



Lectio Divina

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Saturday, July 1, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father,

guide and protector of your people,

grant us an unfailing respect for your name, and keep us always in your love.

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

Gospel Reading - Matthew 8: 5-17

When Jesus went into Capernaum a centurion came up and pleaded with him. 'Sir,' he said, 'my servant is lying at home paralyzed and in great pain.' Jesus said to him, 'I will come myself and cure him.' The centurion replied, 'Sir, I am not worthy to have you under my roof; just give the word and my servant will be cured. For I am under authority myself and have soldiers under me; and I say to one man, "Go," and he goes; to another, "Come here," and he comes; to my servant, "Do this," and he does it.'

When Jesus heard this he was astonished and said to those following him, 'In truth I tell you, in no one in Israel have I found faith as great as this. And I tell you that many will come from east and west and sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob at the feast in the kingdom of Heaven; but the children of the kingdom will be thrown out into the darkness outside, where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth.' And to the centurion Jesus said, 'Go back, then; let this be done for you, as your faith demands.' And the servant was cured at that moment.

And going into Peter's house Jesus found Peter's mother-in-law in bed and feverish. He touched her hand and the fever left her, and she got up and began to serve him.

That evening they brought him many who were possessed by devils. He drove out the spirits with a command and cured all who were sick. This was to fulfil what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: He himself bore our sicknesses away and carried our diseases.

Reflection

The Gospel today continues the description of the activity of Jesus to indicate how he put into practice the Law of God, proclaimed on the Mountain of the Beatitudes. After the cure of the leper in the Gospel of yesterday (Mt 8: 1-4), now follows the description of other cures:

- Matthew 8: 5-7: The petition of the centurion and the answer of Jesus. When analyzing the texts of the Gospel, it is always good to be attentive to small details. The centurion is a pagan, a foreigner. He does not ask for anything, he only informs Jesus telling him that his servant is sick and suffers terribly. Behind this attitude of people in regard to Jesus, there is the conviction that it was not necessary to ask things of Jesus. It was sufficient to communicate the problem to him. And Jesus would have done the rest. An attitude of unlimited trust! In fact, the reaction of Jesus is immediate: "I will come myself and cure him!"

- Matthew 8: 8: The reaction of the centurion. The centurion did not expect such an immediate gesture and so generous. He did not expect that Jesus would go to his house. And beginning by his own experience of 'head' he gives an example to express his faith and the trust that he had in Jesus. He tells him: "Lord, am not worthy to have you under my roof, just say a word and my servant will be cured. For I am under authority myself and have soldiers under me; and I say to one man, 'Go' and he goes, to another, 'Come here' and he comes, to my servant, 'Do this and he does it.'" This reaction of a foreigner before Jesus reveals that which was the opinion of the people in regard to Jesus. Jesus was a person who could be trusted and that he would not have driven away those who would go to him to tell him their problems. This is the image of Jesus which the Gospel of Matthew communicates to us even now that we read it in the XXI century.
- Matthew 8: 10-13: Jesus' comment. The official was admired of the reaction of Jesus and Jesus was admired of the reaction of the official: "In truth I tell you, in no one in Israel have I found faith as great as this." And Jesus already foresaw what was happening when Matthew wrote the Gospel: "And I tell you many will come from east and west and sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob at the feast in the Kingdom of Heaven, but the children of the Kingdom will be thrown out into the darkness outside where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth". The message of Jesus, the New Law of God proclaimed from the top of the Mountain of the Beatitudes is a response to the deepest desires of the human heart. The sincere and honest pagans like the centurion and so many others coming from the East and the West, perceived in Jesus the response to their yearning and accept it. The message of Jesus is not, in the first place, a doctrine or morals, nor a rite or a series of norms, but a deep experience of God which responds to what the human heart desires. If today many go away from the Church or seek other religions, it is not always their fault, but it could be ours, because we do not know how to live nor radiate God's message.
- Matthew 8: 14-15: The cure of Peter's mother-in-law. Jesus goes to Peter's house and cures his mother-in-law. She was sick. In the second half of the first century, when Matthew writes, the expression: "Peter's House" evoked the Church, constructed on the rock which was Peter. Jesus enters into this house and cures Peter's mother-in-law: "He touched her hand and the fever left her and she got up and began to serve him." In Greek word used is *diakonew*, to serve. A woman becomes deaconess in Peter's House. This is what was happening in the communities of that time. In the letter to the Romans, Paul mentions the deaconess Phoebe of the community of Cenchreae (Rm 16: 1). We have much to learn from the first Christians.
- Matthew 8: 16-17: The fulfilment of the prophecy of Isaiah. Matthew says that "when evening came," they brought many persons to Jesus who were possessed by the devil. Why only at night? Because in Mark's Gospel, from where Matthew takes his information, it was a Saturday (Mk 1: 21), and Saturday ended at the moment when the first star appeared in the sky. Then people could go out of the house, carry a burden and take the sick to the place where Jesus was. And "Jesus with his word cast out the evil spirits and cured all the sick! Using a text of Isaiah, Matthew throws light on the meaning of this gesture of Jesus: "So that what Isaiah had said would be fulfilled." Ours were the sufferings he was bearing, ours sorrows he was carrying." In this way, Matthew teaches that Jesus was the Messiah-Servant, announced by Isaiah (Is 53: 4; cf. Is 42: 1-9; 49: 1-6; 50: 4-9; 52: 13-53: 12). Matthew was doing what our communities do today: to use the Bible to enlighten and interpret the events and discover the presence of the creative word of God.

Personal Questions

- Compare the image of God that you have with that of the centurion and of the people, who followed Jesus.
- The Good News of Jesus is not, in the first place, a doctrine or morals, nor a rite or a series of norms, but it is a profound experience of God that responds to what the human heart yearns for. How do the Good News strike you, in your life and in your heart?

Concluding Prayer

Proclaim with me the greatness of Yahweh, let us acclaim his name together.

I seek Yahweh and he answers me, frees me from all my fears. (Ps 34: 3-4)

Sunday, July 2, 2023

13th Sunday of Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

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

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

Reading

A Division of the Text to Help with the Reading:

- Matthew 10: 37: Love of Jesus must be above love of father and mother and children
- Matthew 10: 38: The cross is part of the following of Jesus
- Matthew 10: 39: To know how to lose one's life so as to keep it
- Matthew 10: 40-41: Jesus identifies himself with the missionary and the disciple
- Matthew 10: 42: The least deed done to one of the least is rewarded

A Key to the Reading:

In the 13th Sunday of ordinary time, we meditate on the last section of the *Discourse on Mission* (Mt 10: 1- 42). This discourse contains words and counsels of Jesus, teaching us to carry out the mission of proclaiming the Good News of God. Jesus does not deceive, and points out clearly the difficulties that this mission implies. As we read this text, it is good to pay attention to what follows: "What is Jesus' basic demand of those who go on mission?"

Text:

37 'No one who prefers father or mother to me is worthy of me. No one who prefers son or daughter to me is worthy of me. 38 Anyone who does not take his cross and follow in my footsteps is not worthy of me. 39 Anyone who finds his life will lose it; anyone who loses his life for my sake will find it.

40 'Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me; and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. 41 'Anyone who welcomes a prophet because he is a prophet will have a prophet's reward; and anyone who welcomes an upright person because he is upright will have the reward of an upright person. 42 'If anyone gives so much as a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is a disciple, then in truth I tell you, he will most certainly not go without his reward.'

A Moment of Prayerful Silence

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

Some Questions

to help us in our personal reflection.

- What part of the text touched you most? Why?
- What recommendations does this text hold for us? What is its basic demand?
- Jesus says: "No one who prefers father or mother to me is worthy of me" – How must we understand this statement?
- What does the text tell us about the mission we must undertake as disciples of Jesus?

To Go Deeper Into the Topic

The Context of our Text in the Gospel of Matthew:

The Gospel of Matthew organizes the words and actions of Jesus around *five* great discourses:

- Matthew 5 to 7: The **Discourse of the Mountain** describes the gateway to the Kingdom.
- Matthew 10: the **Discourse on the Mission** describes the way those who follow Jesus must proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom and the difficulties involved.
- Matthew 13: the **Discourse of the Parables**, by means of parallels taken from daily life, Jesus reveals the presence of the Kingdom in people's lives.
- Matthew 18: the **Discourse on Community** describes how Christians ought to live together in such a way that the community becomes a revelation of the Kingdom.
- Matthew 24 and 25: the **Eschatological Discourse** describes the future coming of the Kingdom of God. Through this literary device, Matthew imitates *the five books of the Pentateuch*, and thus presents the Good News of the Kingdom as the *New Law of God*.

In the Discourse on the Mission (Mt 10: 1-42), the Evangelist puts together words and recommendations of Jesus that shed light on the difficult situation of the Judeo-Christians towards the second half of the first century. He wants to encourage them not to lose heart despite the many and grave difficulties they have to face in proclaiming the Good News to the brothers and sisters of their race. It is indeed at this time, the 80's, that the Jews are recovering from the disaster of the destruction of Jerusalem which took place in the 70's, and are beginning to reorganize themselves in the regions of Syria and Galilee. A tension is growing between the "Synagogue" and the "Ecclesia". This tension, source of much suffering and persecution, forms the background to the Discourse on the Mission and, thus, to the Gospel of the 13th Sunday of ordinary time.

A Commentary on the Text:

- Matthew 10: 37: Love of Jesus must be greater than love of parents and children
Jesus says: "No one who prefers father or mother to me is worthy of me; no one who prefers son or daughter to me is worthy of me". We find this same statement in the Gospel of Luke with even greater force: "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, and wife and children, and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple" (Lk 14: 26). Does Jesus then want to disintegrate family life? This cannot be so, because elsewhere he insists on the observance of the fourth commandment which binds us to love father and mother (Mk 7: 8-13; 10: 17-19). He himself obeyed his parents (Lk 2: 51). These seem to be contradictory statements. One thing is certain: Jesus does not contradict himself. We shall give an interpretation to show that the two statements are both true and not mutually exclusive.
- Matthew 10: 38: The cross is part of following Jesus
Jesus says: "Anyone who does not take his cross and follow in my footsteps is not worthy of me". In Mark's Gospel Jesus says: "If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me!" (Mk 8: 34). In those days, the cross was the death sentence imposed by the Roman Empire for thieves and the marginalized. To take up one's cross and follow Jesus was equivalent to accepting being marginalized by the unjust system of the Empire. Jesus' cross is the consequence of the free commitment taken on to reveal the Good News that God is Father and that, therefore, all are to be accepted and treated as brothers and sisters. Because of this revolutionary proclamation, Jesus was persecuted and was not afraid to give up his life. Greater love than this no man has, that he lay down his life for his friends.
- Matthew 10: 39: To know how to lose one's life so as to keep it
This manner of speaking was quite common among the early Christians because it expressed what they were living through. For instance, for Paul to be faithful to Jesus and obtain life, he had to lose everything he had, career, the respect of his people, and suffer persecution. The same happened to many Christians. Christians were persecuted for being Christian. Paul says: "I am crucified with Christ". "I wish to experience his cross and his death, so that I may also experience his resurrection." "I am crucified to the world and the world to me". This is the paradox of the Gospel: The last is first, the one who loses wins, the one who gives all keeps all, the one who dies lives. The one who has the courage to lose life obtains it. This is a logic that is quite different from the neo-liberal system that rules the world today.
- Matthew 10: 40-41: Jesus identifies himself with the missionary and the disciple

For the missionary and the disciple, it is very important to know that he/she will never be alone. If she/he remains faithful to her/his mission, she/he will have the certainty that Jesus identifies himself with her/him, and through Jesus the Father will reveal himself to those to whom the missionary and disciple proclaim the Good News. And so, just as Jesus reflected the face of the Father, so also the disciple must or should be a mirror where people can glimpse something of the love of Jesus.

- Matthew 10: 42: The least deed done for the little ones, reveals the presence of the Father

In order to change the world and human relationships, the political decisions of powerful persons are not enough, nor are the decrees of Councils and of bishops. What is needed is a change in the lives of people, in interpersonal and community relationships otherwise nothing will change. That is why Jesus puts so much importance on small acts of sharing: a glass of water given to a poor person!

A Deepening: To Love Father and Mother, to Hate Father and Mother!

One of the things that Jesus insists on for those who wish to follow him is that of leaving behind father, mother, wife, children, sisters, house, land, to leave everything for love of Him and his Gospel (Lk 18: 29; Mt 19: 29; Mk 10: 29). He even commands us "to hate father, mother, wife, children, sisters, brothers. Otherwise, you cannot be my disciples" (cf Lk 14: 28). These demands are not just for some but for all those who wish to follow him (Lk 14: 25-26, 33). How can we understand these statements that seem to dismantle and break up all family ties? We cannot imagine Jesus demanding of all men and women in Galilee to leave their families, lands, villages to follow him. In fact, this did not happen except for a small group of followers. So what is the meaning of these demands?

