tears of delusion and those of failure. If we could raise our eyes from our miserable things to see him coming on the horizon of our history, then our life will be filled with light and we shall learn to read his writing in the sand of our thoughts and will, of our falls and dreams, of our attitudes and learning. If we have the courage to leaf through the pages of daily life and there gather the seeds fallen into the furrows of our being, then our hearts will find peace. Then vain words, pleasures swallowed by time, will only be a lost memory because the rock on which we would have built will be the rock of the Word of the living God. If no one knows the day or the hour, then it is not for us to go guessing. The Father knows and we trust in him

Oratio

Wisdom 9: 1-6, 9-11

O God of my fathers and Lord of mercy, who hast made all things by thy word, and by thy wisdom hast formed man, to have dominion over the creatures thou hast made, and rule the world in holiness and righteousness, and pronounce judgment in uprightness of soul, give me the wisdom that sits by thy throne, and do not reject me from among thy servants. For I am thy slave and the son of thy maidservant, a man who is weak and short-lived, with little understanding of judgment and laws; for even if one is perfect among the sons of men, yet

without the wisdom that comes from thee he will be regarded as nothing. With thee is wisdom, who knows thy works and was present when thou didst make the world, and who understand what is pleasing in thy sight and what is right according to thy commandments. Send her forth from the holy heavens, and from the throne of thy glory send her, that she may be with me and toil, and that I may learn what is pleasing to thee. For she knows and understands all things, and she will guide me wisely in my actions and guard me with her glory.

Contemplatio

Lord, I gaze upon the tender branch of the fig tree that is my life and I wait. As the shadows of evening lengthen along my path, I think back on your words. What peace floods my heart when my thoughts dwell on you! In your own good time, my waiting for you will be fulfilled. In my time your expectations of me will be fulfilled. What a mystery is time, past, future and the eternal present! Today's waves break on the burning experience of your presence and remind me of games in the sand that are always washed away by the sea. And yet, I am happy. Happy that I am nothing, happy with the sand that will not last, because once more your Word goes on writing. We seek to pause in time, writing and talking, achieving excellent works that stand the ravages of centuries. You, however, pause to write on sand to achieve works of love that have the perfume of a caressed gazelle standing still, that have the sound of formless voices that are the basis of daily life, the taste of a doused vendetta of a returned embrace... works that do not last except in the heart of God and in the memory of the living who are sensitive to the flight of a dove in the heaven of their existence. Tender love of my soul, may I, each day, look up to the clouds and be consumed by the nostalgia of your return. Amen.

Monday, November 18, 2024

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father of all that is good, keep us faithful in serving you, for to serve you is our lasting joy.

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 18: 35-43

Now it happened that as Jesus drew near to Jericho there was a blind man sitting at the side of the road begging. When he heard the crowd going past he asked what it was all about, and they told him that Jesus the Nazarene was passing by. So he called out, 'Jesus, Son of David, have pity on me.' The people in front scolded him and told him to keep quiet, but he only shouted all the louder, 'Son of David, have pity on me.'

Jesus stopped and ordered them to bring the man to him, and when he came up, asked him, 'What do you want me to do for you?' 'Sir,' he replied, 'let me see again.' Jesus said to him, 'Receive your sight. Your faith has saved you.' And instantly his sight returned, and he followed him praising God, and all the people who saw it gave praise to God.

Reflection

The Gospel today describes the arrival of Jesus to Jericho. It is the last stop before going up to Jerusalem, where the “Exodus” of Jesus will take place, according to what he announced in his Transfiguration (Lk 9: 31) and along the way up to Jerusalem (Lk 9: 44; 18: 31-33).

- Luke 18: 35-37: The blind man sitting on the side of the road. “Now it happened that as Jesus drew near to Jericho, there was a blind man sitting on the side of the road begging. When he heard the crowd going past, he asked what it was all about. They told him that Jesus the Nazarene was passing by.” In the Gospel of Mark, the blind man is called Bartimaeus (Mk 10: 46). Since he was blind, he could not participate in the procession which accompanied Jesus. At that time, there were many blind people in Palestine, because the strong sun which hit the whitened rocky earth hurt the eyes which were not protected.
- Luke 18: 38-39: The cry of the blind man and the reaction of the people. “Then he began to cry out: Jesus, Son of David, have pity on me!” He calls Jesus using the title “Son of David.” The catechism of that time taught that the Messiah would be of the descent of David, “Son of David”, a glorious Messiah. Jesus did not like this title. In quoting the Messianic Psalm, he asks himself: “How is it that the Messiah can be the son of David if even David calls him “My Lord?” (Lk 20: 41-44) The cry of the blind man bothers the people who accompany Jesus. Because of this, “The people in front scolded him and told him to keep quiet. They tried to stop him but he only shouted all the louder, Son of David have pity on me!” Even up to our time the cry of the poor bothers the established society: migrants, beggars, refugees, sick with AIDS, and so many!
- Luke 18: 40-41: The reaction of Jesus before the cry of the blind man. And what does Jesus do? “Jesus stopped and ordered them to bring the man to him.” Those who wanted to stop the blind man from shouting because this bothered them, now asked by Jesus, are obliged to help the poor man to get to Jesus. The Gospel of Mark adds that the blind man left everything and went to Jesus. He did not have too much; only his mantle. That is what he possessed to cover his body (cf. Es 22: 25-26). That was his security! That was his land! Today, also, Jesus listens to the cry of the poor which, we, many times do not want to hear. “When he came up to Jesus, he asked him: What do you want me to do for you?” It is not sufficient to shout or cry out, it is necessary to know why he is shouting! The blind man answers: “Lord that I may see again.”
- Luke 18: 42-43: Go! Your faith has saved you! “And Jesus says: Receive your sight. Your faith has saved you.” Immediately he recovered his sight and began to follow Jesus praising God. And all the people, when they saw that, praised God.” The blind man had called Jesus with an idea which was not totally correct, because the title “Son of David” was not completely correct. But he had greater faith in Jesus than in his ideas about Jesus. He did not demand anything like

Peter did (Mk 8: 32-33). He knew how to give his life accepting Jesus without imposing any conditions. Healing is the fruit of his faith in Jesus. Once he was cured, he follows Jesus and walks along with Him toward Jerusalem. In this way he becomes a model disciple for all of us who want “to follow Jesus along the road” toward Jerusalem: to believe more in Jesus and not so much in our ideas about Jesus! In this decision to walk with Jesus is found the source of courage and the seed of the victory on the cross. Because the cross is not something fatal, but it is an experience of God. It is the consequence of the commitment of Jesus, in obedience to the Father, to serve the brothers and not to accept privileges!

- Faith is a force which transforms the person. The Good News of the Kingdom announced by Jesus was a sort of fertilizer. It made the seed of life hidden in people to grow; that seed hidden like the fire under the ashes of observance without life. Jesus blew on the ashes and the fire lit up. The Kingdom appears and the people rejoice. The condition was always the same: to believe in Jesus. The cure of the blind man clarifies a very important aspect of our faith. Even calling Jesus with ideas which are not completely correct, the blind man had faith and he was cured. He was converted; he left everything behind and followed Jesus along the road toward Calvary! The full understanding of the following of Jesus is not obtained from a theoretical instruction, but rather from a practical commitment, walking together with Him along the way of service, from Galilee to Jerusalem. Anyone who insists in keeping the idea of Peter, that is, of the glorious Messiah without a cross, will understand nothing of Jesus and will not succeed in attaining the attitude of a true disciple of Jesus. Anyone who knows how to believe in Jesus and gives himself (Lk 9: 23-24), anyone who knows how to accept to be last (Lk 22: 26), who knows how to drink the chalice and to carry his/her own cross (Mt 20: 22; Mk 10: 38), this one, like the blind man, even not having ideas completely correct, will succeed “to follow Jesus along the way” (Lk 18: 43). In this certainty of walking together with Jesus is found the source of courage and the seed of victory on the cross.

Personal Questions

- How do I see and hear the cry of the poor: migrants, Blacks, sick of AIDS, beggars, refugees, and so many others?
- How is my faith: am I more fixed on my ideas about Jesus or on Jesus?

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)

Tuesday, November 19, 2024

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father of all that is good, keep us faithful in serving you, for to serve you is our lasting joy.

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 19: 1-10

Jesus entered Jericho and was going through the town and suddenly a man whose name was Zacchaeus made his appearance; he was one of the senior tax collectors and a wealthy man. He kept trying to see which Jesus was, but he was too short and could not see him for the crowd; so he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to catch a glimpse of Jesus who was to pass that way. When Jesus reached the spot he looked up and spoke to him, 'Zacchaeus, come down. Hurry, because I am to stay at your house today.'

And he hurried down and welcomed him joyfully.

They all complained when they saw what was happening. 'He has gone to stay at a sinner's house,' they said. But Zacchaeus stood his ground and said to the Lord, 'Look, sir, I am going to give half my property to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody I will pay him back four times the amount.'

And Jesus said to him, 'Today salvation has come to this house, because this man too is a son of Abraham; for the Son of man has come to seek out and save what was lost.'

Reflection

In today's Gospel we are reaching the end of the long journey which began in chapter 9 (Lk 9: 51). During the journey, it was not easy to know the way Jesus was following. It was only known that he was going toward Jerusalem! Now at the end, the geography was clear and definite. Jesus reaches Jericho, the city of the palm trees, in the Valley of Jordan. The last stop of the pilgrims, before going up toward Jerusalem! He went to Jericho where the long road of exodus of 40 years in the desert ended. The exodus of Jesus was also ended. In entering into Jericho, Jesus meets a blind man who wanted to see him (Lk 18: 35-43).

Now ingoing out of the city, he meets Zacchaeus, a tax collector: he also wants to see him. A blind man and a Publican. Both of them were excluded. Both of them bothered and disturbed the people: the blind man because he was shouting out to Jesus, the Publican because of the taxes. Both are accepted by Jesus, each one in his own way.