If we place the demand to leave one's family within the social context of the period, we can see another meaning, much more fundamental and practical. The invasion of Palestine in 64 B.C. and the imposition of the tribute by Herod (35 to 3 B.C.) and his son Herod Antipas (3 B.C. to 37 A.D.), a policy in favor of the Roman government, brought progressive impoverishment and growing unemployment. Through Herod's policy, supported by the Roman Empire, the Hellenic ideology permeated daily life, thus bringing with it growing individualism. All this caused the larger family, the clan and the community to disintegrate. Thus the small family began to feel bound to turn in on itself and not able to practice the law. Besides, the practice of ritual purity caused people to despise and exclude those persons and families that lived in legal impurity. The economic, social, political and religious context made it possible for families to turn in on themselves and weaken the clan. Preoccupation with family problems stopped people from uniting in **community**. It stopped the clan from realizing the aim for which it was created, that is, to offer real and adequate protection for families and persons, to preserve identity, to defend land, to prevent exclusion and to welcome the excluded and the poor, and thus to reveal the face of God. Now, for the Kingdom to reveal itself again in the sharing, it was necessary to break the vicious circle. People had to overcome the strict limits of the small family to open themselves to the larger family and the Community. This is the context that forms the background to the words proclaimed by Jesus.

Jesus himself gives an example. When his family tries to claim him, he reacts and says, "Who are my mother and my brethren?" And looking around he says: "Behold my mother and my brethren! For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother" (Mk 3: 33-35). He stretched the family. He created community. The people he attracted and called were the poor and the excluded (Lk 4: 18; Mt 11: 25). He asked

the same thing of those who wished to follow him. The excluded and marginalized must be welcomed again into the sharing and thus feel welcomed by God (cf Lk 14: 12-14). This was the way to achieve the end of the Law that said: "There should be no one of you in need" (Dt 15: 4).

Jesus tries to change the process of disintegration of the clan, of the community. Like the great prophets of the past, he seeks to consolidate community life in the villages of Galilee. He takes up again the deep meaning of the clan, of the family, of the community as an expression of the incarnation of the love of God in the love of neighbor. That is why he asks of those who wish to be his disciples to leave father, mother, wife, brother, sister, house, all! They have to lose their life in order to possess it! He is the guarantor of this: "Amen I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands for my sake and for the Gospel's sake, who shall not receive now in the present time a hundredfold as much, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands – along with persecutions, and in the age to come life everlasting" (MK 10: 29-30). Truly, those who have the courage to break the closed circle of their family, will find again, in the clan, in the community, a hundredfold whatever they have left: brother, sister, mother, child, land! Jesus does that which people expected in messianic times: to lead back the hearts of parents to their children, and the hearts of children to their parents, to rebuild the clan, reweave the social pattern.

Psalm 19: 7-14

The Law of Yahweh is Perfect

The Law of Yahweh is perfect, refreshment to the soul;
the decree of Yahweh is trustworthy, wisdom for the simple.

The precepts of Yahweh are honest, joy for the heart;
the commandment of Yahweh is pure, light for the eyes.

The fear of Yahweh is pure, lasting forever;
the judgements of Yahweh are true, upright, every one,
more desirable than gold, even than the finest gold;
his words are sweeter than honey, that drips from the comb.

Thus your servant is formed by them; observing them brings great reward. But who can detect his own failings? Wash away my hidden faults.

And from pride preserve your servant, never let it be my master.

So shall I be above reproach, free from grave sin.

May the words of my mouth always find favor, and the whispering of my heart, in your presence, Yahweh, my rock, my redeemer.

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, July 3, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father,
you call your children
to walk in the light of Christ.

Free us from darkness
and keep us in the radiance of your truth.

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

Gospel Reading - John 20: 24-29

Thomas, called the Twin, who was one of the Twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples said to him, 'We have seen the Lord,' but he answered, 'Unless I can see the holes that the nails made in his hands and can put my finger into the holes they made, and unless I can put my hand into his side, I refuse to believe.'

Eight days later the disciples were in the house again and Thomas was with them. The doors were closed, but Jesus came in and stood among them. 'Peace be with you,' he said. Then he spoke to Thomas, 'Put your finger here; look, here are my hands. Give me your hand; put it into my side. Do not be unbelieving any more but believe.'

Thomas replied, 'My Lord and my God!' Jesus said to him: You believe because you can see me. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.

Reflection

Today is the Feast of Saint Thomas and the Gospel speaks to us about the encounter of Jesus with Thomas, the apostle who wanted to see in order to believe. For this reason many call him Thomas the incredulous. In reality the message of this Gospel is very diverse. It is much more profound and actual.

- John 20: 24-25: The doubt of Thomas. Thomas, one of the twelve was not present when Jesus appeared to the disciples the week before. He did not believe in the witness of the others who said: "We have seen the Lord". He gives some conditions: "Unless I can see the holes that the nails made in his hands and can put my finger into the holes they made, and unless I can put my hand into his side, I refuse to believe". Thomas is very demanding. In order to believe he wants to see! He does not want a miracle in order to believe. No! He wants to see the signs on the hands, on the feet and on the side! He does not believe in the glorious Jesus, separated from the human Jesus who suffered on the Cross. When John writes, at the end of the first century, there were some persons who did not accept the coming of the Son of God in the flesh (2 Jn 7; 1 Jn 4: 2-3). They were the Gnostics who despised matter and

the body. John presents this concern of Thomas to criticize the Gnostics: "To see in order to believe". The doubt of Thomas also makes us see the difficulty of believing in the Resurrection!

- John 20: 26-27: Do not be unbelieving but believe. The text says "six days later". That means that Thomas was capable of maintaining his opinion during a whole week against the witness of the other Apostles. Stubborn! Thank God, for us! Thus, six days later, during the community meeting, they once again had the profound experience of the presence of the risen Lord in their midst. The closed doors could not prevent the presence of Jesus in the midst of those who believe in him. Today, it is also like this. When we are meeting, even when we are meeting with the doors closed, Jesus is in our midst. And up until today, the first word of Jesus is and will always be: "Peace be with you!" What impresses is the kindness of Jesus. He does not criticize, nor does he judge the unbelief of Thomas, but he accepts the challenge and says: "Thomas, put your finger in the hole of my hands!" Jesus confirms the conviction of Thomas and of the communities, that is, the glorious Risen One is the tortured crucified One! The Jesus who is in the community is not a glorious Jesus who has nothing in common with our life. He is the same Jesus who lived on this earth and on his body he has the signs of his Passion. The signs of the Passion are found today in the sufferings of people, in hunger, in the signs of torture, of injustice. And Jesus becomes present in our midst in the persons who react, who struggle for life and who do not allow themselves to be disheartened. Thomas believes in this Christ and so do we!
- John 20: 28-29: Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe. Together with him we say: "My Lord and my God!" This gift of Thomas is the ideal attitude of faith. And Jesus completes with a final message: "You believe because you can see me. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe!" With this phrase, Jesus declares blessed all of us who find ourselves in the same condition: without having seen, we believe that Jesus, who is in our midst, is the same One who died crucified!

The mandate: "As the Father sent me so I am sending you!" From this Jesus, who was crucified and rose from the dead, we receive the mission, the same one which he has received from the Father (Jn 20: 21). Here, in the second apparition, Jesus repeats: "Peace be with you!" This repetition stresses the importance of Peace. To construct peace forms part of the mission. Peace means much more than the absence of war. It means to construct a harmonious human living together in which persons can be themselves, having everything necessary to live, living happily together in peace. This was the mission of Jesus and also our own mission. Jesus breathed and said: "Receive the Holy Spirit" (Jn 20: 22). And with the help of the Holy Spirit, we will be capable to fulfil the mission which he has entrusted to us. Then Jesus communicates the power to forgive sins: "If you forgive anyone's sins, they are forgiven; if you retain anyone's sins, they are retained!" The central point of the mission of peace is reconciliation, in the effort of trying to overcome barriers which separate us. This power of reconciling and of forgiving is given to the community (Jn 20: 23); Mt 18: 18). In the Gospel of Matthew, this power is also given to Peter (Mt 16: 19). Here we can perceive that a community without pardon and without reconciliation is not a Christian community. In one word, our mission is that of "forming community" according to the example of the community of the Father, of the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Personal Questions

- In society today the divergence and the tensions of race, social class, religion, gender and culture are enormous and they continue to grow every day. How can the mission of reconciliation be carried out today?

- In your community and in your family is there some mustard seed, the sign of a reconciled society?

Concluding Prayer

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

Tuesday, July 4, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father,
you call your children to walk in the light of Christ.
Free us from darkness
and keep us in the radiance of your truth.

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

Gospel Reading - Matthew 8: 23-27

Then Jesus got into the boat followed by his disciples. Suddenly a storm broke over the lake, so violent that the boat was being swamped by the waves. But he was asleep.

So they went to him and woke him saying, 'Save us, Lord, we are lost!' And he said to them, 'Why are you so frightened, you who have so little faith?' And then he stood up and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm.

They were astounded and said, 'Whatever kind of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?'

Reflection

Matthew writes for the converted Jews of the years 70's who felt lost like a boat in the middle of a stormy sea, without the hope of being able to get to the desired port. Jesus seems to be asleep in the boat, and it seems to them that no divine power will come to save them from the persecution. In the face of this desperate and anguished situation, Matthew puts together several episodes of the life of Jesus to help the community discover, in the midst of an apparent absence, the welcoming and powerful presence of Jesus the conqueror who dominates the sea (Mt 8: 23-27), who conquers and casts away the power of evil (Mt 9: 28-34) and who has the power to forgive sins (Mt 9: 1-8). In other words, Matthew wants to communicate hope and to suggest that the communities have no reason to fear. This is the reason for the narration of the storm calmed by Jesus in today's Gospel.

- Matthew 8: 23: *The starting point: to enter into the boat.* Matthew follows the Gospel of Mark, but makes it shorter and inserts it in the new outline which he has adopted. In Mark, the day had been very heavy because of the work that they had done. Having finished the discourse of the parables (Mk 4: 3-34), the disciples take Jesus into the boat and he was so tired that he fell asleep on a cushion (Mk 4: 38). Matthew's text is very brief. It only says that Jesus went into the boat and that the disciples accompanied him. Jesus is the Master, the disciples *follow* the Master.
- Matthew 8: 24-25: *The desperate situation: "We are lost!"* The Lake of Galilee is close to high mountains. Sometimes, between the cracks of the rocks, the wind blows strongly on the lake causing a sudden storm. Strong wind, agitated sea, the boat full of water! The disciples were experienced fishermen. If they thought that they were about to sink, it meant that the situation was truly dangerous! But Jesus is not aware, and continues to sleep. They cried out: *"Save us, Lord, we are lost!"* In Matthew the profound sleep of Jesus is not only a sign of tiredness. It is also the expression of the calm trust of Jesus in God. The contrast between the attitude of Jesus and that of the disciples is enormous!
- Matthew 8: 26: *The reaction of Jesus: Why are you so frightened, you who have so little faith!* Jesus wakes up, not because of the waves, but because of the desperate cry of the disciples. And he turns to them saying: *"Why are you so frightened, you who have so little faith!"* Then he stood up and rebuked the winds and the sea, because there was no danger. It is like when one arrives to a friend's house, and the dog, at the side of his master, barks very much. But one should not be afraid, because the master is present and controls the situation. The episode of the storm calmed by Jesus evokes the episode, when people, without fear, passed across the water of the sea (Ex 14: 22). Jesus recreates this episode. He recalls the Prophet Isaiah who said to the people: *"If you have to go across the water, I will be with you!"* (Is 43: 2). The episode of the calmed storm recalls and fulfils the prophecy announced in the Psalm 107:

Those who ploughed the waves in the sea on the ships, plying their trade on the great ocean.

They have seen the works of the Lord, his wonders in the deep. By his word he raised a storm-wind lashing up towering waves.

Up to the sky then down to the depths; their stomachs were turned to water. They staggered and reeled like drunkards, and all their skill went under.

They cried out to Yahweh in their distress, he rescued them from their plight. He reduced the storm to a calm, and all the waters subsided.

He brought them overjoyed at the stillness, to the port where they were bound (Ps 107: 23-30)

- Matthew 8: 27: *The fear of the disciples: "Who is this man?"* Jesus asks: *"Why are you so frightened?"* The disciples do not know what to answer. Astounded, they ask themselves: *"Whatever kind of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"* In spite of the long time that they had lived with Jesus, they still do not know who he is. Jesus seems to be a foreigner for them! Who is this man?
- *Who is this man? Who is Jesus for us, for me?* This should be the question which urges us to continue to read the Gospel, every day, with the desire always to know better the significance and the importance of the person of Jesus for our life. From this question comes Christology. It does not come from elevated theological considerations, but from the desire of the first Christians always to find new names and titles to express what Jesus meant for them. There are tens of names, titles and

attributes, from that of *carpenter to Son of God*, which Jesus expresses: Messiah, Christ, Lord, Beloved Son, Holy One of God, Nazarene, Son of Man, Spouse, Son of God, Son of the Most High God, Carpenter, Son of Mary, Prophet, Master, Son of David, *Rabboni*, Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord; Son, Shepherd, Bread of Life, Resurrection, Light of the world, Way, Truth, Life, King of the Jews, King of Israel, etc. Every name, every image, is an effort to express what Jesus means for them. But a name, no matter how beautiful it is, never succeeds to reveal the mystery of a person, and much less of the person of Jesus. Jesus does not enter into any of these names, in no outline, in no title. He exceeds everything, he is the greatest! He cannot be put into a frame. Love takes up all this, not the mind! Starting from this experience of a love which is alive, the names, the titles and the images receive their full significance. Definitely, who is Jesus for me, for us?

Personal Questions

- Which was the agitated sea at the time of Jesus? Which was the agitated sea at the time when Matthew wrote his Gospel? Today, which is the agitated sea for us? Have you ever been on the point of drowning in the agitated waters of the sea of your life? What saved you?
- Who is Jesus for me? Which is the name of Jesus which expresses my faith and my love better?