- Luke 19: 1-2: The situation. Jesus enters into Jericho and crosses the city. "And behold a man whose name was Zacchaeus, head of the tax collectors and a rich man." The tax collector was the person who collected the public taxes on selling and buying of merchandise. Zacchaeus was the head of the tax collectors in the city. He was very rich and closely linked to the system of domination of the Romans. The more religious Jews argued in this way: "The king of our people is God. Therefore, the dominion of the Romans on us is against God. Anyone who collaborates with the Romans, sins against God!"

Thus, the soldiers who served in the Roman army and the tax collectors, like Zacchaeus, were excluded and avoided because they were considered sinners and impure.

- Luke 19: 3-4: The attitude of Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus wants to see Jesus. But being small, he ran ahead and climbed on a tree and waited for Jesus to go by. He really had a great desire to see Jesus! Before in the parable of the poor Lazarus and of the rich man who has no name (Lk 16: 19-31), Jesus had said that it was truly very difficult for a rich person to be converted and to open the door that separates him from accepting poor Lazarus. Here we have a rich man who does not close himself up in his riches. Zacchaeus wants something more. When an adult, a person who is prominent in the city, climbs up on a tree, it is because he does not care much about the opinion of others. Something more important moves him inside. He wants to open the door for poor Lazarus.
- Luke 19: 5-7: Attitude of Jesus, reaction of the people and of Zacchaeus. Getting and seeing Zacchaeus on the tree, Jesus does not ask nor does he demand anything. He only responds to the desire of the man and says: "Zacchaeus come down, hurry because I am to stay at your home today!" Zacchaeus gets down and receives Jesus, in his house, with great joy, "All complained: He has gone to stay at a sinner's house!" Luke says that all complained! That signifies that Jesus was remaining alone in his attitude of accepting the excluded, especially the collaborators of the system. But Jesus does not care about the criticism. He goes to the house of Zacchaeus and defends him from the criticism. Instead of calling him sinner, he calls him "son of Abraham" (Lk 19: 9).
- Luke 19: 8: Decision of Zacchaeus. "Look, Lord, I am going to give half of my property to the poor; and if I have cheated anybody I will pay him back four times the amount!" This is the conversion produced in Zacchaeus because of the acceptance that he received from Jesus. To give back four times was what the law prescribed to do in certain cases (Ex 21: 37; 22: 3). To give half of my possessions to the poor was the novelty which the contact with Jesus produced in him. In fact, sharing was taking place.
- Luke 19: 9-10: Final word of Jesus. "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man too is a son of Abraham." The interpretation of the Law by means of the ancient Tradition excluded the tax collectors from the race of Abraham. Jesus says that he comes to seek and save what was lost. The Kingdom is for all. Nobody can be excluded. The choice of Jesus is clear, and also his call: It is not possible to be Jesus' friend and continue to support a system which marginalizes and excludes so many people. By denouncing the unjust divisions, Jesus opens the space to a new way of living together, directed by the new values of truth, of justice and of love.
- Son of Abraham. "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man too is a son of Abraham!" Through being a descendant of Abraham all nations of earth will be blessed (Gn 12: 3; 22: 18). It was very important for Luke's communities, formed by Christians, both of Jewish and of Pagan origin, the affirmation that Jesus calls Zacchaeus "son of Abraham." In this we find the confirmation of the fact that in Jesus, God was fulfilling the promises made to Abraham, addressed to all nations, both to Jews and to gentiles. They are also sons of Abraham and heirs of the promises. Jesus accepts those who were not

accepted. He offers a place to those who do not have it. He receives as brothers and sisters the persons whom the religion and the government excluded and considered:

- immoral: the prostitutes and the sinners (Mt 21: 31-32; Mk 2: 15; Lk 7: 37-50; Jn 8: 2-11),
- heretic: pagans and Samaritans (Lk 7: 2-10; 17: 16; Mk 7: 24-30; Jn 4: 7-42),
- impure: lepers and possessed (Mt 8: 2-4; Lk 17: 12-14; Mk 1: 25-26),
- marginalized: women, children and the sick (Mk 1: 32; Mt 8: 16; 19: 13-15; Lk 8: 2-3),
- fighters: publicans and soldiers (Lk 18: 9-14; 19: 1-10);
- the poor: the people of the place and the poor who had no power (Mt 5: 3; Lk 6: 20; Mt 11: 25-26).

Personal Questions

- How does our community accept the persons who are despised and marginalized? Are we capable, like Jesus to perceive the problems of persons and to give them some attention?
- How do we perceive salvation today entering into our house and into our community? The welcoming tenderness of Jesus produced a total change in the life of Zacchaeus. Is the tenderness of our community producing some change in the neighborhood? Which one?

Concluding Prayer

With all my heart I seek you, do not let me stray from your commandments. In my heart I treasure your promises, to avoid sinning against you. (Ps 119: 10-11)

Wednesday, November 20, 2024

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father of all that is good, keep us faithful in serving you, for to serve you is our lasting joy.

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 19: 11-28

Jesus said the following parable, because he was near Jerusalem, and they thought that the kingdom of God was going to show itself then and there.

Accordingly, he said, "A man of noble birth went to a distant country to be appointed king and then return. He summoned ten of his servants and gave them ten pounds, telling them, 'Trade with these, until I get back.'"

But his compatriots detested him and sent a delegation to follow him with this message, "We do not want this man to be our king." 'Now it happened that on his return, having received his appointment as king, he sent for those servants to whom he had given the money, to find out what profit each had made by trading.

The first came in, "Sir," he said, "your one pound has brought in ten." He replied, "Well done, my good servant! Since you have proved yourself trustworthy in a very small thing, you shall have the government of ten cities."

Then came the second, "Sir," he said, "your one pound has made five." To this one also he said, "And you shall be in charge of five cities."

Next came the other, "Sir," he said, "here is your pound. I put it away safely wrapped up in a cloth because I was afraid of you; for you are an exacting man: you gather in what you have not laid out and reap what you have not sown." He said to him, "You wicked servant! Out of your own mouth I condemn you. So you knew that I was an exacting man, gathering in what I have not laid out and reaping what I have not sown? Then why did you not put my money in the bank? On my return I could have drawn it out with interest."

And he said to those standing by, "Take the pound from him and give it to the man who has ten pounds." And they said to him, "But, sir, he has ten pounds . . ." "I tell you, to everyone who has will be given more; but anyone who has not will be deprived even of what he has.

"As for my enemies who did not want me for their king, bring them here and execute them in my presence."

When he had said this he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem.

Reflection

The Gospel today presents the parable of the talents, in which Jesus speaks of the gifts that persons receive from God. All persons have some qualities; they receive some gift or know something which they can teach to others. Nobody is only a pupil, nobody is only a professor. We all learn from one another.

- Luke 19: 11: The key to understand the story of the parable. To introduce the parable Luke says the following: "At that time Jesus went on to tell a parable because he was near Jerusalem and the disciples thought that the Kingdom of God was going to show itself then and there." In this initial information, Luke presents three reasons which led Jesus to tell this parable: (a) The acceptance, which is to be given to the excluded, referring to the episode of Zacchaeus, the excluded one whom Jesus accepts. (b) The getting closer to the Passion, Death and Resurrection, because he said that Jesus was near Jerusalem where shortly he would be condemned to death (c) The imminent coming of the Kingdom of God, because the persons who accompanied Jesus thought that the Kingdom of God would come later.
- Luke 19: 12-14: The beginning of the parable. "A man of noble birth went to a distant country to be appointed king and then return. He summoned ten of his servants and gave them ten pounds telling them, 'Trade with these, until

I get back.” Some scholars think that in this Parable Jesus is referring to Herod who seventy years before (40 AD), went to Rome to receive the title and power of King of Palestine. People did not like Herod and did not want him to become king, because the experience that they had of him was one of a commander to repress the rebellions in Galilee against Rome and it was tragic and painful. This is why they said: “We do not want this man to be our king!” To this same Herod they would apply the last phrase of the Parable: “As for my enemies who did not want me for their king, bring them here and execute them in my presence.” In fact, Herod killed many people.

- Luke 19: 15-19: The account given by the first employees who received one hundred silver coins. The story also informs that Herod, after having obtained the title of king, returned to Palestine to take over the power. In the Parable, the king called his servants to whom he had given one hundred silver coins to know how much they had gained. The first one came in and said: Sir, your talent has produced ten other talents. He replied, “Well done, my good servant! Since you have proved yourself trustworthy in a very small thing, you shall have the government of ten cities. Then came the second one, and said, ‘Sir, your talent has brought five other talents. To this one also he said, ‘And you shall be in charge of five cities.’ According to the story, Herod the Great and his son Herod Antipas, both knew how to deal with money and to promote the persons who helped them. In the parable, the king gave ten cities to the servant who multiplied by ten the talent he had received and five cities to the one who multiplied it by five.
- Luke 19: 20-23: The rendering of account by the servant who gained nothing. The third servant arrived and said: ‘Sir, here is your talent I put it away safely wrapped up in a cloth, because I was afraid of you, for you are an exacting man, you gather in what you have not laid out and reap what you have not sown. In this phrase we have a mistaken idea of God which is criticized by Jesus. The servant considers God a severe master. Before such a God, the human being is afraid and hides himself behind the exact and poor observance of the law. He thinks that acting in this way, he will not be punished by the severity of the legislator. Such a person does not believe in God, but believes only in self, in his observance of the law. He closes himself up in self; he draws away from God and is not able to be concerned about others. He becomes incapable to grow as a free person. This false image of God isolates the human being, kills the community, extinguishes the joy and impoverishes life. The king answers: Out of your own mouth I condemn you, wicked servant!” You knew that I was an exacting man, gathering what I have not laid out and reaping what I have not sown? Then why did you not put my money in the bank? On my return I could have drawn it out with interest. The servant is not coherent with the image he had of God. If he imagined God so severe, at least he should have put the money in the bank. He is not condemned by God, but by the mistaken idea that he had conceived of God and which renders him more immature and more fearful than what he should have been. One of the things which has more influences in the life of the people is the idea that we have of God. Among the Jews of the line of the Pharisees, some imagined God as a severe judge who treated them according to the merit gained by the observance. That caused fear and prevented persons from growing. And above all, it prevented

them from opening a space within themselves to accept the new experience of God which Jesus communicated.