Concluding Prayer

Each age will praise your deeds to the next, proclaiming your mighty works.

Your renown is the splendour of your glory,

I will ponder the story of your wonders. (Ps 145: 4-5)

Wednesday, July 5, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father,

you call your children

to walk in the light of Christ.

Free us from darkness

and keep us in the radiance of your truth.

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

Gospel Reading - Matthew 8: 28-34

When Jesus reached the territory of the Gadarenes on the other side, two demoniacs came towards him out of the tombs -- they were so dangerously violent that nobody

could use that path. Suddenly they shouted, 'What do you want with us, Son of God? Have you come here to torture us before the time?'

Now some distance away there was a large herd of pigs feeding, and the devils pleaded with Jesus, 'If you drive us out, send us into the herd of pigs.'

And he said to them, 'Go then,' and they came out and made for the pigs; and at that the whole herd charged down the cliff into the lake and perished in the water. The herdsmen ran off and made for the city, where they told the whole story, including what had happened to the demoniacs. Suddenly the whole city set out to meet Jesus; and as soon as they saw him they implored him to leave their neighborhood.

Reflection

Today's Gospel stresses the power of Jesus over the devil. In our text, the devil or the power of evil is associated to three things: 1) To the *cemetery*, the place of the dead. To death which kills life! 2) To the pig, that was considered an impure animal. The impurity which separates from God! 3) With the *sea*, which was considered like the symbol of chaos before creation? The chaos which destroys nature. The Gospel of Mark, from which Matthew takes his information, associates the power of evil to a fourth element which is the word *Legion*, (Mc 5, 9), the name of the army of the Roman Empire. The Empire oppressed and exploited the people. Thus, it is understood that the victory of Jesus over the Devil had an enormous importance for the life of the communities of the years 70's, the time when Matthew wrote his Gospel. The communities lived oppressed and marginalized, because of the official ideology of the Roman Empire and of the Pharisees which was renewed. The same significance and the same importance continue to be valid today.

- Matthew 8, 28: *The force of evil oppresses, ill-treats and alienates persons.* This first verse describes the situation of the people before the coming of Jesus. In describing the behaviour of the two possessed persons, the Evangelist associates the force of evil to the cemetery and to death. It is a mortal power, without a goal, without direction, without control and a destructing power, which causes everyone to fear. It deprives the persons from their conscience, from self-control and autonomy.
- Matthew 8, 29: *Before the simple presence of Jesus the force of evil breaks up and disintegrates.* Here is described the first contact between Jesus and the two possessed men. We see that there is total disproportion. The power, that at first seemed to be so strong, melts and disintegrates before Jesus. They shouted: "What do you want with us, Son of God? Have you come to torture us before the time?" they become aware that they are losing their power.
- Matthew 8, 30-32: *The power of evil is impure and has no autonomy, nor consistency.* The Devil does not have power over his movements. It only obtains the power to enter into the pigs with the permission of Jesus! Once they enter into the pigs, the whole herd charged down the cliff into the sea and perished in the water. According to the opinion of the people, the pig was a symbol of impurity which prevented the human being to relate with God and of feeling accepted by him. The sea was the symbol of the existing chaos before creation and which according to the belief of that time, continued to threaten life. This episode of the pigs which threw themselves into the sea is strange and difficult to understand. But the message is very clear: before Jesus, the power of evil has no autonomy, no consistency. Anyone who believes in Jesus has already conquered the power of evil and should not fear!
- Matthew 8, 33-34: *The reaction of the people of that place.* The herdsmen of the pigs went to the city and told the story to the people, and they all set out to go and meet

Jesus. Mark says that they saw the “possessed” man sitting down, dressed and with perfect judgment” (Mk 5, 15). But they remained without the pigs. This is why they asked Jesus to leave from their neighbourhood. For them the pigs were more important than the person who recovered his senses.

- *The expulsion of the demons.* At the time of Jesus, the words *Devil or Satan* were used to indicate the power of evil which drew persons away from the right path. For example, when Peter tried to deviate Jesus, he was Satan for Jesus (Mk 8, 33). Other times, those same words were used to indicate the political power of the Roman Empire which oppressed and exploited people. For example, in the Apocalypse, the Roman Empire is identified with “Devil or Satan” (Ap 12, 9). While other times, people used the same words to indicate the evils and the illnesses. It was spoken about devil, dumb spirit, deaf spirit, impure or unclean spirit, etc. There was great fear! In the time of Matthew, in the second half of the first century, the fear of demons increased. Some religions, from the East diffused worship toward the spirits. They taught that some of our mistaken gestures could irritate the spirits, and these, in order to revenge, could prevent us from having access to God and deprived us from divine benefits. For this reason, through rites and writings, intense prayer and complicated ceremonies, people sought to calm down these spirits or demons, in such a way that they would not cause harm to life. These religions, instead of liberating people, nourished fear and anguish. Now, one of the objectives of the Good News of Jesus was to help people to liberate themselves from this fear. The coming of the Kingdom of God meant the coming of a *stronger power*. Jesus is “*the strongest man*” who can conquer Satan, the power of evil, snatching away from its hands, humanity imprisoned by fear (cf. Mk 3, 27). For this reason the Gospels insist very much on the victory of Jesus over the power of evil, over the devil, over Satan, over sin and over death. It was in order to encourage the communities to overcome this fear of the devil! And today, who can say: “I am completely free?” Nobody! Then, if I am not totally free, there is some part in me which is possessed by other powers. How can these forces be cast away? The message of today’s Gospel continues to be valid for us.

Personal Questions

- What oppresses and ill-treats people today? Why is it that today in certain places so much is spoken about casting out the devil? Is it good to insist so much on the devil? What do you think?
- Who can say that he/she is completely free or liberated? Nobody! And then, we are all somewhat possessed by other forces which occupy some space within us. What can we do to expel this power from within us and from society?

Concluding Prayer

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

Thursday, July 6, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father,
you call your children
to walk in the light of Christ.

Free us from darkness
and keep us in the radiance of your truth.

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

Gospel Reading - Matthew 9: 1-8

Jesus got back in the boat, crossed the water and came to his home town. And suddenly some people brought him a paralytic stretched out on a bed. Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the paralytic, 'Take comfort, my child, your sins are forgiven.'

And now some scribes said to themselves, 'This man is being blasphemous.' Knowing what was in their minds Jesus said, 'Why do you have such wicked thoughts in your hearts? Now, which of these is easier: to say, "Your sins are forgiven," or to say, "Get up and walk"? But to prove to you that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins,' -- then he said to the paralytic-'get up, pick up your bed and go off home.'

And the man got up and went home. A feeling of awe came over the crowd when they saw this, and they praised God for having given such authority to human beings.

Reflection

- The extraordinary authority of Jesus. To the reader, Jesus appears as a person invested with extraordinary authority, by means of the words and actions (Mt 9: 6, 8). The authoritative word of Jesus strikes evil at its root: in the case of the paralytic man on sin that affects the man in his liberty and blocks him in his living forces: "Your sins are forgiven" (v. 5); "'Get up pick up your bed and go off home" (v.6). Truly all the forms of paralysis of the heart and the mind to which we are subject are cancelled by the authority of Jesus (9, 6), because during his life on earth he met all these forms. The authoritative and effective word of Jesus awakens the paralyzed humanity (9: 5-7) and gives it the gift of walking (9: 6) in a renewed faith.
- The encounter with the paralytic. After the storm and a visit in the country of the Gadarenes, Jesus returns to Capernaum, his city. And as he was on his way, he met the paralytic. The healing did not take place in a house, but along the road. Therefore, along the road that leads to Capernaum they brought him a paralytic man. Jesus addresses him calling him "my son", a gesture of attention that soon becomes a gesture of salvation: "your sins are forgiven you" (v. 2) The forgiveness of sins which Jesus pronounces on the part of God on the paralytic refers to the bond between sickness, failure and sin. This is the first time that the evangelist attributes this particular divine power to Jesus, in an explicit way. For the Jews the sickness of a man was considered a punishment because of sins committed; The physical illness was considered always as a consequence of one's own moral evil or due to parents (Jn 9: 2). Jesus restores to man the condition of salvation freeing him from illness as well as from sin.

- For some of those who were present, for the Scribes, the words of Jesus which announce forgiveness of sins is a true and proper blasphemy. According to them Jesus is arrogant because God alone can forgive sins. They do not manifest openly such a judgment of Jesus but express it by murmuring among themselves. Jesus who penetrates their hearts sees their considerations and reproves them because of their unbelief. The expression of Jesus “To prove to you that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins...” (v. 6) he is going to indicate that not only God can forgive sins, but with Jesus, also man (Gnilka).
- The crowd, differently from the Scribes, is seized by fear before the cure of the paralytic and glorifies God. The crowd is struck by the power to forgive sins manifested in the healing. People exult because God has granted such a power to the Son of man. Is it possible to attribute this to the ecclesial community where forgiveness of sins was granted on the order of Jesus? Matthew has presented this episode on forgiveness of sins with the intention of applying it to fraternal relationships within the ecclesial community. In it the practice to forgive sins, by delegation of Jesus, was already in force; a practice which was not shared in the Synagogue. The theme of forgiveness of sins is repeated also in Mt 18 and at the end of the Gospel it is affirmed that this is rooted in the death of Jesus on the Cross (26: 28). But in our context the forgiveness of sins is linked with the demand of mercy present in the episode which follows, the vocation of Matthew: «...mercy is what pleases me, not sacrifice. And indeed, I came to call not the upright but sinners” (Mt 9: 13). Such words of Jesus intend to say that He has made visible the forgiveness of God; above all, in his relationships with the Publicans or tax collectors and sinners, in sitting at table with them.
- This account that takes up again the problem of sin and reminds of the bond with the misery of man is something to be practiced in the forgiveness which should be given, but it is a story that should occupy a privileged place in the preaching of our ecclesial communities.

Personal Questions

- Are you convinced that Jesus, called the friend of sinners, does not despise your weaknesses and your resistance, but he understands and offers you the necessary help to live a life in harmony with God and with the brothers and sisters?
- When you make the experience of betraying or refusing friendship with God do you have recourse to the Sacrament of reconciliation that reconciles you with the Father and with the Church and makes you a new creature by the force of the Holy Spirit?

Concluding Prayer

The precepts of Yahweh are honest, joy for the heart;
the commandment of Yahweh is pure, light for the eyes. (Ps 19: 8)n

Friday, July 7, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father,
you call your children
to walk in the light of Christ.

Free us from darkness
and keep us in the radiance of your truth.

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

Gospel Reading - Matthew 9: 9-13

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

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

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

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

Reflection

The Sermon on the Mountain takes chapters 5, 6 and 7 of the Gospel of Matthew. The purpose of the narrative part of chapters 8 and 9 is to show how Jesus put into practice what he had just taught. In the Sermon on the Mountain, he teaches acceptance (Mt 5: 23-25, 38- 42, 43). Now he puts it into practice accepting the lepers (Mt 8: 1-4), the foreigners (Mt 8: 5- 13), the women (Mt 8: 14-15), the sick (Mt 8: 16-17), the possessed (Mt 8: 28-34), the paralytics

(Mt 9: 1-8), the tax collectors (Mt 9: 9-13), the unclean persons (Mt 9: 20-22), etc. Jesus breaks the norms and the customs which excluded and divided persons, that is with the fear and the lack of faith (Mt 8: 23-27) the laws on purity (9: 14-17), and he clearly says which are the requirements for those who want to follow him. They should have the courage to abandon many things (Mt 8: 18-22). In the same way in the attitudes and in the practice of Jesus we see in what the Kingdom and the perfect observance of the Law of God consists.

- Matthew 9: 9: *The call to follow Jesus*. The first persons called to follow Jesus are four fishermen, all Jewish (Mt 4: 18-22). Now Jesus calls a tax collector, considered a sinner and treated as an unclean person by the community of the most observant of the Pharisees. In the other Gospels, this tax collector is called Levi. Here, his name is Matthew, which means *gift of God or given by God*. The communities, instead of excluding the tax collector and of considering him unclean, should consider him a *Gift of God* for the community, because his presence makes the community become a sign of salvation for all! Like the first four who were called, in the same way also Matthew, the tax collector, leaves everything that he has and follows Jesus. The following of Jesus requires breaking away from many things. Matthew leaves the tax office, his source of revenue and follows Jesus!
- Matthew 9: 10: *Jesus sits at table with sinners and tax collectors*. At that time the Jews lived separated from the tax collectors and sinners and they did not eat with them

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

- Matthew 9: 11: *The question of the Pharisees. Jews were forbidden to sit at table with the tax collectors and with sinners, but Jesus does not follow this prohibition. Rather he becomes a friend to them. The Pharisees seeing the attitude of Jesus, ask the disciples: "Why does your master eat with tax collectors and sinners?"* This question may be interpreted as an expression of their desire to know why Jesus acts in that way. Others interpret the question like a criticism of Jesus' behavior, because for over five hundred years, from the time of the slavery in Babylon until the time of Jesus, the Jews had observed the laws of purity. This secular observance became a strong sign of identity. At the same time it was a factor of their separation in the midst of other peoples. Thus, because of the laws on purity, they could not nor did they succeed to sit around the same table to eat with tax collectors. To eat with tax collectors meant to get contaminated, to become unclean. The precepts of legal purity were rigorously observed, in Palestine as well as in the Jewish communities of the Diaspora. At the time of Jesus, there were more than five hundred precepts to keep purity. In the years 70's, at the time when Matthew wrote, this conflict was very actual.
- Matthew 9: 12-13: *"Mercy is what pleases me, not sacrifice.* Jesus hears the question of the Pharisees to the disciples and he answers with two clarifications: the first one is taken from common sense: *"It is not the healthy who need the doctor, but the sick".* The second one is taken from the Bible: *"Go and learn the meaning of the words: Mercy is what pleases me, not sacrifice".* Through these clarifications, Jesus makes explicit and clarifies his mission among the people: *"I have not come to call the upright but sinners".* Jesus denies the criticism of the Pharisees; he does not accept their arguments, because they came from a false idea of the Law of God. He himself invokes the Bible: *"Mercy is what pleases me, not sacrifice".* For Jesus, mercy is more important than legal purity. He refers to the prophetic tradition to say that mercy has greater value for God than all sacrifices (Ho 6: 6; Is 1: 10-17). God has profound mercy and is moved before the failures of his people (Ho 11: 8-9).