- Luke 19: 24-27: Conclusion for all. "And he said to those standing by: Take the talent from him and give it to the man who has ten talents. And they answered: But, Sir, he already has ten!" I tell you, to everyone who has will be given more, but anyone who has not will be deprived even of what he has. As for my enemies who did not want me for their king, bring them here and execute them in my presence." The man orders to take away the one hundred coins and to give them to the one who has one thousand, because "To everyone who has will be given more, but anyone who has not will be deprived even of what he has." In this last phrase is found the key which clarifies the Parable. In the symbolism of the parable, the silver coin of the king are the goods of the Kingdom of God, that is, all that which makes the person grow and which reveals God's presence: love, service, sharing. Anyone who closes self in self out of fear to lose what he has, he will lose even the little that he has. Therefore, the person who does not think only of self, but gives himself/herself to others, will grow and will receive super abundantly, all that he/she has given and much more: "one hundred times more, a hundred-fold" (Mk 10: 30). "Anyone who wants to save his life will lose it, anyone who has the courage to lose it, will save it" (Lk 9: 24; 17: 33; Mt 10: 39; 16: 25; Mk 8: 35). The third servant is afraid and does nothing. He does not want to lose anything and because of this he gains nothing. He loses even the little he had. The Kingdom is a risk. Anyone who does not run, runs a risk, he loses the Kingdom!
- Luke 19: 28: Return to the triple initial key. At the end, Luke closes this theme with the following information: "Having said these things Jesus went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem." This final information recalls the triple key given at the beginning: the acceptance to be given to the excluded, the closeness of the Passion, death and Resurrection of Jesus in Jerusalem and the idea of the imminent coming of the Kingdom. To those who thought that the Kingdom of God was about to arrive, the parable orders to change the way of looking, the vision. The Kingdom of God arrives, yes but through the death and the Resurrection of Jesus which will take place within a short time in Jerusalem. And the reason for the death and resurrection is the acceptance which Jesus gives to the excluded, for example to Zacchaeus and to so many others. He disturbs the great and they eliminated him condemning him to death, and death on the cross.

Personal Questions

- In our community, do we try to know and to value and appreciate the gifts of every person? Sometimes, the gifts of others cause jealousy and competitiveness in others. How do we react?
- In our community, is there a space where persons can show or manifest their gifts?

Concluding Prayer

Praise God in his holy place, praise him in the heavenly vault of his power, praise him for his mighty deeds, praise him for all his greatness. (Ps 150: 1-2)

Thursday, November 21, 2024

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father of all that is good, keep us faithful in serving you, for to serve you is our lasting joy.

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 19: 41-44

As Jesus drew near and came in sight of the city, he shed tears over it and said, 'If you too had only recognized on this day the way to peace! But in fact, it is hidden from your eyes!

Yes, a time is coming when your enemies will raise fortifications all round you, when they will encircle you and hem you in on every side; they will dash you and the children inside your walls to the ground; they will leave not one stone standing on another within you, because you did not recognize the moment of your visitation.'

Reflection

The Gospel today tells us that Jesus when arriving close to Jerusalem, in seeing the city he began to shed tears and to pronounce words which made one foresee a very dark future for the city, the capital city of his people.

- Luke 19: 41-42 Jesus sheds tears over Jerusalem. "At that time, when Jesus was near Jerusalem, when he saw the city, he shed tears over it and said: 'If you too had only recognized on this day the way to peace! But in fact, it is hidden from your eyes!'" Jesus sheds tears because he loves his homeland, his people, the capital city of his land, the Temple. He sheds tears, because he knows that everything will be destroyed because of the fault of his people who were not aware of the call made by God through the facts of life. People were not aware of the way that could lead them to Peace, Shalom. But, in fact, it is hidden from your eyes! This affirmation recalls the criticism of Isaiah to the person who adored the idols: "He hankers after ashes, his deluded heart has led him astray; he will not save himself; he will not think. What I have in my hand is nothing but a lie!" (Is 44: 20). The lie was in their look and, because of this; they became incapable to perceive the truth. As Saint Paul says: "But for those who out of jealousy have taken for their guide not truth but injustice, there will be a fury of retribution" (Rm 2: 8). It is the truth that remains the prisoner of injustice. On another occasion, Jesus complains that Jerusalem did not know how to become aware of God's visit, nor of accepting it: "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, it will be deserted" (Lk 13: 34-35).

- Luke 19: 43-44 Announcement of the destruction of Jerusalem. "Yes, a time is coming when your enemies will raise fortifications all round you, when they will encircle you and hem you in on every side; they will dash you and your children inside your walls to the ground; they will leave not one stone standing on another within you, because you did not recognize the moment of your visitation" Jesus describes what will happen to Jerusalem. He uses the images of war which were common at that time when an army attacked a city: trenches, killing of people and total destruction of the walls and of the houses. Thus, in the past this is the way Jerusalem was destroyed by Nabuchadnezzar. In this way, the Roman legions used to do with the rebellious cities, and this is what will be done again, forty years later, to the city of Jerusalem. In fact, in the year 70, Jerusalem was surrounded and invaded by the Roman army. Everything was destroyed. Before this historical background, the gesture of Jesus becomes a very serious warning for all those who pervert the sense of the Good News of Jesus. They should have listened to the final warning: "Because you did not recognize the moment of your visitation" In this warning, everything which Jesus does is defined as a "visitation from God."

Personal Questions

- Do you weep over a world situation? Looking at the present-day situation of the world, would Jesus shed tears? The prevision is dark. From the point of view of Ecology, we have already gone beyond the limit. The prevision is tragic.
- In Jesus, God visits his people. In your life, have you received some visit from God?

Concluding Prayer

Sing a new song to Yahweh: his praise in the assembly of the faithful! Israel shall rejoice in its Maker, the children of Zion delight in their king. (Ps 149: 1-2)

Friday, November 22, 2024

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father of all that is good, keep us faithful in serving you, for to serve you is our lasting joy.

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 19: 45-48

Jesus went into the Temple and began driving out those who were busy trading, saying to them, "According to scripture, my house shall be a house of prayer but you have turned it into a bandits' den."
He taught in the Temple every day. The chief priests and the scribes, in company with the leading citizens, tried to do away with him, but they could not find a way to carry this out because the whole people hung on his words.

Reflection

- Context.

Luke after having described the journey of Jesus going up to Jerusalem (11-19, 28) now presents him while he is carrying out his activity in the context of the Temple. After the entrance of the one sent by the Lord into Jerusalem passing through the door on the East (19: 45), the Temple becomes the first place where Jesus carries out his activity: the controversies that are narrated take place in this place and they refer to this. Jesus' going to the Temple is not only a personal fact but also concerns the "multitude of his disciples" (v. 37) on their relationship with God (vv. 31-34). Luke above all, presents a first episode in which are presented the preparations for the entrance of Jesus into the Temple (vv. 29-36) and their realization (vv. 37-40); then follows a scene where we find the passage of today's liturgy: his installation in the Temple and driving out the sellers from the Temple (vv. 45-48).

- The Gesture of Jesus.

This does not have a political value but a prophetic significance. The reader thinks that the great purpose of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem is the entrance into the Temple. To recall the prophecy of Malachi is evident that is fulfilled at the entrance of Jesus into the Temple: "And suddenly the Lord whom you seek will come to his Temple..." (3: 1). The gesture of driving out the sellers from the Temple is accompanied by Jesus with two references to Scripture. Above all, Is 56: 7: "My house will be a house of prayer." The Temple is the place in which Jesus turns back to the Father. The commercial and business activity has made the Temple a den of bandits and has deprived it of its only and exclusive function: the encounter with the presence of God. The second reference from Scripture: is taken from Jeremiah 7: 11: "Do you look on this Temple that bears my name as a den of bandits?" The image of the den of bandits serves Jesus to condemn the material traffic on the one side and not only the dishonest traffic of trade or business that in a hidden and illegal way was carried out in the Temple. Jesus demands a complete change: to purify the Temple from all those human negative things and to bring it back to its original function: to render an authentic service to God. And driving out those impostors of the trade and business the prophecy of Zechariah is fulfilled: "There will be no more traders in the Temple of Yahweh Sabaoth, when that Day comes" (14: 21). These words of Jesus on the Temple are not directed to a restoration of the purity of the cult or worship, as was the intention of the Zelots. The intention of Jesus goes beyond the purity of the cult; it is more radical, intransigent: the Temple is not a work done by human efforts; the presence of God is not bound to its material aspect; the authentic service of God is carried out by Jesus through his teaching. Because of this preaching "the high priests and the Scribes

together with the leading citizens tried to do away with him” (v. 47). Within this temporary place of the Temple Jesus carries out a highly significant teaching, in fact, it is precisely in this place that is so fundamental for the Jews that his teaching reaches the summit and it will be from here that the words of the Apostles will begin also (Act 5: 12, 20, 25, 42). The diffusion of the Word of grace of which Jesus is the only bearer extends itself like an arch that begins with his opposition, when he was still only twelve years old in the Temple among the doctors of the Law; it is prolonged with his teaching when going across Galilee and during his journey to Jerusalem; until he entered the Temple where he takes possession of the house of God. The bases for the future mission of the Church are placed in this place: the diffusion of the Word of God. The heads of the people do not intend to suppress Jesus for having ruined the progress of the economic affairs of that time, but the reasons go back to all his previous activity of teaching and now these act in his discourse against the temple. Jesus claims something and this causes the reaction of the high priests and of the Scribes to break out. In contrast with this hostile behavior one can see the positive one of the people who “are hanging from his words.” Jesus is considered as the Messiah who gathers around him with his Word of grace the people of God.