Personal Questions

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

Concluding Prayer

Blessed are those who observe his instructions, Blessed are those who observe his instructions, who seek him with all their hearts,

and, doing no evil, who walk in his ways. (Ps 119: 2-3)

Saturday, July 8, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father,
you call your children
to walk in the light of Christ.

Free us from darkness
and keep us in the radiance of your truth.

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

Gospel Reading - Matthew 9: 14-17

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

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

No one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth onto an old cloak, because the patch pulls away from the cloak and the tear gets worse. Nor do people put new wine into old wineskins; otherwise, the skins burst, the wine runs out, and the skins are lost. No; they put new wine in fresh skins and both are preserved.'

Reflection

Matthew 9, 14: *The question of the disciples of John concerning the practice of fasting.* Fasting is quite an ancient use, practiced by almost all religions. Jesus himself practiced it during forty days (Mt 4, 2). But he does not insist with the disciples so that they do the same thing. He leaves them free. Because of this, the disciples of John the Baptist and of the Pharisees, who were obliged to fast, want to know why Jesus does not insist on fasting "*Why is it that we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not?*"

Matthew 9, 15: *The answer of Jesus.* Jesus answers with a comparison in the form of a question: "*Surely the bridegroom's attendants cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is still with them?*" Jesus associates fasting to mourning, and he considers himself the bridegroom. When the bridegroom is with his friends, that is, during the wedding feast, they have no need to fast. When Jesus is with them, with his disciples, it is a feast, the wedding feast. Therefore, they should not fast. But one day the bridegroom will go away. It will be a day of mourning. Then, if they want they can fast. Jesus refers to his death. He knows and feels that if he continues on this way of liberty, the authority will want to kill him.

Matthew 9, 16-17: *New wine in new skins!* In these two verses, the Gospel of Matthew gives two separate phrases of Jesus on the patch of new cloth on an old cloak and of the new wine in new skins. These words throw light on the discussions and the conflicts of Jesus with religious authority of the time. A patch of new cloth is not put on an old cloak; because when washing it, the new piece of cloth shrinks and pulls on the old cloak and tears it and the tear becomes bigger. Nobody puts new wine in old skins, because when the new wine ferments, it tears the old skins. New wine in new skins! The religion defended by the religious authority was like a piece of old cloth, like an old skin. Both the disciples of John and the Pharisees, tried to renew the religion. In reality, they hardly put some patches and because of this, they ran the risk of compromising and harming both the novelty as well as the old uses. It is not necessary to want to change the novelty which Jesus brings to us for the old uses. Either one or the other! The new wine which Jesus brings to us tears the old skins. It is necessary to know how to separate things. Most probably, Matthew presents these words of Jesus to orientate the communities of the years 80's. There was a group of Jew-Christians who wanted to reduce the novelty of Jesus to the Judaism of the time before the coming of Jesus. Jesus is not against what is "old". He does not want that what is old be imposed on that which is *new* and, that it prevents it from manifesting itself. Vatican II cannot be reread with the mentality before the Council, like some try to do today.

Personal Questions

- Which are the conflicts around the religious practices which today make many persons suffer and are a reason for heated discussions and polemics? Which is the image of God which is behind all these preconceptions, these norms and these prohibitions?
- How is this phrase of Jesus to be understood: *"Nobody puts a piece of new cloth on an old cloak?"* Which is the message which we can draw from all this for your community today?

Concluding Prayer

I am listening. What is God's message? Yahweh's message is peace for his people, for his faithful, if only they renounce their folly. (Ps 85: 8)

Sunday, July 9, 2023

14th Sunday of Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

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

Create in us silence so that we may listen to your voice in Creation and in the Scriptures, in events and in people, above all in the poor and suffering. May your word guide us so that we too, like the two disciples from Emmaus, may experience the force of your resurrection and witness to others that you are alive in our midst as source of

fraternity, justice and peace. We ask this of you, Jesus, son of Mary, who revealed to us the Father and sent us your Spirit. Amen.

Reading

A Key to Guide the Reading:

When Jesus realized that the little ones understood the good news of the Reign, he was very happy. Spontaneously he turned to the Father with a prayer of thanksgiving and extended a generous invitation to all those suffering and oppressed by the burden of life. The text reveals Jesus' kindness in welcoming little ones and his goodness in offering himself to the poor as the source of rest and peace.

A Division of the Text to Help with the Reading:

- Mt 11: 25-26: Prayer of thanks to the Father
- Mt 11: 27: Jesus presents himself as the way which leads to the Father
- Mt 11: 28-30: An invitation to all who suffer and are oppressed

The Text:

v25-26: At that time Jesus exclaimed, 'I bless you, Father, Lord of heaven and of earth, for hiding these things from the learned and the clever and revealing them to little children. Yes, Father, for that is what it pleased you to do.

v27: Everything has been entrusted to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, just as no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

v28-30: 'Come to me, all you who labor and are overburdened, and I will give you rest. Shoulder my yoke and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. Yes, my yoke is easy and my burden light.'

A Moment of Prayerful Silence

so that the Word of God may enter into us and enlighten our life.

Some Questions

to help us in our personal reflection.

- Which part of the text caught my attention most and pleased me most?
- In the first part (25-27), Jesus turns to the Father. What image of the Father does Jesus reveal in his prayer? What is it that urges him to praise the Father? What image do I have of God? When and how do I praise the Father?
- To whom does Jesus turn in the second part (28-30)? What was the greatest burden carried by the people in those days? What burden is most burdensome today?
- Which burden comforts me?
- How can Jesus' words help our community to be a place of rest in our lives?
- Jesus presents himself as the one who reveals the Father and as the way to Him. Who is Jesus for me?

A Key to the Reading

for those who wish to go deeper into the text.

The Literary Context of Jesus' Words: Chapters 10-12 of Matthew's Gospel.

- In Matthew's Gospel, the discourse on the *Mission* takes up the whole of chapter 10. In the narrative after chapters 11 and 12, where we find a description of how Jesus fulfils the *Mission*, Jesus has to face incomprehension and resistance. John the Baptist, who looked at Jesus with an eye to the past, could not understand him (Mt 11: 1-15). The people, who looked at Jesus with an eye to self-interest, were incapable of understanding him (Mt 11: 16-19). The big cities around the lake that had heard the preaching and seen the miracles will not open themselves to his message (Mt 11: 20-24). The scribes and doctors, who judged everything according to their knowledge, were not capable of understanding Jesus' words (Mt 11: 25). Not even do his relatives understand him (Mt 12: 46-50). Only the *little ones* understand him and accept the good news of the Reign (Mt 11: 25-30). The others look for sacrifices, but Jesus wants mercy (Mt 1: 8). This resistance to Jesus leads the Pharisees to want to kill him (Mt 12: 9-14). They call him Beelzebub (Mt 12: 22-32). But Jesus does not retreat; he goes on with his mission of Servant as described in the prophet Isaiah (Is 42: 1-4) and cited in its entirety by Matthew (12: 15-21).
- Thus the context in chapters 10-12 suggests that the acceptance of the good news by the *little ones* is the fulfilment of the prophet Isaiah. Jesus is the awaited Messiah, but he is not what the majority expected him to be. He is not the glorious nationalist Messiah, nor is he a strict judge, nor a powerful king Messiah. He is the humble Messiah, the servant who "will not break the crushed reed, nor put out the smouldering wick" (Mt 12: 20). He will fight on until justice and right will prevail in the world (Mt 12: 18,20-21). The acceptance of the Reign by the little ones is the light that shines (Mt 5: 14) and the salt which flavours (Mt 5: 13) and the mustard seed which (when fully grown) will provide room for the birds of the air to nest there among its branches (Mt 13: 31-32).

A Brief Comment on Jesus' Words:

- Matthew 11: 25-26: Only the little ones can understand and accept the good news of the Reign.
- Jesus experiences a great joy when the little ones welcome the message of the Reign, and, spontaneously, he transforms his joy into a prayer of jubilation and thanksgiving to the Father: I bless you, Father, of heaven and of earth, for hiding these things from the learned and the clever and revealing them to mere children. Yes, Father, for that is what it pleased you to do. The learned, the doctors of that time, had created a series of laws concerning legal purity, which they then imposed on the people in the name of God (Mt 15: 1-9). They thought that God demanded every single observance, so that the people might acquire peace. But the law of love, revealed by Jesus, said otherwise. In fact, what matters is not that which we do for God, but rather that which God, in his great love, does for us. The little ones heard this good news and rejoiced. The learned and the doctors could not understand this teaching. Today, as then, Jesus is teaching many things to the poor and to the little ones. The learned and intelligent would do well to learn at the feet of these little ones.
- Jesus prayed much! He prayed with his disciples, he prayed with the people, he prayed alone. He spent whole nights in prayer. He managed to express his message in

one prayer that contains seven concerns, namely, the Our Father. Sometimes, as in this case, the Gospels tell us the content of Jesus' prayer (Mt 11: 25-26; 26: 39; Jn 11: 41-42; 17: 1-26). At other times, they tell us that Jesus prayed the Psalms (Mt 26: 30; 27: 46). In most cases, however, they just say that Jesus prayed. Today, everywhere prayer groups are increasing.

- In Matthew's Gospel, the term little ones (*elakistoi, mikroi, nepioi*) sometimes refers to children and sometimes to a group of people excluded from society. It is not easy to distinguish. Sometimes, that which one Gospel calls little ones, another Gospel calls children. Also, it is not easy to distinguish between that which comes from the time of Jesus and that which is from the time of the communities for whom the Gospels were written. But even so, what is clear is the context of exclusion that prevailed then and the image of Jesus as a person who welcomed the little ones that the early communities had of him
- Matthew 11: 27: The origin of the new Law: the Son who knows the Father
Jesus, as Son, knows the Father and knows that which the Father wanted when, in times gone by, he had called Abraham and Sarah to form a people or when he entrusted the Law to Moses to form a covenant. The experience of God as Father helped Jesus to perceive in a new manner the things that God had said in the past. It helped him to recognise errors and limitations, where the good news of God was imprisoned by the dominant ideology. His intimacy with the Father gave him a new criterion that placed him in direct contact with the author of the Bible. Jesus did not move from the letter to the source, but from the source to the letter. He sought the meaning at its origin. To understand the meaning of a letter, it is important to study the words it contains. But Jesus' friendship with the author of the letter helped him uncover a deeper dimension in those words, which study alone could not reveal.
- Matthew 11: 28-30
Jesus invites all those who are weary and promises them rest. The people of that time lived wearily, under the double burden of levies and the observances demanded by the laws of purity. And Jesus says, Shoulder my yoke and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. Yes, my yoke is easy and my burden light. Through the prophet Jeremiah, God had invited the people to examine the past in order to discover the right way that could give them rest for their souls (Jer 6: 16). This right way now appears in Jesus. Jesus offers rest for souls. He is the way (Jn 14:6).
Learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart. Like Moses, Jesus was gentle and humble (Num 12: 3). Many times this phrase has been manipulated to bring people into submission, meekness and passivity. Jesus wants to say the opposite. He asks that people, in order to understand the things of the Reign, not give so much importance to the "learned and doctors", that is, to the official teachers of religion of the time, and that they trust more in the little ones. Those oppressed must begin to learn from Jesus that he is "gentle and humble in heart".
Often, in the Bible the word humble is synonymous with humbled. Jesus, unlike the scribes who flaunted their knowledge, identified himself with the humble and humbled people. He, our Master, knew from experience what was in the hearts of people and how much people suffered in their daily lives.

Light on Jesus' Attitude:

- Jesus' style in proclaiming the good news of the Reign

In his manner of proclaiming the good news of the Reign, Jesus reveals a great passion for the Father and for the humiliated people. Unlike the doctors of his time, Jesus proclaims the good news of God wherever he meets people who will listen to him. In *synagogues* during the celebration of the Word (Mt 4: 23). In the *homes* of friends (Mt 13: 36). When walking along the *streets* with his disciples (Mt 12: 1-8). On the seashore, at the edge of the *beach*, sitting in a boat (Mt 13: 1-3). On the *mountain*, where he proclaims the beatitudes (Mt 5: 1). In the *squares* of villages and cities, where people bring their sick (Mt 14: 34-36). Even in the *temple in Jerusalem*, at the time of pilgrimages (Mt 26: 55)! In Jesus, *everything* is the revelation of that which animates his inner being! He not only proclaims the good news of the Reign, he is living proof of the Reign. In him we see what happens when someone allows God to *reign* and take possession of his/her life.

- The Divine Wisdom's invitation to all who seek it
Jesus invites all those who suffer under the burden of life to find rest and comfort in him (Mt 11: 25-30). This invitation echoes the beautiful words of Isaiah who comforted the weary people in exile (Is 55: 1-3). This invitation stands in correlation to Divine Wisdom, which calls people to itself (Sir 24: 18-19), saying that "her ways are delightful ways, her paths all lead to contentment" (Prov 3: 17). Again, Wisdom says, "Wisdom brings up her own sons, and cares for those who seek her. Whoever loves her loves life, those who wait on her early will be filled with happiness" (Si 4: 11-12). This invitation reveals a very important feminine aspect of God: the gentleness and welcome that comforts, revitalises the person and makes it feel well. Jesus is the comfort that God gives to a weary people!

Psalm 132

The Prayer of the Little Ones

O Lord, my heart is not lifted up, my eyes are not raised too high;

I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me.

But I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a child quieted at its mother's breast; like a child that is quieted is my soul.

O Israel, hope in the Lord from this time forth and for evermore.

Final Prayer

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

Monday, July 10, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father,

through the obedience of Jesus, your servant and your Son,
you raised a fallen world.

Free us from sin

and bring us the joy that lasts for ever.

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

Gospel Reading - Matthew 9: 18-26

While Jesus was speaking to them, suddenly one of the officials came up, who bowed low in front of him and said, 'My daughter has just died, but come and lay your hand on her and her life will be saved.' Jesus rose and, with his disciples, followed him.

Then suddenly from behind him came a woman, who had been suffering from a hemorrhage for twelve years, and she touched the fringe of his cloak, for she was thinking, 'If only I can touch his cloak I shall be saved.' Jesus turned round and saw her; and he said to her, 'Courage, my daughter, your faith has saved you.' And from that moment the woman was saved.

When Jesus reached the official's house and saw the flute-players, with the crowd making a commotion, he said, 'Get out of here; the little girl is not dead; she is asleep.' And they ridiculed him. But when the people had been turned out he went inside and took her by the hand; and she stood up. And the news of this spread all round the countryside.

Reflection

Today's Gospel takes us to meditate on two miracles of Jesus. The first one was in favor of a woman considered unclean because of an irregular hemorrhage which had been lasting for more than twelve years. The second one in favor of a girl who had just died. According to the mentality of that time, the person who touched blood or a corpse or dead body was considered unclean and whoever touched that person became unclean. Blood and death were factors of exclusion! This is why those two women were marginalized persons, excluded from the participation in the community. Whoever touched them became unclean, and therefore, would not be able to participate in the community, and therefore, could not relate with God. In order to be admitted to participate fully in the community, it was necessary to go through the rite of purification, prescribed by the norms of the law. Now, when curing the impurity of the woman, through faith, Jesus opens a new path toward God which does not depend anymore on the rites of purification, controlled by the priests. In resurrecting the girl, Jesus conquers the power of death and opens a new horizon to life.

- Matthew 9: 18-19: The death of the little girl. When Jesus was still speaking, behold an official of the place came to intercede for his daughter who has just died. He asks Jesus to go to impose his hands on her and, "she will live". The official thinks that Jesus has the power to make his daughter rise from the dead. This is a sign of much faith in Jesus on the part of the father of the little girl. Jesus rises and goes with him, taking only his disciples. This is the starting point of both episodes which follow: the cure of the woman who had been suffering for the past twelve years from a hemorrhage, and the resurrection of the little girl. The Gospel of Mark presents both of these episodes, but with many details: the official was called Jarius and he was the president of the Synagogue. The little girl was not dead as yet, and she was twelve

years old, etc. (Mk 5: 21-43). Matthew gives a briefer narration of the very lively one of Mark.

- Matthew 9: 20-21: The situation of the woman. While they were on the way to the official's house, a woman who had been suffering for twelve years because of a irregular hemorrhage got close to Jesus seeking to be cured. Twelve years with a haemorrhage! This is why she was marginalized, excluded, because as we have said, at that time blood rendered the person impure. Mark says that the woman had spent all she had with doctors, but instead of improving her situation had become worse (Mk 5: 25-26) But she had heard some speak about Jesus (Mk 5: 27). This is why a new hope sprang in her. She told herself: "If I can just touch his clothes, I shall be saved". The catechism of that time said: "If I touch his clothes I will remain impure". The woman thinks exactly the contrary! This was a sign of great courage! A sign also that women were not in agreement with everything that the religious authority taught. The teaching of the Pharisees and of the Scribes did not succeed to control the thinking of the people. Thank God! The woman got close to Jesus from behind, she touched the end of his cloak and she was cured.
- Matthew 9: 22. The word of Jesus which enlightens. Jesus turns and seeing the woman declares: "Courage, my daughter your faith has saved you". A brief phrase, but which makes us see three very important points: (1) In saying "my daughter", Jesus accepts the woman in the new community which has formed around him. She was no longer excluded. (2) What she expected and believed takes place in fact. She was cured. This proves that the catechism of the religious authority was not correct and that in Jesus was opened a new path which gave people the possibility of obtaining the purity which the law demanded and also to enter into contact with God. (3) Jesus recognizes that without the faith of this woman, He would not have been able to work the miracle. The cure was not a magic rite, but an act of faith.
- Matthew 9: 23-24: In the house of the official. After that Jesus goes to the house of the official. Seeing the agitation of those who were mourning because of the death of the little girl, he asks everybody to get out from the room. And he says: "The little girl is not dead, she is sleeping!" People laugh, because they know how to distinguish when a person sleeps or when she is dead. Death was for them a barrier that nobody could go beyond. It is the laughter of Abraham and of Sarah, that is, of those who do not succeed to believe that nothing is impossible for God (Gn 17: 17; 18: 12-14; Lk 1: 27). The words of Jesus still have a very deep significance. The situation of the communities at the time of Matthew seemed to be in a situation of death. Even though they heard said, "It is not death, you are asleep! Wake up!"
- Matthew 9: 25-26: The resurrection of the little girl. Jesus does not give any importance to the laughter of the people. He waits for everyone to get out of the house. Then he enters, takes the little girl by the hand and she gets up. Mark keeps the words of Jesus: "*Talita kúmi!*" which mean: "Little girl, I tell you to get up!" (Mk 5: 41). The news spread throughout that region. The people believed that Jesus is the Lord of life who overcomes death.

Personal Questions

- Today, which are the categories of persons who feel excluded from participating in the Christian community? Which are the factors which cause the exclusion of so many persons and render life difficult for them in the family and in society?

- “The little girl is not dead. She sleeps!” “She is not dead! You are sleeping! Wake up! This is the message of today’s Gospel. What does it tell me? Am I one of those who laugh?”

Concluding Prayer

I shall praise you to the heights, God my King, I shall bless your name for ever and ever.

Day after day I shall bless you,

I shall praise your name for ever and ever. (Ps 145: 1-2)

Tuesday, July 11, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father,

through the obedience of Jesus, your servant and your Son,

you raised a fallen world. Free us from sin

and bring us the joy that lasts forever.

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

Gospel Reading - Matthew 9: 32-38

A man was brought to Jesus, a dumb demoniac. And when the devil was driven out, the dumb man spoke and the people were amazed and said, 'Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel.' But the Pharisees said, 'It is through the prince of devils that he drives out devils.' Jesus made a tour through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing all kinds of disease and all kinds of illness. And when he saw the crowds he felt sorry for them because they were harassed and dejected, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is rich but the laborers are few, so ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers to his harvest.'

Reflection

Today’s Gospel presents two facts: (1) the cure of a possessed dumb person (Mt 9: 32-34) and (2) a summary of the activity of Jesus (Mt 9: 35-38). These two episodes end the narrative part of chapters 8 and 9 of the Gospel of Matthew in which the Evangelist seeks to indicate how Jesus put into practice the teachings given in the Sermon on the Mountain (Mt 5 and 7). In chapter 10, the meditation which begins in the Gospel of tomorrow, we see the second great discourse of Jesus: The Discourse of the Mission (Mt 10: 1-42).

- Matthew 9: 32-33a: The cure of a dumb. In one only verse Matthew describes the arrival of the possessed person before Jesus, the expulsion of the demon and the attitude of Jesus, which in the fourth Gospel there is the attention and affection of

Jesus with sick persons. The illnesses were many, social security non-existent. The illnesses were not only deficiencies of the body: deafness, blindness, paralysis, leprosy and so many other sicknesses. In fact, these illnesses were nothing else than a manifestation of a much deeper and vast evil which undermined the health of persons, and that is the total abandonment and the depressing and inhuman state in which they were obliged to live. The activity and the cures of Jesus were directed not only against physical sickness, but also and above all against this greater evil of material and spiritual abandonment, in which people were obliged to live the few years of life. Then, in addition to the economic exploitation which stole half of the family stipend, the official religion of that time, instead of helping people to find strength in God, to resist and have hope, taught that sickness was a punishment from God for sin. This increased in them the sentiment of exclusion and condemnation. Jesus did all the contrary. The acceptance full of tenderness of Jesus and the cure of the sick form part of the effort to knit together again the human relationship among persons and to re-establish community and fraternal living in the villages of Galilee, his land. Matthew 9: 33b-34: The twofold interpretation of the cure of the dumb man. Before the cure of the possessed dumb man, the reaction of the people is one of admiration and of gratitude: "Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel!" The reaction of the Pharisee is one of mistrust and malice: "It is through the prince of devils that he drives out devils!" They were not able to deny the facts which cause admiration in the people, the only way which the Pharisees find to neutralize the influence of Jesus before the people is to attribute the expulsion to the power of the evil one. Mark presents an extensive argument of Jesus to demonstrate the lack of coherence and the malice of the interpretation given by the Pharisees (Mk 3: 22-27). Matthew does not present any response of Jesus to the interpretation of the Pharisees, because when malice is evident, truth shines by itself.

- Matthew 9: 35: Tireless, Jesus goes through the villages. The description of the tireless activity of Jesus is beautiful, in which emerges the double concern to which we referred: the acceptance full of tenderness and the cure of the sick: "Jesus went through all the towns, teaching in their Synagogues, preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom and curing all kinds of diseases and all kinds of illness". In the previous chapters, Matthew had already referred several times to this itinerant activity of Jesus in the villages and towns of Galilee (Mt 4: 23-24; 8: 16).
- Matthew 9: 36: The compassion of Jesus. "Seeing the crowds he felt sorry for them because they were harassed and dejected, like sheep without a shepherd". Those who should be shepherds were not shepherds; they did not take care of the flock. Jesus tries to be the shepherd (Jn 10: 11-14). In this, Matthew sees the realization of the Prophecy of the Servant of Yahweh, who took upon himself our sickness, and bore our infirmities" (Mt 8: 17 and Is 53: 4). As it was for Jesus, the great concern of the Servant was "to find a word of comfort for those who were discouraged". (Is 50: 4). Jesus shows the same compassion toward the abandoned crowd, on the occasion of the multiplication of the loaves: they are like sheep without a shepherd (Mt 15: 32). The Gospel of Matthew has a constant concern in revealing to the converted Jews of the communities of Galilee and of Syria that Jesus is the Messiah announced by the Prophets. For this reason, frequently, he shows that in Jesus' activity the prophecies are fulfilled (cf. Mt 1: 23; 2: 5, 15, 17, 23; 3: 3; 4: 14-16; etc.).
- Matthew 9: 37-38: The harvest is rich, but the laborers are few. Jesus transmits to the disciples the concern and the compassion which are within him: "The harvest is rich, but the laborers are few! Therefore, pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers to his harvest!"

Personal Questions

- Compassion for the tired and hungry crowds. In the history of humanity, there have never been so many tired and hungry people as today. Television diffuses the facts, but does not offer any responses. Do we, Christians, succeed to have the same compassion of Jesus and to communicate it to others?
- The goodness of Jesus toward the poor disturbed the Pharisees. They have recourse to malice to neutralize the discomfort caused by Jesus. Are there many good attitudes in the persons who disturb me? How do I interpret them: with pleasant admiration as the crowds or with malice as the Pharisees?

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)

Wednesday, July 12, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father,

through the obedience of Jesus, your servant and your Son,
you raised a fallen world.

Free us from sin

and bring us the joy that lasts forever.

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

Gospel Reading - Matthew 10: 1-7

Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits with power to drive them out and to cure all kinds of disease and all kinds of illness.

These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon who is known as Peter, and his brother Andrew; James the son of Zebedee, and his brother John; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas, and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who was also his betrayer.

These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them as follows: 'Do not make your way to gentile territory, and do not enter any Samaritan town; go instead to the lost sheep of the House of Israel. And as you go, proclaim that the kingdom of Heaven is close at hand.