Personal Questions

- Does your prayer to the Lord consist in a simple relationship of father to son in which to find all the strength to communicate with God, or rather is it accompanied by uses and practices to gain over his goodness?
- When you listen to the Word of Jesus do you feel seized by his teaching like the crowds who hung from his words? Or rather are you sufficiently attentive to listen to the Gospel and do you adhere to Christ?

Concluding Prayer

The Law you have uttered is more precious to me than all the wealth in the world. How pleasant your promise to my palate, sweeter than honey in my mouth! (Ps 119: 72, 103)

Saturday, November 23, 2024

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father of all that is good, keep us faithful in serving you, for to serve you is our lasting joy.

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 20: 27-40

Some Sadducees -- those who argue that there is no resurrection -- approached Jesus and they put this question to him, 'Master, Moses prescribed for us, if a man's married brother dies childless, the man must marry the widow to raise up children for his brother. Well then, there were seven brothers; the first, having married a wife, died childless. The second and then the third married the widow. And the same with all seven, they died leaving no children. Finally, the woman herself died. Now, at the resurrection, whose wife will she be since she had been married to all seven?'

Jesus replied, 'The children of this world take wives and husbands, but those who are judged worthy of a place in the other world and in the resurrection from the dead do not marry because they can no longer die, for they are the same as the angels, and being children of the resurrection they are children of God.'

And Moses himself implies that the dead rise again, in the passage about the bush where he calls the Lord the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. Now he is God, not of the dead, but of the living; for to him everyone is alive.'

Some scribes then spoke up. They said, "Well put, Master." They did not dare to ask him any more questions.

Reflection

The Gospel today gives us the discussion of the Sadducees with Jesus on faith in the resurrection.

- Luke 20: 27: The ideology of the Sadducees. The Gospel today begins with the following affirmation: "The Sadducees affirm that there is no resurrection." The Sadducees were an elite type of great landowners or large estates and traders. They were conservative. They did not accept faith in the resurrection. At that time, this faith was beginning to be valued, appreciated by the Pharisees and by popular piety. This urged the people to resist against the dominion of the Romans and of the priests, of the elders and of the Sadducees; the Messianic Kingdom was already present in the situation of well-being which they were living. They followed the so called "Theology of Retribution" which distorted reality. According to that Theology, God would pay with riches and well-being those who observed the law of God and would punish with suffering and poverty those who do evil. Thus, one can understand why the Sadducees did not want any changes. They wanted religion to remain just as it was, immutable like God himself. And for this, to criticize and to ridicule faith in the resurrection, they told fictitious cases to indicate that faith in the resurrection would have led people to be absurd.
- Luke 20: 28-33: The fictitious case of the woman who married seven times. According to the law of the time, if the husband died without leaving any children, his brother had to marry the widow of the deceased man. And this was done in order to avoid that, in case someone died without any descendants, his property would go to another family (Dt 25: 5-6). The Sadducees invented the story of a woman who buried seven husbands, brothers among themselves, and then she herself also died without children. And they asked Jesus: "This woman, then, in the resurrection, whose wife will

she be? because the seven of them had her as wife.” This was invented in order to show that faith in the resurrection creates absurd situations.

- Luke 20: 34-38: The response of Jesus which leaves no doubts. In the response of Jesus there emerges irritation of one who cannot bear pretense or deceit. Jesus cannot bear hypocrisy on the part of the elite which manipulates and ridicules faith in God to legitimize and defend its own interests. The response contains two parts: (a) you understand nothing of the resurrection: The children of this world take wives and husbands, but those who are judged worthy of a place in the other world and in the resurrection from the dead, do not marry, because they can no longer die, for they are the same as the angels, and being children of the resurrection, they are children of God” (vv. 34-36). Jesus explains that the condition of persons after death will be totally diverse from the actual condition. After death there will be no marriages, but all will be like angels in heaven. The Sadducees imagined life in Heaven the same as life on earth; (b) you understand nothing about God: “For the dead will rise, Moses has also indicated this in regard to the bush, when he calls the Lord: the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. God is not God of the dead, but of the living, because all live in him.” The disciples are attentive and learn! Those who are on the side of the Sadducees find themselves on the opposite side of God!
- Luke 20: 39-40: The reaction of others before the response of Jesus. “Then some of the Scribes said: “Master you have spoken well. And they no longer dared to ask him any more questions.” Most probably these doctors of the law were Pharisees, because the Pharisees believed in the resurrection (cf. Ac 23: 6).

Personal Questions

- Today, how do the groups which have power imitate the Sadducees and prepare traps in order to prevent changes in the world and in the Church?
- Do you believe in the resurrection? When you say that you believe in the resurrection, do you think about something of the past, of the present or of the future? Have you ever had an experience of resurrection in your life?

Concluding Prayer

This I believe: I shall see the goodness of Yahweh, in the land of the living.
Put your hope in Yahweh, be strong, let your heart be bold, put your hope in Yahweh. (Ps 27: 13-14)

Sunday, November 24, 2024

Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe

Opening Prayer

Father, your Word knocked at my door in the night. He was captured, bound, and yet he was still speaking, still calling, and as always, he was saying to me:

“Arise, hurry up and follow me!” At dawn, I saw him a prisoner of Pilate and, in spite of all the suffering of the passion, of the forsakenness he felt, he knew me and waited for me. Father, let me go with him into the Praetorium where he is accused, condemned to die. This is my life today, my interior world. Yes, every time your Word invites me, it is a little like going into the Praetorium of my heart, a contaminated and contaminating place, awaiting the purifying presence of Jesus. You know that I am afraid, but Jesus is with me, I must not fear any more. I stay, Father, and listen attentively to the truth of your Son speaking to me. I watch and contemplate his actions, his steps. I follow him, such as I am, throughout the life you have given me. Enfold and fill me with your Holy Spirit.

Gospel Reading - John 18: 33-37

Placing this Passage in its Context:

These few verses help us to further understand the story of the Passion and lead us almost into an intimate relationship with Jesus, in a closed place, set apart, where he is alone, facing Pilate: the Praetorium. He is questioned, he answers, in turn asks, continues to reveal his mystery of salvation and to invite people to come to Him. It is here that Jesus shows that he is king and shepherd; he is bound and crowned while under sentence of death. Here he leads us to the green pastures of his words of truth. This passage is part of a larger section, vv. 28–40, which tells us about the trial of Jesus before the governor. After a whole night of interrogation, beatings, jeers and betrayals, Jesus is handed over to the Roman authority and is condemned to death, but it is in this very death that he reveals himself as Lord, the One who came to give his life, the just One for us unjust, the innocent One for us sinners.

An aid to the reading of the passage:

- vv. 33-34: Pilate goes back into the Praetorium and begins to question Jesus. His first question is “Are you the king of the Jews?” Jesus does not reply directly but draws Pilate into making it absolutely clear what he means by such kingship, he leads Pilate to think further. King of the Jews means the Messiah and it is as Messiah that Jesus is judged and sentenced.
- v. 35: In his reply, Pilate seems to despise the Jews, who are clearly the ones accusing Jesus, the high priests and the people, each bearing responsibility, as we read in the prologue: “He came to his own domain, and his own people did not accept him” (Jn 1: 11). Then comes Pilate’s second question to Jesus: “What have you done?”, but he does not get a reply to this question.
- v. 36: In Jesus’ reply to Pilate’s first question, three times he uses the expression “my kingdom.” Here we have a wonderful explanation as to what really is the kingdom and the kingship of Jesus: it is not of this world, but *of the world to come*, he does not have *guards or servants to fight for him*, only the loving *committing* of his life into his Father’s hands.
- v. 37: The questioning comes back to the first question and Jesus still answers in the affirmative: “Yes, I am a king”, but goes on to explain his origin and his mission. Jesus was born for us, he was sent for us, to reveal the truth of the

Father from whom we have salvation and allow us to listen to his voice and to follow him by being faithful to him all our life.

The Text:

³³ Pilate entered the praetorium again and called Jesus, and said to him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" ³⁴ Jesus answered, "Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?" ³⁵ Pilate answered, "Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me; what have you done?" ³⁶ Jesus answered, "My kingship is not of this world; if my kingship were of this world, my servants would fight, that I might not be handed over to the Jews; but my kingship is not from the world." ³⁷ Pilate said to him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice." ³⁸ Pilate said to him, "What is truth?"

A Moment of Prayerful Silence

so as to enter into the Praetorium and to listen carefully to each word that comes from the mouth of Jesus.

A Few Questions

To help me draw closer to the king and to hand over to him my whole existence.

- I look at the movements of Pilate, his wish to make contact with Jesus, even though he is not aware of doing so. In my own life, why is it difficult for me to enter into, ask, call and hold a dialogue with the Lord?
- The Lord wishes to have a personal relationship with me. Am I capable of getting involved or of allowing myself to be drawn into a real, intense, vital relationship with the Lord? And if I am afraid of doing so, why? What is it that separates me from him, that keeps me at a distance from him?
- "*Handed over.*" I stop at these words and try to reflect on them, to hold them in my heart and to confront them with my life, my behavior of every day.
- Three times Jesus repeats that his kingdom "*is not of this world*", and, thus, invites me forcefully to go on to another reality. Once again he upsets me, putting before me another world, another kingdom, another power. What kind of kingdom am I expecting?
- The final crack of the passage is amazing: "*Listen to my voice.*" I, who am so absorbed in a thousand tasks, commitments, meetings, where shall I turn my ear to? Whom shall I listen to? Of whom shall I think? Every morning I receive new life, but really to whom do I think I owe this regeneration?

A Key to the Reading

- Jesus, the Bound King Handed Over

In these lines a strong verb stands out, repeated again and again from the beginning of the story of the Passion: it is the verb to hand over, said, here, first

by Pilate and then by Jesus. The “handing over of the Christ” is a theological reality, yet at the same time vital, of supreme importance, because it leads us on a journey of wisdom and excellent training. It might be useful to seek out this verb in the pages of Scripture. It first appears that the Father himself handed over Jesus his Son as a gift for all and for all time. In Romans 8: 32 we read: “Since God did not spare his own Son, but gave him up to benefit us all, we may be certain, after such a gift, that he will not refuse anything he can give.” However, I also see that Jesus himself, in the most intimate of fusions with the will of the Father, hands himself over to, offers his life for us, in an act of supreme freely given love. St. Paul says: “Follow Christ by loving as he loved you, giving himself up in our place...” (Eph 5: 2. 25), and I also recall the words of Jesus: “I lay down my life for my sheep... No one takes it from me; I lay it down of my own free will” (Jn 10: 15, 18). Thus, above and beyond all handing over lies this voluntary handing over, which is purely a gift of love. In the Gospels we see the evil handing over of Judas, properly called the traitor, that is, the one who “hands over”, the one who said to the high priests: “What are you prepared to give me if I hand him over to you?” (Mt 26: 15); see also Jn 12: 4; 18: 2. 5. Then it is the Jews who hand over Jesus to Pilate: “If he were not a criminal, we should not be handing him over to you” (Jn 18: 30, 35) and it is Pilate who represents the gentiles, as Jesus had said before: “The Son of Man... will be handed over to the pagans” (Mk 10: 33). Finally, Pilate hands him over to the Jews to be crucified (Jn 19: 16). I contemplate these passages, I see my king bound, chained, as John the Evangelist tells me in 18: 12 and 18: 24. I go down on my knees, I bow before him and ask the Lord for the courage to follow these dramatic yet wonderful passages that are like a hymn of the love of Jesus for us, his “yes” repeated to infinity for our salvation. The Gospel takes me gently into this unique night, when Jesus is handed over for me, as Bread, as Life made flesh, as entirely love. “On the same night he was betrayed [handed over], the Lord Jesus took some bread... and he said: This is my body, which is for you” (1 Cor 11: 23). Then I begin to understand that happiness for me is hidden even in these chains, these knots, with Jesus, with the great king, and that it is hidden in these passages, which speak of one handing over after another, to the will of God and to the love of my Father.

- Jesus, the Messiah King

The dialogue between Jesus and Pilate: in this strange and mysterious questioning, what stands out is that, at first, Pilate calls Jesus “king of the Jews” and later only “king”, as though there was a process, whereby he comes to a fuller and truer understanding of the Lord Jesus. “King of the Jews” is a formula used with a very rich meaning by the Jewish people of that time, and it contains the basis, the nucleus of the faith in the expectation of Israel: it clearly signifies the Messiah. Jesus is questioned and judged on whether he is or is not the Messiah. Jesus is the Messiah of the Lord, his Anointed, his Consecrated, he is the servant sent into the world for this, to fulfil in his person and in his life all that the prophets, the law and the psalms had said concerning him. Words that speak of persecution, of suffering, of weeping, wounds and blood, words of death for Jesus, for the Anointed of the Lord, for the one who is our breath and in whose shadow we shall live among the nations, as the prophet Jeremiah says in Lam 4: 20; words that speak of pitfalls, of insurrections, conspiracies (Ps

2: 2) and snares. We see him disfigured, as a man of suffering, unrecognizable except by that love, which, like him, knows suffering only too well. "For this reason, the whole House of Israel can be certain that God has made this Jesus whom you crucified both Lord and Christ!" (Acts 2: 36). Yes, my king is a bound king, a king handed over, cast aside, despised; he is a king anointed for battle, but anointed to lose, to sacrifice himself, to be crucified, to be immolated like a lamb. This is the Messiah: the king whose throne is the cross, whose purple is his blood poured out, whose palace is the hearts of men and women, poor like him, but made rich and consoled by a continuous resurrection. These are our times, the times of consolation by the Lord, when he sends the Lord Jesus all the time, the Jesus whom he destined to be our Messiah.

- Jesus, the Martyr King

"I came to witness to the truth," says Jesus, using a very strong term, which, in Greek, contains the meaning of martyrdom. A witness is a martyr, one who affirms by his life, his blood, everything that he is and has, the truth that he believes. Jesus witnesses to the truth, which is the Word of the Father (Jn 17: 17) and he gives his life for this Word. Life for life, word for word, love for love. Jesus is the Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of God's creation (Rev 3: 14); in him there is only "yes," forever and from the beginning, and in this "yes" he offers us the whole truth of the Father, of himself, of the Spirit, and in this truth, in this light, he makes of us his kingdom. "They who trust in him will understand the truth, those who are faithful will live with him in love" (Wis 3: 8-9). I do not seek further words, I only stay near the Lord, on his breast, like John on that night. Thus, he becomes my breath, my sight, my "yes" pronounced to the Father, to my brothers and sisters, in witness of my love. He is the faithful one, the one present, the Truth that I listen to and by whom I let myself be transformed.

Psalm 21 (20)

A hymn of thanksgiving for the victory, which comes from God

Ref. Great is your love for us, Lord!

In thy strength the king rejoices, O Lord; and in thy help how greatly he exults! Thou hast given him his heart's desire, and hast not withheld the request of his lips. For thou dost meet him with goodly blessings; thou dost set a crown of fine gold upon his head. He asked life of thee; thou gavest it to him, length of days for ever and ever.

His glory is great through thy help; splendor and majesty thou dost bestow upon him. Yea, thou dost make him most blessed forever; thou dost make him glad with the joy of thy presence. For the king trusts in the Lord; and through the steadfast love of the Most High he shall not be moved. Be exalted, O Lord, in thy strength!

We will sing and praise thy power.

Closing Prayer

Father, I praise you, I bless you, I thank you that you have led me together with your Son, Jesus, into Pilate's Praetorium, into this foreign and hostile land, and

yet a land of revelation and of light. Only you, in your infinite love, can transform every distance and every darkness into a place of encounter and life.

Thank you for bringing about the time of consolation, when you sent your Lamb, seated on the throne, a sacrificed yet living king. His blood is life-giving dewdrops, anointing of salvation. Thank you because He always speaks and sings to me your truth, which is all love and mercy. I would like to be an instrument in the hands of my king, Jesus, to pass on to all the consoling notes of your Word.

Father, today I have listened to you in this Gospel. Please grant that my ears may never tire of listening to you, to you Son, to your Spirit. Grant that I may be born again from truth so that I may give witness to truth.

Monday, November 25, 2024

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Lord, increase our eagerness to do your will and help us to know the saving power of your love. You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading - Luke 21: 1-4

Looking up, Jesus saw rich people putting their offerings into the treasury; and he noticed a poverty-stricken widow putting in two small coins, and he said, "I tell you truly, this poor widow has put in more than any of them; for these have all put in money they could spare, but she in her poverty has put in all she had to live on."

Reflection

In today's Gospel Jesus weaves the praise of a poor widow who knows how to share more than the rich. Many poor people today do the same. People say: "The poor do not let the poor starve to death." But, sometimes, even this is not possible. A woman who went to live out in the country in the periphery of a city in Brazil, in Paraiba, said: "In the country the people are poor, but they always have something to share with the poor who knock at their door. Now that I am here in the city, when I see a poor person who knocks on the door, I hide because I feel ashamed, because I have nothing in the house to share with him!" On one side, there are rich people who have everything but do not know how to share; on the other side, there are poor people who have hardly anything, but who want to share the little they have.

At the beginning, in the Church, the great majority of the first Christian communities, were formed by poor people. (1 Co 1: 26). After a short time, well-to-do people also entered these communities, and this caused several problems. The social tensions which were present in the Roman Empire began to appear also in the life of the communities. That manifested itself, for example,

when they met together to celebrate the supper (1 Co 11: 20-22), or when they held the meeting (Jm 2: 1-4). This is why, the teaching of the act of the widow was very actual, both for them as well as for us today.

- Luke 21: 1-2: The widow's mite. Jesus was before the treasure in the Temple and observed people who put their offering into the treasury. The poor put in a few pennies, the rich offerings of great value. The Treasury of the Temple received much money. All gave something for the maintenance of the worship, to support the clergy and for the preservation of the building. Part of this money was used to help the poor, because at that time there was no social security. The poor lived at the mercy of public charity. The persons who had the greatest needs were the orphans and the widows. They depended for everything on the charity of others, but even in this way, they tried to share with others the little that they had. Thus, a very poor widow put her offering into the treasury of the Temple; just two pennies!
- Luke 21: 3-4: The comment of Jesus. Which is worth more: the few pennies of the widow or the great amount of the rich? According to the majority, the money of the rich was more useful for charity, than the few pennies of the widow. For example, the disciples thought that the problem of the people could be resolved only with much money. On the occasion of the multiplication of the loaves, they had suggested to buy bread to feed the people (Lk 9: 13; Mk 6: 37). Philip succeeded in saying: "Two-hundred denarii of bread are not sufficient even for everyone to have a piece of bread" (Jn 6: 7). In fact, for anyone who thinks like that, the two pennies of the widow do not serve for anything. But Jesus says: "I tell you truly, this poor widow has put in more than any of them." Jesus has diverse criteria. Calling the attention of the disciples on the act of the widow, he teaches them and us where we have to look for the manifestation of God's will: in the poor and in sharing. This is a very important criterion: "In fact all these have put in money they could spare, but she in her poverty has put in all she had to live on."
- Alms, sharing, riches. The practice of giving alms was very important for the Jews. It was considered to be a "good work", because the law of the Old Testament said: "Of course, there will never cease to be poor people in the country, and that is why I am giving you this command: Always be open handed with your brother, and with anyone in your country who is in need and poor" (Dt 15: 11). The alms put into the treasury of the Temple, whether for the worship or for the needy, orphans or widows, were considered a pleasing act to God (Eccl 35: 2; cf. Eccl 17: 17; 29: 12; 40: 24). To give alms was a way to recognize that all goods of the earth belong to God and that we are only the administrators of these gifts. But the tendency to accumulate continues to exist and is very strong; it always arises anew in the human heart. Conversion is always necessary. This is why Jesus said to the rich young man: "Go, sell all you possess, give it to the poor!" (Mk 10: 21). In the other Gospels the same requirement is repeated: "Sell your possessions and give to those in need. Get yourselves purses that do not wear out, treasure that will not fail you, in heaven where no thief can reach it and no moth destroy it" (Lk 12: 33-34; Mt 6: 9-20). The practice of sharing and of solidarity is one of the characteristics which the Spirit of Jesus wants to realize in the community. The result of the effusion of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost was that: "None of the members was ever