Reflection

The second great Discourse: The Discourse of the Mission begins in chapter 10 of the Gospel of Matthew. Matthew organizes his Gospel as a new edition of the Law of God or like a new “Pentateuch” with its five books. For this reason, his Gospel presents five great discourses or teachings of Jesus followed by a narrative part, in which he describes the way in which Jesus puts into practice what he had taught in the discourses. The following is the outline:

- Introduction: the birth and preparation of the Messiah (Mt 1 to 4)
- Sermon on the Mountain: the entrance door into the Kingdom (Mt 5 to 7)
- Narrative Mt 8 and 9
- Discourse of the Mission: how to announce and diffuse the Kingdom (Mt 10)
- Narrative Mt 11 and 12
- Discourse of the Parables: The mystery of the Kingdom present in life (Mt 13)
- Narrative Mt 14 to 17
- Discourse of the Community: the new way of living together in the Kingdom (Mt 18)
- Narrative 19 to 23
- Discourse of the future coming of the Kingdom: the utopia which sustains hope (Mt 24 and 25)
- Conclusion: Passion, death and Resurrection (Mt 26 to 28)

Today's Gospel presents to us the beginning of the Discourse of the Mission, in which the accent is placed on three aspects: (a) the call of the disciples (Mt 10: 1); (b) the list of the names of the twelve Apostles who will be the recipients of the Discourse on the Mission (Mt 10: 2- 4); (c) the sending out of the twelve (Mt 10: 5-7).

- Matthew 10: 1: The call of the twelve disciples. Matthew had already spoken about the call of the disciples (Mt 4: 18-22; 9: 9). Here, at the beginning of the Discourse of the Mission, he presents a summary: “He summoned his twelve disciples, and gave them authority over unclean spirits with power to drive them out and to cure all kinds of diseases and all kinds of illness”. The task or the mission of the disciple is to follow Jesus, the Master, forming community with him and carrying out the same mission of Jesus: to drive out the unclean spirits, to cure all sorts of diseases and all sorts of illness. In Mark's Gospel they receive the same two-fold mission, formulated with other words: Jesus constituted the group of Twelve, to remain with him and to send them out to preach and cast out devils” (Mc 3: 14-15). 1) To be with him, that is to form a community, in which Jesus is the center. 2) To preach and to be able to cast out the devils, that is, to announce the Good News and to conquer the force of evil which destroys the life of the people and alienates persons. Luke says that Jesus prayed the whole night, and the following day he called the disciples. He prayed to God so as to know whom to choose (Lk 6: 12-13).
- Matthew 10: 2-4: The list of the names of the Twelve Apostles. A good number of these names come from the Old Testament. For example, Simon is the name of one of the sons of the Patriarch Jacob (Gn 29: 33). James is the same as Giacomo (Gn 25: 26). Judas is the name of the other son of Jacob (Gn 35: 23). Matthew also had the name of Levi (Mk 2: 14), who was the other son of Jacob (Gn 35: 23). Of the Twelve Apostles seven have a name which comes from the time of the Patriarchs. Two are called Simon; two are called James; two are called Judas, one Levi! Only one has a Greek name: Philip. This reveals the desire of people to start again the history from the beginning! Perhaps it is good to think in the names which are given today to the children when they are born. Because each one of us is called by God by his/her name.

- Matthew 10: 5-7: The sending out or the mission of the twelve apostles toward the lost sheep of Israel. After having given the list of the names of the twelve, Jesus sends them out with the following recommendation: "Do not make your way to gentile territory, and do not enter any Samaritan town, go instead to the lost sheep of the House of Israel. And as you go, proclaim that the Kingdom of Heaven is close at hand". In this one phrase there is a three-fold insistence in showing that the preference of the mission is for the House of Israel: (1) Do not go among the gentiles, (2) do not enter into the towns of the Samaritans, (3) rather go to the lost sheep of Israel. Here appears a response to the doubt of the first Christians concerning opening up to pagans. Paul, who strongly affirmed the openness to the gentiles, agrees in saying that the Good News of Jesus should first be announced to the Jews and, then to the gentiles (Rm 9: 1 -11, 36; cf. At 1: 8; 11: 3; 13: 46; 15: 1, 5, 23-29). But then, in the same Gospel of Matthew, in the conversation of Jesus with the Canaanite woman, the openness to the gentiles will take place (Mt 15: 21-29).
- The sending out of the Apostles toward all peoples. After the Resurrection of Jesus, there are several episodes on the sending out of the Apostles not only toward the Jews, but toward all peoples. In Matthew: Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to observe everything which I have commanded. And I will be with you until the end of time" (Mt 28: 19-20). In Mark: "Go to the entire world, proclaim the Good News to all creatures. Those who will believe and will be baptized will be saved; those who will not believe will be condemned" (Mk 15-16). In Luke: "So it is written that the Christ would suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that in his name, repentance for the forgiveness of sins would be preached to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses to this (Lk 24: 46-48; Ac 1: 8) John summarizes all in one phrase: "As the Father has sent me, so I also send you!" (Jn 20: 21).

Personal Questions

- Have you ever thought sometime about the meaning of your name? Have you asked your parents why they gave you the name that you have? Do you like your name?
- Jesus calls the disciples. His call has a two-fold purpose: to form a community and to go on mission. How do I live in my life this two-fold purpose?

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)

Thursday, July 13, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father,

through the obedience of Jesus, your servant and your Son,
you raised a fallen world.

Free us from sin

and bring us the joy that lasts forever.

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

Gospel Reading - Matthew 10: 7-15

Jesus said to his disciples: "As you go, proclaim that the kingdom of Heaven is close at hand. Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those suffering from virulent skin-diseases, drive out devils.

You received without charge, give without charge. Provide yourselves with no gold or silver, not even with coppers for your purses, with no haversack for the journey or spare tunic or footwear or a staff, for the labourer deserves his keep.

'Whatever town or village you go into, seek out someone worthy and stay with him until you leave.

As you enter his house, salute it, and if the house deserves it, may your peace come upon it; if it does not, may your peace come back to you. And if anyone does not welcome you or listen to what you have to say, as you walk out of the house or town shake the dust from your feet. In truth I tell you, on the Day of Judgement it will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town."

Reflection

The Gospel today presents the second part of the sending out of the disciples. Yesterday we have seen that Jesus insists in directing them first toward the lost sheep of Israel. Today, we see the concrete instructions to carry out the mission.

- Matthew 10: 7: *The objective of the mission: to reveal the presence of the Kingdom. "Go and announce the Kingdom of Heaven is close at hand"*. The principal objective is that of announcing that the Kingdom is close at hand. This is the novelty which Christ brings to us. For the other Jews there was still a long time before the coming of the Kingdom. It would have come only after they would have done their own part. The coming of the Kingdom depended, according to them, on their effort. For the *Pharisees*, for example, the Kingdom would be attained only after the perfect observance of the Law. For the *Essences*, when the country would have purified itself. But Jesus thinks in a different way. He has a different way of reading the facts of life. He says that the hour has already arrived (Mk 1: 15). When he says that the Kingdom is close at hand or that the Kingdom is already among us, in our midst, he does not mean to say that the Kingdom was just arriving at that moment, but that it was *already there*, independently of the effort made by the people. What they all expected was already present among the people, gratuitously, but the people did not know it, nor perceived it (cf. Lk 17: 21). Jesus is aware of this, because he sees reality with different eyes. He reveals and announces to the poor of his land this hidden presence of the Kingdom in our midst (Lk 4: 18). It is the mustard seed which will receive the rain of his word and the warmth of his love.
- Matthew 10: 8: *The signs of the presence of the Kingdom: accept the excluded*. How should the presence of the Kingdom be announced? Only through words and

discourses? No! The signs of the presence of the Kingdom are above all concrete gestures or acts, done gratuitously: “*Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out the devils. You received without charge, give without charge*”. This means that the disciples should accept within the community those who have been excluded. This practice of solidarity criticizes both the religion and society which exclude and indicates concrete solutions.

- Matthew 10: 9-10: *Do not take anything for the journey*. Contrary to other missionaries, the disciples of Jesus should not take anything: “*Provide yourselves with no gold or silver, not even with coppers for your purses, with no haversack for the journey or a spare tunic or footwear or a staff, for the laborer deserves his keep*”. This means that they have to trust in the hospitality of the people. Because the disciples who go without anything, taking only peace (Mk 10: 13), show that they trust the people. It is certain that they will be welcomed, that they will be able to participate in the life and the work of the people of the place and that they will be able to survive with what they will receive in exchange, because the laborer *deserves his keep*. This means that the disciples should trust in sharing. By means of this practice they criticize the laws of exclusion and recover the ancient values of community living together.
- Matthew 10: 11-13: *To share peace in the community*. The disciples should not go from house to house, but should seek persons of peace and remain in that house. That is, they should stay in a stable manner. Thus, through that new practice, they criticize the culture of accumulation which characterized the politics of the Roman Empire, and they announced a new model of living together. Once all these requirements were respected, the disciples could cry out: *The Kingdom of God has arrived!* To announce the Kingdom does not mean, in the first place, to teach truths and doctrine, but lead toward a new fraternal manner of living and of sharing starting from the Good News which Jesus has brought to us: God and Father and Mother of all men and women.
- Matthew 10: 14-15: *The severity of the menace*. How is such a severe menace to be understood? Jesus has brought us something completely new. He has come to rescue the community values of the past: hospitality, sharing, communion around the table, acceptance of the excluded. That explains the severity against those who reject the message. Because they do not reject something new, but their own past, their own culture and wisdom! The objective of the pedagogy of Jesus is to dig out from the memory, to recover the wisdom of the people, to reconstruct the community, to renew the Covenant, to reconstruct life.

Personal Questions

- Today, how can we put into practice the recommendation not to take anything for the journey when going to a mission?
- Jesus orders to seek for persons of peace, so as to be able to remain in their house. Today, who would be a person of peace to whom to address oneself in the announcement of the Good News?

Concluding Prayer

God Sabaoth, come back, we pray, look down from heaven and see, visit this vine; protect what your own hand has planted. (Ps 80: 14-15)

Friday, July 14, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father,

through the obedience of Jesus, your servant and your Son,
you raised a fallen world.

Free us from sin

and bring us the joy that lasts forever.

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

Gospel Reading - Matthew 10: 16-23

Jesus said to his disciples: "Look, I am sending you out like sheep among wolves; so be cunning as snakes and yet innocent as doves. 'Be prepared for people to hand you over to the Sanhedrin and scourge you in their synagogues. You will be brought before governors and kings for my sake, as evidence to them and to the gentiles. But when you are handed over, do not worry about how to speak or what to say; what you are to say will be given to you when the time comes, because it is not you who will be speaking; the Spirit of your Father will be speaking in you.

'Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will come forward against their parents and have them put to death. You will be universally hated on account of my name; but anyone who stands firm to the end will be saved.

If they persecute you in one town, take refuge in the next; and if they persecute you in that, take refuge in another. In truth I tell you, you will not have gone the round of the towns of Israel before the Son of man comes.

Reflection

To the community of his disciples, called and gathered together around him and invested with his same authority as collaborators, Jesus entrusts them directives in view of their future mission.

- Matthew 10: 16-19: Danger and trust in God. Jesus introduces this part of his discourse with two metaphors: sheep in the midst of wolves; prudent as serpents, simple as the doves. The first one serves to show the difficult and dangerous context to which the disciples are sent. On the one hand, the dangerous situation is made evident in which the disciples sent on mission will find themselves; on the other the expression "I send you" expresses protection. Also regarding the astuteness of the serpent and the simplicity of the dove Jesus seems to put together two attitudes: trust in God and prolonged and attentive reflection on the way in which we should relate with others. Jesus, then, following this gives an order that seems, at first sight, filled with mistrust: «beware of men...», but, in reality, it means to be attentive to possible persecutions, hostility, and denouncement. The expression "will deliver you" does not only refer to the accusation in the tribunal but, above all, it has a theological value: the disciples who is following Jesus can experience the same experience of the Master of

“being delivered in the hands of man” (17: 22). The disciples must be strong and resist in order “to give witness”, The fact of being delivered to the tribunal should become a witness for the Jews and for the Pagans, it is the possibility to be able to draw them to the person and the cause of Jesus and, therefore, to the knowledge of the Gospel. This positive implication is important as a result of witnessing: characterized by the credible and fascinating faith.

- Matthew 10: 20: the divine help. So that all this may take place in the mission-witness of the disciples it is essential to have the help that comes from God. That is to say that we should not trust our own security and resources, but the disciples in critical, dangerous and aggressive situations, for their lives found help and solidarity in God. For their mission as disciples is also promised the Spirit of the Father (v.20), he is the one who acts in them when they are committed in their mission of evangelization and of witnessing, the Spirit will speak through them.
- Matthew 10: 21-22: Threat-consolation. Once again, the announcement of threat is repeated in the expression “will be delivered”: Brother will betray brother, a father against his son, the sons against the parents. It is a question of a true and great disorder in the social relationships, the breaking up of the family. Persons who are bound by the most intimate family relationships – such as parents, children, brothers and sisters – will fall in the misfortune of mutually hating and eliminating one another. In what sense does such a division of the family have to do with the witness in behalf of Jesus? Such breaking up of the family relationships could be caused by the diverse attitudes that are taken within the family, regarding Jesus. The expression “you will be hated” seems to indicate the theme of the hostile acceptance on the part of the contemporaries and of those he sent. The strong sense of the words of Jesus find a comparison in another part of the New Testament: «Blessed are you if you are insulted for the sake of Christ’s name, because the Spirit of glory, the Spirit of God, rests upon you. No one of you should suffer as a murderer or thief or evil doer or as a spy. But if one suffers as a Christian, do not blush, because of this name, rather give glory to God”. After the threat, follows the promise of consolation (v.3). The greatest consolation for the disciples will be that of “being saved”, of being able to live the experience of the Savior, that is to say, to participate in his victories.

Personal Questions

- What do these dispositions of Jesus teach us today for understanding the mission of the Christian?
- Do you know how to trust on divine help when you experience conflicts, persecutions and trials?

Concluding Prayer

Give me back the joy of your salvation, sustain in me a generous spirit.

Lord, open my lips,

and my mouth will speak out your praise. (Ps 51: 12,15)

Saturday, July 15, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father,

through the obedience of Jesus, your servant and your Son,
you raised a fallen world.

Free us from sin

and bring us the joy that lasts forever.

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

Gospel Reading - Matthew 10: 24-33

Jesus said to his disciples: "The disciple is not superior to teacher, nor slave to master. It is enough for disciple to grow to be like teacher, and slave like master. If they have called the master of the house "Beelzebul", how much more the members of his household? 'So do not be afraid of them. Everything now covered up will be uncovered, and everything now hidden will be made clear. What I say to you in the dark, tell in the daylight; what you hear in whispers, proclaim from the housetops. 'Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the

soul; fear him rather who can destroy both body and soul in hell. Can you not buy two sparrows for a penny? And yet not one falls to the ground without your Father knowing. Why, every hair on your head has been counted. So there is no need to be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows. 'So if anyone declares himself for me in the presence of human beings, I will declare myself for him in the presence of my Father in heaven. But the one who disowns me in the presence of human beings, I will disown in the presence of my Father in heaven.

Reflection

Today's Gospel presents to us diverse instructions of Jesus on the behaviour that the disciples have to adopt in the exercise of their mission. What strikes most in these instructions are two warnings: (a) the frequency with which Jesus refers to the persecutions and suffering which they will have to bear; (b) the insistence repeated three times to the disciples not to be afraid.

- Matthew 10: 24-25: Persecutions and sufferings which mark the life of the disciples. These two verses constitute the final part of a warning of Jesus to the disciples concerning persecutions. The disciples should know that, because of the fact of being disciples of Jesus, they will be persecuted (Mt 10: 17-23). But this should not be a reason for worrying, because a disciple should imitate the life of the Master and share the trials with him. This is part of discipleship. "A disciple is not greater than the Teacher or a servant than his master; it is sufficient for the disciple to grow to be like his teacher and the servant like his master". If they called Jesus Beelzebul, how much more will they insult his disciples. In other words, the disciple of Jesus should be worried if in his life there are no persecutions.
- Matthew 10: 26-27: Do not be afraid to say the truth. The disciples should not be afraid to be persecuted. Those who persecute them, succeed to pervert the sense of the facts and to spread calumnies which change truth into lie, and the lie into truth. But no matter how great the lie is, truth will triumph at the end and will make the lie crumble down. This is why we should not be afraid to proclaim truth, the things

which Jesus has taught. Every day, the means of communication succeed to pervert the meaning of things and the persons who proclaim the truth are considered as criminals; they make the neo-liberal system to appear as just and it perverts the sense of human life.

- Matthew 10: 28: Do not be afraid of those who kill the body. The disciples should not be afraid of those who kill the body, who torture, who strike and cause suffering. Those who torture can kill the body, but they cannot succeed to kill liberty and the spirit in the body. They should be afraid, yes, that the fear of suffering may lead them to hide or to deny the truth, and that this will lead them to offend God, because anyone who draws away from God will be lost forever.
- Matthew 10: 29-31: Do not be afraid, but trust in Divine Providence. The disciples should not fear anything, because they are in God's hands. Jesus orders to look at the birds in the air. Two sparrows are sold for a penny, but not one of them will fall to the ground without the Father wanting. Every hair on our head has been counted. Luke says that not one hair falls without our Father wanting it (Lk 21: 18). And so many hairs fall from our head! Because of this "Do not be afraid. You are worth more than many sparrows". This is the lesson which Jesus draws from the contemplation of nature.
- Matthew 10: 32-33: Do not be afraid to be the witnesses of Jesus. At the end Jesus summarizes everything in this sentence: "If anyone declares himself for me in the presence of human beings, I will declare myself for him in the presence of my Father in heaven; 33: the one who instead will disown me in the presence of human beings, I will disown him in the presence of my Father in heaven". Knowing that we are in God's hands and that God is with us, at every moment, we have the necessary courage and the peace to render witness and to be disciples of Jesus.

Personal Questions

- Are you afraid? Afraid of what? Why?
- Have you been persecuted sometimes because of your commitment to announce the Good News of God which Jesus announced to us?

Concluding Prayer

Your decrees stand firm, unshakeable, holiness is the beauty of your house, Yahweh, for all time to come. (Ps 93: 5)

Sunday, July 16, 2023

15th Sunday of Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Prayer is also the willingness to listen; it is the suitable time for meeting with God. Today, the Sunday of the 'sower', we would like to open our hearts to listen to the word of Jesus using the words of St. John Chrysostom that we too may become docile and willing listeners of the saving Word: *«Grant, Lord, that I may listen attentively and remember constantly your teaching, that I may put it into practice forcefully and courageously, despising riches and avoiding the worries of a worldly life... Grant me your strength and that I may meditate on your words putting down deep roots and*

purifying me of all worldly perils» (St. John Chrysostom, *A Commentary on the Gospel according to Matthew 44: 3-4*).

Reading

The Context:

Matthew places the parable of the seed along with the events of the preceding chapters 11 and 12 where he mentions the kingdom of God that suffers violence. The theme of our parable, as also of the whole of the discourse in parables in chapter 13, is the kingdom of God.

The “house” whence Jesus leaves is the house where he lived in Capharnaum and where he is once more with his disciples (v.1: *That same day, Jesus left the house*) and his leaving is connected with the going out of the sower (v.3: *a sower went out to sow*). His “leaving” has as its physical or concrete berth the shore of the lake (v.1: *he got into a boat and sat there*); this moment recalls the time when Jesus had called his disciples (4: 18), but, the sea is a place of passage to the pagan peoples, thus, it represents the border between Israel and the pagan world. The background of the discourse in parables is, then, the lake of Genesareth, called a “sea” according to the people. His leaving attracts the crowds. And while Jesus is sitting by the shore of the sea, he is surprised by the crowds coming to him, and is obliged to get into a boat. This boat becomes the chair of his teaching. Jesus turns to his listeners and “told them many things in parables” that is in a manner different from teaching or proclaiming.

The Text:

1 That same day, Jesus left the house and sat by the lakeside, 2 but such large crowds gathered round him that he got into a boat and sat there. The people all stood on the shore, 3 and he told them many things in parables. He said, 'Listen, a sower went out to sow. 4 As he sowed, some seeds fell on the edge of the path, and the birds came and ate them up. 5 Others fell on patches of rock where they found little soil and sprang up at once, because there was no depth of earth; 6 but as soon as the sun came up they were scorched and, not having any roots, they withered away. 7 Others fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. 8 Others fell on rich soil and produced their crop, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. 9 Anyone who has ears should listen!'

10 Then the disciples went up to him and asked, 'Why do you talk to them in parables?' 11 In answer, he said, 'Because to you is granted to understand the mysteries of the kingdom of Heaven, but to them it is not granted. 12 Anyone who has will be given more and will have more than enough; but anyone who has not will be deprived even of what he has. 13 The reason I talk to them in parables is that they look without seeing and listen without hearing or understanding. 14 So in their case what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah is being fulfilled: Listen and listen, but never understand! Look and look, but never perceive! 15 This people's heart has grown coarse, their ears dulled, they have shut their eyes tight to avoid using their eyes to see, their ears to hear, their heart to understand, changing their ways and being healed by

me. 16 'But blessed are your eyes because they see, your ears because they hear! 17 In truth I tell you, many prophets and upright people longed to see what you see, and never saw it; to hear what you hear, and never heard it.

18 'So pay attention to the parable of the sower. 19 When anyone hears the word of the kingdom without understanding, the Evil One comes and carries off what was sown in his heart: this is the seed sown on the edge of the path. 20 The seed sown on patches of

rock is someone who hears the word and welcomes it at once with joy. 21 But such a person has no root deep down and does not last; should some trial come, or some persecution on account of the word, at once he falls away. 22 The seed sown in thorns is someone who hears the word, but the worry of the world and the lure of riches choke the word and so it produces nothing. 23 And the seed sown in rich soil is someone who hears the word and understands it; this is the one who yields a harvest and produces now a hundredfold, now sixty, now thirty.'

A Moment of Prayerful Silence

In our busy way of acting, which leads to exterior concerns, we feel the need to stop and calm down in silence... at such a time we become receptive of the fire of the Word...

Interpreting the Text

The Action of the Sower:

The parable speaks of a sower, not of a peasant, and his activity is marked by the contrast between the loss of the seeds (13: 4-7) and the abundant fruit (13: 8). Furthermore, we need to note the difference between the wealth of the description of those who lose the seeds and the concise form of the abundant fruit. But the number of failed and disappointing experiences represented by the various forms of loss of seeds (*on the edge of the path...on patches of rock... among thorns...*) is contrasted with the great harvest that makes us forget the negative experiences of the losses. Again, in the parable there is the time difference between the initial phase of the sowing and the end phase which coincides with the fruit of the harvest. If in the various attempts at sowing there is no fruit, such lack brings to mind the Kingdom of God at the time of the great harvest. Jesus, the sower, sows the word of the kingdom (13: 19) which makes present the lordship of God over the world, over people and that bears the final fruit. The parable has such persuasive force as to bring the listener to trust in the works of Jesus, which, while marked by failure or disappointment, will finally succeed.

Apart, Jesus Communicates to the Disciples the Reason for Speaking in Parables (13: 10-17):

After telling the parable and before his explanation (13: 18-23) the disciples go up to Jesus (the verb "to go up to" expresses the intimate relationship with Jesus) and put an explicit question to him, they cannot see why Jesus speaks to the crowds in parables (v.10: *Why do you talk to them in parables?*). The reply to their question is in v.13: «...*The reason I talk to them in parables is that they look without seeing and listen without hearing or understanding*». It is as if to say: the crowds neither perceive nor understand. Jesus does not mean to force them to understand. Indeed until now Jesus has spoken and acted clearly, but the crowds have not understood; but, as the time has come for him to go on revealing his message in all its radical nature – namely understanding – he has recourse to the language of parables, which although more obscure may stimulate the crowds to think more, to reflect on the obstacles that prevent their understanding of the teachings of Jesus. This seems like a repetition of the times of Isaiah, when the people were closed to the message of God (Is 6: 9-10), and as such a situation of refusal foreseen by biblical tradition repeats itself in the crowds that "see-listen" but do not understand.

Compared to the crowd, the disciples hold a privileged position (13: 11). Jesus shows this in the first part of his reply when he distinguishes between those included and those excluded from knowing the kingdom. The knowledge of the mysteries of God – that is

God's plan – is possible through the intervention of God and not through one's own human efforts. The disciples are presented as those who understand Jesus' parable not because they are more intelligent, but because it is he himself who explains his words to them.

The lack of understanding on the part of the crowds is the cause of his speaking in parables: they do not understand Jesus, thus they show clearly their obstinate incomprehension or better their inability to discern. The disciples, on the other hand, are declared blessed because they can *see and listen*.

The Explanation of the Parable (13: 18-23):

After Jesus expressed his reasons for speaking in parables, he showed the fate of the word of the Kingdom in each of his listeners. Although there are four kinds of soil listed, there are only two types of listeners compared: those who listen to the Word and do not understand it (13: 19) and those who listen to the Word and understand (13: 23). It is interesting to note that Matthew, in contrast with Mark, tells the story in the singular. It is the personal commitment that is the benchmark of real listening and true understanding. The first category of listeners shows that they listen to the Word (19), but do not understand it. Understanding the Word here is not to be understood on the intellectual level but on the wisdom level. It is necessary to enter into its deep and saving meaning. In the second (13: 20-21) the Word is heard and welcomed with joy. Such a welcome (lack of roots) becomes unstable when the initial enthusiasm wears out, perhaps because of experiences of suffering and persecution inevitable in every journey of faithful listening to God.

The third possibility evokes material preoccupations that can choke the Word (13: 22). Finally, the positive result: the seed lost in the threefold soil is compensated by the fruitful result. Briefly, the parable brings out three aspects of the act of active and persevering faith: listening, understanding and bearing fruit.

Meditation for Ecclesial Practice

- What can the parable say to the Church of today? Which soil does our ecclesial community represent? On the personal level, what interior availability and understanding do we manifest in our listening of the Word?
- Is it not true that the dangers Jesus pointed out to his disciples concerning the welcoming of the Word are relevant to us too? For instance, fickleness before difficulties, negligence, anxiety for the future, daily worries?
- The disciples were capable of asking Jesus, of questioning him about their worries and difficulties. On your journey of faith to the Word of God, to whom do you address your questions? The replies that Jesus communicates to us in our intimate and personal relationship with him, depend on the sort of question we ask.
- The figure of the sower recalls that of the Church in its commitment to evangelisation: to know how to communicate in a new way the person of Jesus and the values of the Gospel. The Church has to stand out for the authoritative character of its teaching, for its outspokenness and for the force of its actions. Today we need to be confident, eager and tireless evangelisers. Every ecclesial community is urged by the parable of the sower not to be selective of persons or social contexts for the proclamation of the Gospel; we must have a broad vision and dedicate ourselves, even in what seem to be impossible situations, to communicating the Gospel. Every pastoral action of evangelisation experiences a first moment of ephemeral enthusiasm, which, however, may be followed by a cold reaction and opposition.

Pastoral attempts are comparable to the threefold attempt of the sower, in the end they are rewarded by the threefold harvest. It is certain that the word of Jesus buds and bears fruit in hearts open to his action, but we must not cease from shaking our sluggishness, our indecision and the hardness of hearing of many believers.