in want, as all those who owned land or houses would sell them, and bring the money from the sale of them, to present it to the apostles" (Ac 4: 34-35^a; 2: 44-45). This money deposited at the feet of the Apostles was not accumulated but "it was then distributed to any who might be in need" (Ac 4: 35b; 2: 45). The entry of the rich into the Christian communities on the one side rendered possible the expansion of Christianity, providing better conditions for the missionary voyages. But on the other side, the tendency to accumulate blocked the movement of solidarity and of sharing. James helped people to become aware if they were following a mistaken path: "Well now you rich! Lament, weep for the miseries that are coming to you. Your wealth is rotting; your clothes are all moth-eaten." (Jm 5: 1-3). To undertake the way to the Kingdom, all need to become pupils of that poor widow, who shared with others that which was necessary for her living (Lk 21: 4).

Personal Questions

- Which are the difficulties and the joys that you find in your life in practicing solidarity and sharing with others?
- How is it that the two pennies of the widow can be worth more than the large amounts of the rich? Which is the message of this text for us today?

Concluding Prayer

Be sure that Yahweh is God, he made us, we belong to him, his people, the flock of his sheepfold. (Ps 100: 3)

Tuesday, November 26, 2024

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Lord,
increase our eagerness to do your will and help us to know the saving power of your love. You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading - Luke 21: 5-11

When some were talking about the Temple, remarking how it was adorned with fine stonework and votive offerings, Jesus said, "All these things you are staring at now -- the time will come when not a single stone will be left on another; everything will be destroyed."

And they put to him this question, "Master," they said, "when will this happen, then, and what sign will there be that it is about to take place?"

But he said, "Take care not to be deceived, because many will come using my name and saying, 'I am the one' and 'The time is near at hand.' Refuse to join

them. And when you hear of wars and revolutions, do not be terrified, for this is something that must happen first, but the end will not come at once.” Then he said to them, “Nation will fight against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes and plagues and famines in various places; there will be terrifying events and great signs from heaven.”

Reflection

The Gospel today begins with the discourse of Jesus called the Apocalyptic Discourse. It is a long discourse, which will be the theme of the Gospels in the next days up to the last week of the ecclesial year. For us of the XXI century, the apocalyptic language is strange and confused. But for the poor and persecuted people of the Christian communities of that time these were the words that everybody understood and the principal purpose of which was to animate the faith and the hope of the poor and of the oppressed. The apocalyptic language is the fruit of the witness of faith of these poor people, who, despite the persecution and against all contrary appearances, continued to believe that God was with them and that he continued to be the Lord of history.

- Luke 21: 5-7: Introduction to the Apocalyptic Discourse.

In the days previous to the Apocalyptic Discourse, Jesus had broken away from the Temple (Lk 19: 45-48), with the priests and the elders (Lk 20: 1-26), with the Sadducees (Lk 20: 27-40), with the Scribes who exploited the widows (Lk 20: 41-47) and at the end, as we have seen in yesterday's Gospel, he ends by praising the widow who gave as alms all she possessed (Lk 21: 1-4). Now, in today's Gospel, listening that “while some were talking about the Temple, remarking how it was adorned with fine stonework and votive offerings, Jesus said: “The time will come when not a single stone will be left on another everything will be destroyed.” In listening to this comment of Jesus, the disciples asked: “Master, when will this happen, then, and what sign will there be that it is about to take place?” They ask for more information. The Apocalyptic Discourse which follows is the response of Jesus to this question of the disciples on when and on how the destruction of the Temple will take place. The Gospel of Mark informs the following on the context in which Jesus pronounces this discourse. He says that Jesus had left the city and was now sitting on the Mount of Olives (Mk 13: 2-4). There, from the top of the mountain he had a majestic view of the Temple. Mark also says that there were only four disciples who listened to his last discourse. At the beginning of his preaching, three years before, there in Galilee, the crowds followed Jesus to listen to his words. Now, in the last discourse, there are only four who listen: Peter, James, John, and Andrew (Mk 13: 3). Efficiency and a good result are not always measured by the quantity!

- Luke 21: 8: Objective of the discourse: "Take care not to be deceived!"

The disciples had asked: “Master, when will this happen, then, and what sign will there be that it is about to take place?” Jesus begins his response with a warning: “Take care not to be deceived. Many will come using my name and saying, ‘I am the one’ and ‘the time is near at hand’; refuse to join them.” At a time of changes and of confusion there are always persons who want to draw advantage from the situation deceiving the others. This happens today and it

also happened in the years 80's, at the time when Luke wrote his Gospel. In the face of the disasters and the wars of those years, in the face of the destruction of Jerusalem of the year 70 and of the persecution of the Christians on the part of the Roman Empire, many thought that the end of time was close at hand. There were people who said: "God no longer controls the events! We are lost!" This is why the main concern of the Apocalyptic Discourses is always the same: to help the communities to discern better the signs of the times so as not to be deceived by the conversation of people concerning the end of the world: "Take care not to be deceived." Then follows the discourse which offers signs to help them discern and thus, increases their hope.

- Luke 21: 9-11: Signs to help them to read the facts.

After this brief introduction, begins the discourse properly so called: "When you hear of wars and revolutions, do not be terrified, for this is something that must happen first, but the end will not come at once." Then he said to them: "Nation will fight against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes and plagues and famines in various places, there will be terrifying events and great signs from heaven." To understand these words well, it is well to recall what follows: Jesus lives and speaks in the year 33. The readers of Luke live and listen in the year 85. Now, in the fifty years between the year 33 and the year 85, the majority of things, mentioned by Jesus, had already taken place and were known by everybody. For example, in diverse parts of the world there were wars, false prophets arose, there were sicknesses and plagues, and, in Asia Minor, the earthquakes were frequent. According to the apocalyptic style, the discourse lists all these events, one after the other, as signs or stages of the project of God in the history of the People of God, from the time of Jesus down to our time:

- 1st sign: the false Messiahs (Lk 21: 8);
- 2nd sign: war and revolutions (Lk 21: 9);
- 3rd sign: nations which fight against other nations, one kingdom against another kingdom (Lk 21: 10);
- 4th sign: earthquakes in different parts (Lk 21: 11);
- 5th sign: hunger, plagues and signs in the sky (Lk 21: 11).

Here ends the Gospel for today. That of tomorrow presents another sign: the persecution of the Christian communities (Lk 21: 12). The Gospel for day after tomorrow two signs: the destruction of Jerusalem and the beginning of the disintegration of creation. Thus, by means of these signs of the Apocalyptic Discourse, the communities of the years 80, the time when Luke wrote his Gospel, could calculate at what level the execution of God's plan was, and discover that history had not escaped from the hands of God. Everything happened according to what was foretold and announced by Jesus in the Apocalyptic Discourse.

Personal Questions

- What sentiment or feeling did you experience during the reading of today's Gospel? Peace or fear?

- Do you think that the end of the world is close at hand? What can we answer to those who say that the end of the world is close at hand? How can we encourage people today to resist and to have hope?

Concluding Prayer

Let the countryside exult, and all that is in it, and all the trees of the forest cry out for joy, at Yahweh's approach, for he is coming, coming to judge the earth; he will judge the world with saving justice, and the nations with constancy. (Ps 96: 12-13)

Wednesday, November 27, 2024

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Lord,
increase our eagerness to do your will and help us to know the saving power of your love. You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading - Luke 21: 12-19

Jesus said to his disciples: 'You will be seized and persecuted; you will be handed over to the synagogues and to imprisonment and brought before kings and governors for the sake of my name -and that will be your opportunity to bear witness.

Make up your minds not to prepare your defense, because I myself shall give you an eloquence and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to resist or contradict.

You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, relations, and friends; and some of you will be put to death. You will be hated universally on account of my name, but not a hair of your head will be lost.

Your perseverance will win you your lives.

Reflection

In today's Gospel, which is the continuation of the discourse begun yesterday, Jesus lists the different signs to help the communities to place themselves in the events and not to lose faith in God, nor the courage to resist against the attacks of the Roman Empire. We will repeat the first five signs mentioned in yesterday's Gospel:

- 1st sign: the false Messiahs (Lk 21: 8);
- 2nd sign: war and revolutions (Lk 21: 9);
- 3rd sign: nations which fight against other nations, a kingdom against another kingdom (Lk 21: 10);

- 4th sign: earthquakes in different places (Lk 21: 11);
- 5th sign: hunger, plagues and signs in the sky (Lk 21: 11);

The Gospel of yesterday ends here. Now, in today's Gospel another sign is added:

- 6th sign: the persecution of Christians (Lk 21: 12-19).

- Luke 21: 12. *The sixth sign is the persecution.*

Various times, in the few years which he lived among us, Jesus had warned the disciples that they would be persecuted. Here, in the last discourse, he repeats the same warning and makes them know that the persecution has to be taken into consideration in discerning the signs of the times: *"You will be seized and persecuted, you will be handed over to the Synagogues and to imprisonment, and brought before kings and governors, for the sake of my name."* And of these, apparently very negative warnings, Jesus had said: *"Do not be terrified for this is something that must happen first, but the end will not come at once"* (Lk 21: 9). And the Gospel of Mark adds that all these signs *"have only begun, this is the beginning of the birth pangs!"* (Mk 13: 8). Now, the birth pangs though being very painful for the mother are not a sign of death, but rather of life! They are not a reason to fear, but rather to hope! This way of reading the events brings peace to the persecuted communities. Thus, reading or hearing these signs, prophesized by Jesus in the year 33, the readers of Luke of the years 80 could conclude: "All these things already take place according to the plan foreseen and announced by Jesus! Therefore, the history has not escaped from God's hand! God is with us!"

- Luke 21: 13-15: The mission of the Christians during the time of persecution.

Persecution is not something fatal, neither can it be a reason for discouragement or for despair, but it should be considered as a possibility offered by God, in a way that the communities may carry out the mission of witnessing to the Good News of God. God says: "That will be your opportunity to bear witness. Make up your minds not to prepare your defense because I myself shall give you eloquence and wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to resist or contradict."

By means of this affirmation Jesus encourages the persecuted Christians who lived anguished. He makes them know that, even if persecuted, they had a mission to carry out, that is: to give witness of the Good News of God and thus be a sign of the Kingdom (Ac 1: 8). The courageous witness would lead the people to repeat what the magi in Egypt said before the signs and to have courage like Moses and Aaron: *"The finger of God is here"* (Ex 8: 15). Conclusion: if the communities should not be worried, if everything is in God's hands, if everything was already foreseen, if everything is nothing more than birth pangs, then there is no reason to worry.

- Luke 21: 16-17: *Persecution even within the family.*

"You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, relations and friends, and some of you will be put to death; you will be hated universally on account of my name." Persecution does not only come from outside, from the Empire, but also from inside, on the part of one's own family. In one same family, some

accepted the Good News, others did not. The announcement of the Good News caused divisions within families. There were even some persons, who basing themselves on the Law of God, denounced and killed their own relatives who declared themselves followers of Jesus (Dt 13: 7-12).

- Luke 21: 18-19: *the source of hope and of resistance.*

"But not a hair of your head will be lost. Your perseverance will win you your lives!" This final observation of Jesus recalls the other word which Jesus had said: *"But not a hair of your head will be lost!"* (Lk 21: 18). This comparison was a strong call not to lose faith and to continue righteously in the community. And this also confirms what Jesus had said on another occasion: *Anyone who wants to save his life will lose it, but anyone who will lose his life for my sake will save it"* (Lk 9: 24).

Personal Questions

- How do you usually read the stages of the history of your life or of your country?
- Looking at the history of humanity of the last years, has hope increased or diminished in you?

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)

Thursday, November 28, 2024

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Lord,
increase our eagerness to do your will and help us to know the saving power of your love. You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading - Luke 21: 20-28

Jesus said to his disciples: 'When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then you must realize that it will soon be laid desolate. Then those in Judaea must escape to the mountains, those inside the city must leave it, and those in country districts must not take refuge in it. For this is the time of retribution when all that scripture says must be fulfilled.

Alas for those with child, or with babies at the breast, when those days come! 'For great misery will descend on the land and retribution on this people. They will fall by the edge of the sword and be led captive to every gentile country;

and Jerusalem will be trampled down by the gentiles until their time is complete.

'There will be signs in the sun and moon and stars; on earth nations in agony, bewildered by the turmoil of the ocean and its waves; men fainting away with terror and fear at what menaces the world, for the powers of heaven will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.

When these things begin to take place, stand erect, hold your heads high, because your liberation is near at hand.'

Reflection

In today's Gospel we have the continuation of the Apocalyptic Discourse which gives two signs, the 7th and the 8th, which should take place before the end of time or better before the coming of the end of this world in order to give place to the new world, to the "new Heavens and the New Earth" (Is 65: 17). The seventh sign is the destruction of Jerusalem and the eighth is the upsetting of the old creation.

- Luke 21: 20-24. The seventh sign: the destruction of Jerusalem. Jerusalem was for them the Eternal City. And now it was destroyed! How can this fact be explained? Is it possible that God is not aware of this? It is difficult for us to imagine the trauma and the crisis of faith that the destruction of Jerusalem caused in the communities both of the Jews and of the Christians. Here it is possible to make an observation on the composition of the Gospel of Luke and of Mark. Luke writes in the year 85. He uses the Gospel of Mark to compose his narrative on Jesus. Mark writes in the year 70, the same year in which Jerusalem was surrounded and destroyed by the Roman armies. This is why Mark writes giving an indication to the reader: "When you see the appalling abomination set up where it ought not to be – (and here he opens a parenthesis and says) "let the reader understand!") (he closes the parenthesis) - then those in Judaea must escape to the mountains" (Mk 13: 14). When Luke mentions the destruction of Jerusalem, for the past fifteen years Jerusalem was in ruins. This is why he omits the parenthesis of Mark and Luke says: "When you will see Jerusalem surrounded by the army, then you must realize that it will soon be laid desolate. Then those in Judaea must escape to the mountains, those inside the city must leave it, and those in country districts must not take refuge in it; for this is the time of retribution when all that Scripture says must be fulfilled. Alas for those with child, or with babies at the breast, when those days come. For great misery will descend on the land and retribution on this people. They will fall by the edge of the sword and be led captive to every gentile country; and Jerusalem will be trampled down by gentiles until their time is complete." Hearing Jesus who announces persecution (6th sign) and the destruction of Jerusalem (7th sign), the readers of the persecuted communities in the time of Luke concluded saying: "This is our day! We are in the 6th and 7th signs!"
- Luke 21: 25-26: The eighth sign: changes in the sun and in the moon. When will the end come? At the end, after having spoken about all these signs which had already been realized, there was still the following question: "God's project is

very much advanced and the stages foreseen by Jesus are already being realized. We are in the sixth and the seventh stages, how many stages or signs are still lacking until the end arrives? Is there much lacking?" The response is now given in the 8th sign: "There will be signs in the sun and moon and stars, and on earth nations in agony, bewildered by the turmoil of the ocean and its waves; men fainting away with terror and fear at what menaces the world, for the powers of heaven will be shaken." The 8th sign is different from the other signs. The signs in heaven and on earth are an indication of what is taking place, at the same time, at the end of the old world, of the ancient creation, it is the beginning of the coming of the new Heaven and the new earth. When the shell of the egg begins to crack it is a sign that the novelty is about to appear. It is the coming of a New World which is provoking the disintegration of the ancient world. Conclusion: very little is lacking! The Kingdom of God is arriving already!

- Luke 21: 27-28: The coming of the Kingdom of God and the appearance of the Son of Man. "Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. When these things begin to take place, stand erect; hold your heads high, because your liberation is near at hand." In this announcement, Jesus describes the coming of the Kingdom with images taken from the prophecy of Daniel (Dn 7: 1-14). Daniel says that, after the misfortunes caused by the kingdoms of this world, the Kingdom of God will come. The kingdoms of this world, all of them, had the figure of an animal: lion, panther, bear, and ferocious beast (Dn 7: 3-7). These are animal signs which dehumanize life, like it happens with the neo-liberal kingdom, today! The Kingdom of God then appears with the aspect of the Son of Man, that is, with a human aspect (Dn 7: 13). It is a human kingdom. To construct this kingdom which humanizes is the task of the persons of the community. It is the new history that we have to take to fulfilment, and which brings together people from the four corners of the earth. The title Son of Man is the name that Jesus liked to use. In the four Gospels this name appears more than 80 times (eighty)! Any pain which we bear from now, any struggle in behalf of life, any persecution for the sake of justice, any birth pangs, are a seed of the Kingdom which will come in the 8th sign.

Personal Questions

- Persecution of the communities, destruction of Jerusalem. Lack of hope. Before the events which today make people suffer, do I despair? Which is the source of my hope?
- Son of Man is the title which Jesus liked to use. He wants to humanize life. The more human it is the more divine as Pope Leo the Great said. Am I human in my relationships with others? Do I humanize?

Concluding Prayer

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

Friday, November 29, 2024

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Lord,
increase our eagerness to do your will and help us to know the saving power of your love. You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading - Luke 21: 29-33

Jesus told to his disciples a parable, 'Look at the fig tree and indeed every tree. As soon as you see them bud, you can see for yourselves that summer is now near. So with you when you see these things happening: know that the kingdom of God is near.

In truth I tell you, before this generation has passed away all will have taken place. Sky and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

Reflection

The Gospel today presents the final recommendations of the Apocalyptic Discourse. Jesus insists on two points: (a) on the attention which should be given to the signs of the times (Lk 21: 29-31) and (b) on hope founded on the firmness of the word of God which drives away fear to despair (Lk 21: 32-33).

- Luke 21: 29-31: Look at the fig tree and indeed every tree. Jesus orders to look at nature: "Look at the fig tree and indeed every tree; as soon as you see them bud, you can see for yourselves that summer is now near. So with you when you see these things happening know that the kingdom of God is near." Jesus asks to contemplate the phenomena of nature to learn how to read and interpret the things which are happening in the world. The buds or sprouts on the fig tree are an evident sign that summer is near. In the same way when the seven signs appear they are a proof that "the Kingdom of God is close at hand!" To make this discernment is not easy. A person who is alone does not become aware of this. By reflecting together in community, the light appears. And the light is this: to experience in everything that happens the call not to close ourselves in the present, but rather to keep the horizon open and to perceive in everything that happens an arrow directed toward the future. But nobody knows the exact hour of the coming of the Kingdom, nobody. In Mark's Gospel, Jesus says: "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).
- Luke 21: 32-33: "In truth I tell you, before this generation has passed away all will have taken place. Sky and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away." This word of Jesus recalls the prophecy of Isaiah which says: "All humanity is grass and all its beauty like the wildflowers. The grass withers, the flower fades when the breath of Yahweh blows on them. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God remains forever." (Is 40: 7-8). The word of

Jesus is the source of our hope. What he says will arrive!

- The coming of the Messiah and the end of the world. Today, many people live worried concerning the end of the world. Some, basing themselves on a mistaken and fundamentalist reading of the Apocalypse of John, even arrive at calculating the exact date of the end of the world. In the past, beginning at “one thousand years” quoted in the Apocalypse (Rv 20: 7), it was usually repeated: “The year one thousand has gone by but the year two-thousand will not pass!” And because of this, as the year two thousand approached, many were worried. There were some people who anguished because of the coming of the end of the world, committed suicide! But the year 2000 arrived and nothing happened. The end of the world did not arrive! In the Christian communities of the first centuries, they faced the same problems. They lived in the expectation of the imminent coming of Jesus. Jesus was coming to carry out the Final Judgment so as to finish with the unjust history of the world here on earth and to inaugurate the new phase of history, the definitive phase of the New Heavens and of the New Earth. They thought that this would take place between 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). There were some persons who no longer worked, because they thought that the end would arrive within a few days or weeks (2 Th 2: 1-3; 3: 11). This is what they thought. But even today, the coming of Jesus has not arrived yet! How can this delay be interpreted? On the streets of the cities people see writings on the walls which say Jesus will return! Is he coming or not? And how will his coming be? Many times, the affirmation “Jesus will return” is used to frighten persons and to oblige them to go to a determinate church.

In the New Testament the return of Jesus is always a reason for joy and peace! For those who are exploited and oppressed, the coming of Jesus is Good News! When will this coming take place? Among the Jews, there were various opinions. The Sadducees and the Herodians said: “The Messianic times will come!” They thought that their well-being during the government of Herod was the expression of the Kingdom of God. And for this reason, they did not accept any changes and they fought against the preaching of Jesus who invited people to change and to convert themselves. The Pharisees said: “The coming of the Kingdom will depend on our effort in observing the law!” The Essenes said: “The promised Kingdom will arrive only when we will have purified the country from all its impurity.” Among the Christians there was the same variety of opinions. Some of the community of Thessalonica the Greeks, basing themselves on Paul’s preaching, said: “Jesus will return!” (1 Th 4: 13-18; 2 Th 2: 2). Paul responds that it was not that simple as they imagined. And to those who did not work he said: “Anyone who does not work has no right to eat!” (2 Th 3: 10). Probably, it was a question of persons who at mealtime they would go to beg for food to the neighbor’s house. Other Christians thought that Jesus would return only after the Gospel had been announced to the whole world (Ac 1: 6-11). And they thought that, the greater their effort would be to evangelize, the more rapidly would the end of the world arrive. Others, tired of waiting, said: “He will never come back!” (2 P 3: 4). Others basing themselves on the word of Jesus justly said: “He is already among us!” (Mt 25: 40).

The same thing happens today. There are people who say: “The way things are in the

Church and in society, it is alright.” They want no changes. Others are waiting for the immediate coming of Jesus. Others think that Jesus will return only through our work and announcement. For us, Jesus is already among us (Mt 28: 20). He is already at our side in the struggle for justice, for peace and for life. But the fullness has not yet been attained. For this reason, we wait with perseverance the liberation of humanity and of nature (Rm 8: 22- 25).

Personal Questions

- Jesus asks to look at the fig tree to contemplate the phenomena of nature. In my life have I already learnt something contemplating nature?
- Jesus says: “The sky and earth will pass, but my words will not pass.” How do I embody in my life these words of Jesus?

Concluding Prayer

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

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

Saturday, November 30, 2024

St. Andrew, Apostle

Prayer

O Father, you called St. Andrew from the net of the world to the wonderful fisher of men for the proclamation of the Gospel. Please also make us taste the sweetness of the heavenly Father and make us to be your beloved children. So that we can open our heart to you with full confidence in order to allow it to be made and be processed by the eyes and words of your beloved Son, our Lord Jesus, and that together with Him, we bring the joyful news of your merciful love to our brothers and sisters, which makes, that our life more beautiful.z

Gospel Reading – Matthew 4: 18-22

As he was walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon who is called Peter, and his brother Andrew, casting a net into the sea; they were fishermen.

He said to them, "Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men." At once they left their nets and followed him. He walked along from there and saw two other brothers, James, the son of Zebedee, and his brother John. They were in a boat, with their father Zebedee, mending their nets. He called them, and immediately they left their boat and their father and followed him.

Meditation

- "He was walking along the Sea of Galilee." Jesus is just out of the desert, after 40 days of great loneliness and struggle against the devil (Mt 4, 1-11). It emerged victorious, secure his love of the Father and came into Galilee, and despised distant land, a land border and irrelevance, bringing his great light, his salvation (Mt 4, 12-16). And here he began to shout his message of joy and liberation: "The kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Mt 4, 17). There is no more loneliness, nor desert filled, there is no since the Lord Jesus has fallen on our land, Galilee of the Gentiles: in fact he is really close, it is God-with-us. It is not far away, does not stay still and hidden, but He "walks", walk along the sea, along the shores of our poor lives. Indeed, even more. Galilee, meaning "ring": this tells us that he, Love, is to marry, to join with Him forever. Then you just have to welcome him, as he walks by the sea. He already sees us, even from a distance, we already know ...
- The verb "saw", repeated twice, first in reference to Andrew and his brother, then James and John, brings all the strength and intensity of a gaze that comes from the heart, from deep. Thus the Lord sees us: our readers in, with loving attention browse the pages of our lives, knows everything about us, everything he loves.
- It is no accident that Matthew often uses the vocabulary to describe this episode of family vocation, encounter with the Lord Jesus we find four times the word "brother" and two times the word "father." We brought home our principle of life, where we discover that we too are sons and brothers. Jesus enters our reality in this most human, most of us, more every day, enters the flesh, in the heart, in my entire life. It is recovered, to make us be born again.
- "Follow me." These are his words, simple and clear: he asks us to set out, to move, we, like him, "Come." It 'nice feeling to awaken from this voice that reaches us and is stronger, sweeter than the voice of the waters of the sea in the world, noisy and confused. When he speaks to the heart, becomes a great calm, calm returns. And then we also offer on course, marks the path to follow, does not let us lose, "Behind me," says the Lord. Just accept the invitation, just accept Him to know more, we just follow him, he is to open the road.

"They left and followed." The two brothers, the first called Peter and Andrew, they become for us the beginning of this journey, as a clear, strong, sure. They teach us to do the moves, the movement, choices. "Release" and "Forward" became the key verbs, the words written in the heart. Yes, because maybe it will happen more often have to do these operations on the inside, in the secret soul, where only we can see. Where only the Lord is faithful, even for us it does this wonderful word of gospel, so bright and strong that changes your life.

- "Now." Twice, Matthew shows us in welcoming the readiness of the disciples the Lord is passing by, his gaze, his voice for them. They do not put obstacles, no doubt, have no fear, but trust him blindly, respond immediately, saying yes to that Love.

In a crescendo, Matthew sliding before our eyes all the elements that inspired the scene, on the shore of the sea: nets, boats, the father ... it slips away into the background, is left aside. There remains only the Lord who goes before and behind him, called the four, new men, that they carry our name, the story that God wrote for us.

Some Questions

- The horizon of this Gospel story, and then the grace that God still does for us is the sea, a clear sea, which has a name, its geography. I can, before the Word of God, at this moment, to give a precise face the horizon of my life? I have the inner peace to lay bare before the eyes of Christ, my life as it is, my Galilee, my sea? Did I fear that the water in my heart, like a menacing sea, dark, enemy? Can I allow the Lord to walk through my bank? Can I let myself look like Andrea, as Simon, James, and John?
- And if I'm silent at this moment, if I leave the steps of Jesus really are as close to me to leave my poor sand on his prints of love, friendship, then I have the courage to let me get by His eyes full of light? Or continue to hide a bit, to escape, to hide somewhere in part, that I do not want to see or accept?

And again, I let him talk to me, tell me, perhaps for the first time: "Come after me"? Or prefer to just keep listening to the sound of the sea, its waves of invading, broken?

- This Gospel speaks to me very strongly of the company of brothers, I speak of my being son, lays bare the deepest part of the heart, enter the intimacy of home. Perhaps this is the place where there is more pain for me, where I do not feel understood, accepted, and loved as myself? For the Lord puts his finger in my wound? Brothers, father, mother, friends ... Jesus is all this for me, and much more. I feel it really so? There is room for Him in my house? And how is my relationship with him? As a brother, friend, son? Or do you only know from a distance, the surface of escape?
- It seems very clear that this passage the Lord does great things in the life of the disciples: "I make you fishers of men," he tells them. How to react to this discovery? I let myself be touched by Him, truly, really? I want to let me change your life? With Him I want to start a new adventure, looking for brothers and sisters who need to meet, to know, to feel loved by his infinite love? I can be a fisher of men, like Andrew and his brothers.
- We have just one thing: the decision, the decision to follow the Lord, to walk behind him tried to stop a moment longer ... What I have to leave today to take this step important? What is holding me back, I silt, which does not allow me to move? What weight in my heart, soul? Perhaps born in me the need to confess, to open my heart. Porto now written into the look that he has laid on me, his words, stronger than the sound of the sea, I can not pretend nothing happened. The Lord is in the past has left a mark. I am no longer that of my first ... I mean yes, as Andrew. Amen.

Concluding Prayer

Your Word, Lord is a lamp to my feet. How can the young walk without fault? Only by keeping your words. With all my heart I seek you; do not let me stray from your commands. In my heart I treasure your promise, that I may not sin against you. Blessed are you, O LORD; teach me your laws.

With my lips I recite all the edicts you have spoken. I find joy in the way of your decrees more than in all riches. I will ponder your precepts and consider your paths. In your laws I take delight; I will never forget your word. (From Psalm 119)