Psalm 65 (64)

You visit the earth and make it fruitful, you fill it with riches;
the river of God brims over with water, you provide the grain.
To that end
you water its furrows abundantly, level its ridges,
soften it with showers and bless its shoots. You crown the year with your generosity,
richness seeps from your tracks,
the pastures of the desert grow moist, the hillsides are wrapped in joy,
the meadows are covered with flocks, the valleys clothed with wheat; they shout and
sing for joy.

Closing Prayer

Lord, your parable of the sower concerns each one of us, the ways of our lives, the hardness of daily life, the difficulties and the moments of softness that are part of our interior scene. We are all, from time to time, sometimes path, rocks and thorns; but also good, fertile soil. Deliver us from the temptation of negative forces that try to eliminate the force of your Word. Strengthen our will when passing and changing emotions render the seduction of your Word less efficacious. Help us to keep the joy that our meeting with your Word creates in our hearts. Strengthen our hearts so that in times of tribulation we may not feel defenseless and thus exposed to discouragement. Grant us the strength to stand up to the obstacles we place to your Word when the worries of the world come or when we are deceived by the mirage of money, seduced by pleasure or by the vanity of appearances. Make us good soil, welcoming persons, capable of rendering our service to your Word. Amen!

Monday, July 17, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

God our Father, your light of truth
guides us to the way of Christ.

May all who follow him
reject what is contrary to the gospel.

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

Gospel Reading - Matthew 10: 34-11: 1

Jesus said to his disciples: 'Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth: it is not peace I have come to bring, but a sword. For I have come to set son against father, daughter against mother, daughter-in-law against mother-in-law; a person's enemies will be the members of his own household. 'No one who prefers father or mother to me is worthy of me. No one who prefers son or daughter to me is worthy of me. Anyone who does not take his cross and follow in my footsteps is not worthy of me. Anyone who finds his life will lose it; anyone who loses his life for my sake will find it. 'Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me; and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. 'Anyone who welcomes a prophet because he is a prophet will have a prophet's reward; and anyone who welcomes an upright person because he is upright will have the reward of an upright person. 'If anyone gives so much as a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is a disciple, then in truth I tell you, he will most certainly not go without his reward.'

When Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples he moved on from there to teach and preach in their towns.

Reflection

In May of 2016, the V Conference of Latin American Bishops, which was held in Aparecida in the north of Brazil, wrote a very important document on the theme: *Disciples and Missionaries of Jesus Christ, so that our peoples may have life.*" The discourse of the Mission of chapter 10 of the Gospel of Matthew, offers much light in order to be able to carry out the mission as disciples and missionaries of Jesus Christ. The Gospel today presents to us the last part of this Discourse of the Mission.

- Matthew 10: 34-36: I have not come to bring peace to the earth but the sword. Jesus always speaks of peace (Mt 5: 50; Lk 1: 79; 10: 5; 19: 27; 16: 33; 20: 21, 26). And then, how can we understand the phrase in today's Gospel which seems to say the contrary: "Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth; no, I have not come to bring peace but the sword". This affirmation does not mean that Jesus was in favor of division and the sword. No! Jesus does not want neither the sword (Jn 18: 11), nor division. He wants the union of all in truth (cf. Jn 17: 17-23). At that time, the announcement of the truth that He, Jesus of Nazareth, was the Messiah became a reason of great division among the Jews. In the same family or community, some were in favour and others were radically contrary. In this sense the Good News of Jesus was truly a source of division, a "sign of contradiction" (Lk 2: 34) or, as Jesus said, he was bringing the sword. In this way the other warning is understood: "I have come to set son against father, daughter against mother, daughter-in-law against mother-in-law; a person's enemies will be the members of his own household". In fact, that was what was happening in the families and in the communities: much division, much discussion, the consequence of the announcement of the Good News among the Jews of that time, because some accepted, others denied. Today the same thing happens. Many times, there where the Church renews itself, the appeal to the Good News becomes a 'sign of contradiction' and of division. Persons, who during years have lived comfortably in their routine of Christian life, do not want to allow themselves to be bothered by the 'innovations' of Vatican Council II. Disturbed by the changes, they used all their intelligence to find arguments in defense of their opinions and to condemn the changes considering them contrary to what they thought was the true faith.
- Matthew 10: 37: No one who prefers father or mother to me is worthy of me. Luke gives this same phrase, but much more demanding. Literally he says: "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his sons and brothers, his

sisters, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple" (Lk 14: 26). How can this affirmation of Jesus be combined with the other one in which he orders to observe the fourth commandment: love and honor father and mother? (Mk 7: 10-12; Mt 19: 19). Two observations: (1) The fundamental criterion on which Jesus insists always is this one: the Good News of God should be the supreme value of our life. In our life there can be no greater value. (2) The economic and social situation at the time of Jesus was such that the families were obliged to close themselves up in themselves. They no longer had the conditions to respect the obligations of human community living together as for example: sharing, hospitality, invitation to a meal and the acceptance of the excluded. This individualistic closing up in self, caused by the national and international situation produced distortion: (1) It made life in community impossible (2) It limited the commandment "honor father and mother" exclusively to the small family nucleus and no longer to the larger family of the community (3) It prevented the full manifestation of the Good News of God, because if God is Father/Mother we are brothers and sisters of one another. And this truth should be expressed in the life of the community. A living and fraternal community is the mirror of the face of God. Human living together without community is a mirror which disfigures the face of God. In this context, the request of Jesus: "to hate father and mother means that the disciples should overcome the individualistic closing up of the small family on itself, and extend it to the community dimension. Jesus himself put into practice what he taught others. His family wanted to call him to close himself up in self. When they told him: "Look, your mother and your brothers are outside and they are looking for you", he answered: "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" And looking at the persons around him he said: "Behold, my mother and my brothers. Anyone who does the will of God is my brother, my sister and my mother" (Mk 3: 32-35). He extends the family! This was and continues to be even today for the small family the only way to be able to keep and transmit the values in which he believes.

- Matthew 10: 38-39: The demands of the mission of the disciples. In these two verses, Jesus gives important and demanding advice: (a) To take up the cross and follow Jesus: Anyone who does not take his cross and follow in my footsteps is not worthy of me. In order to perceive all the significance and importance of this first advice it is well to keep in mind the witness of Saint Paul: "But as for me, it is not 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). To carry the cross presupposes, even now, a radical drawing away from the iniquitous system which reigns in the world. (b) To have the courage to give one's life: "Anyone who finds his life will lose it; anyone who loses his life for my sake will find it". Only the one, who in life has been capable of giving himself totally to others, will feel fulfilled. This second advice confirms the deepest human experience; the source of life is in the gift of life. Giving one receives. If the wheat grain does not die ... (Jn 12, 24).
- Matthew 10: 40: The identification of the disciple with Jesus and with God himself. This human experience of donation and of the gift receives here a clarification, a deepening: "Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me: and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me." In the total gift of self, the disciple identifies himself with Jesus; there the encounter with God takes place, and God allows himself to be found by the one who seeks him.
- Matthew 10: 41-42: the reward of the prophet, of the just and of the disciple. The discourse of the Mission ends with one phrase on reward: "Anyone who welcomes a prophet because he is a prophet will have a prophet's reward; and anyone who welcomes an upright person because he is upright will have the reward of an upright person. If anyone gives so much as a cup of cold water to one of these little ones,

because he is a disciple, then in truth I tell you, he will most certainly not go without reward". In this phrase the sequence is very meaningful: the prophet is recognized because of his mission as one sent by God. The upright person is recognized by his behaviour, by his perfect way of observing the law of God. The disciple is recognized by no quality or mission, but simply by his social condition of being least among the people. The Kingdom is not made of great things. It is like a very big house which is constructed with small bricks. Anyone who despises the brick will have great difficulty in constructing the house. Even a glass of water serves as a brick for the construction of the Kingdom.

- Matthew 11: 1: The end of the Discourse of the Mission. The end of the Discourse of the Mission. When Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples he moved from there to teach and preach in their towns. Now Jesus leaves to put into practice what he has taught. We will see this in the next chapters 11 and 12 of the Gospel of Matthew.

Personal Questions

- To lose life in order to gain life. Have you had some experience of having felt rewarded for an act of donation or gratuity for others?
- He who welcomes you welcomes me, and who welcomes me, welcomes the One who sent me. Stop and think what Jesus says here: He and God himself identify themselves with you.

Concluding Prayer

How blessed are those who live in your house; they shall praise you continually. Pause Blessed those who find their strength in you, whose hearts are set on pilgrimage. (Ps 84: 4-5)

Tuesday, July 18, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

God our Father, your light of truth

guides us to the way of Christ.

May all who follow him

reject what is contrary to the gospel.

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

Gospel Reading - Matthew 11: 20-24

Jesus began to reproach the towns in which most of his miracles had been worked, because they refused to repent. 'Alas for you, Chorazin! Alas for you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. Still, I tell you that it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on Judgement Day than for you.

And as for you, Capernaum, did you want to be raised as high as heaven? You shall be flung down to hell. For if the miracles done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have been standing yet. Still, I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on Judgement Day than for you.'

Reflection

The Discourse of the Mission occupies chapter 10. Chapters 11 and 12 describe the Mission which Jesus carried out and how he did it. The two chapters mention how the people adhered to him, doubted the evangelizing action of Jesus, or rejected it. John the Baptist, who looked at Jesus with the eyes of the past, does not succeed in understanding him (Mt 11: 1-15). The people, who looked at Jesus out of interest, were not capable to understand him (Mt 11: 16- 19). The great cities around the lake, which listened to the preaching of Jesus and saw his miracles, did not want to open themselves up to his message (this is the text of today's Gospel) (Mt 11: 20-24). The wise and the doctors, who appreciated everything according to their own science, were not capable to understand the preaching of Jesus (Mt 11: 25). The Pharisees, who trusted only in the observance of the law, criticized Jesus (Mt 12: 1-8) and decided to kill him (Mt 12: 9-14). They said that Jesus acted in the name of Beelzebul (Mt 12: 22-37). They wanted a proof in order to be able to believe in him (Mt 12: 38-45). Not even his relatives supported him (Mt 12: 46-50). Only the little ones and the simple people understood and accepted the Good News of the Kingdom (Mt 11: 25-30). They followed him (Mt 12: 15-16) and saw in him the Servant announced by Isaiah (Mt 12: 17-21).

This way of describing the missionary activity of Jesus was a clear warning for the disciples who together with Jesus walked through Galilee. They could not expect a reward or praise for the fact of being missionaries of Jesus. This warning is also valid for us who today read and meditate on this discourse of the Mission, because the Gospels were written for all times. They invite us to confront the attitude that we have with Jesus with the attitude of the persons who appear in the Gospel and to ask ourselves if we are like John the Baptist (Mt 11: 1-15), like the people who were interested (Mt 11: 16-19), like the unbelieving cities (Mt 11: 20-24), like the doctors who thought they knew everything and understood nothing (Mt 11: 25), like the Pharisees who only knew how to criticize (Mt 12: 1-45) or like the simple people who went seeking for Jesus (Mt 12: 15) and that, with their wisdom, knew how to understand and accept the message of the Kingdom (Mt 11: 25-30).

- Matthew 11: 20: The word against the cities which did not receive him. The space in which Jesus moves during those three years of his missionary life was small; only a few square kilometers along the Sea of Galilee around the cities of Capernaum, Bethsaida and Chorazin. Only that! So it was in this very reduced space where Jesus made the majority of his discourses and worked his miracles. He came to save the whole of humanity, and almost did not get out of the limited space of his land. Tragically, Jesus has to become aware that the people of those cities did not want to accept the message of the Kingdom and were not converted. The cities become more rigid in their beliefs, traditions and customs and do not accept the invitation of Jesus to change life.
- Matthew 11: 21-24: Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum are worse than Tyre and Sidon. In the past, Tyre and Sidon, inflexible enemies of Israel, ill treated the People of God. Because of this they were cursed by the prophets. (Is 23: 1; Jr 25: 22; 47: 4; Ex 26: 3; 27: 2; 28: 2; Jl 4: 4; Am 1: 10). And now Jesus says that these cities, symbols of all evil, would have already been converted if in them had been worked all the miracles which were worked in Chorazin and Bethsaida. The city of Sodom, the symbol of the worse perversion, was destroyed by the anger of God (Gn 18, 16 to 19, 29). And now

Jesus says that Sodom would exist up until now, because it would have been converted if it had seen the miracles that Jesus worked in Capernaum. Today we still live this same paradox. Many of us, who are Catholics since we were children, have many solid and firm convictions, so much so that nobody is capable of converting us. And in some places, Christianity, instead of being a source of change and of conversion, becomes the refuge of the most reactionary forces of the politics of the country.

Personal Questions

- How do I place myself before the Good News of Jesus: like John the Baptist, like the interested people, like the doctors, like the Pharisees or like the simple and poor people?
- Do my city, my country deserve the warning of Jesus against Capernaum, Chorazion and Bethsaida?

Concluding Prayer

Great is Yahweh and most worthy of praise in the city of our God, the holy mountain, towering in beauty, the joy of the whole world. (Ps 48: 1-2)

Wednesday, July 19, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

God our Father, your light of truth

guides us to the way of Christ.

May all who follow him

reject what is contrary to the gospel.

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

Gospel Reading - Matthew 11: 25-27

At that time Jesus exclaimed, 'I bless you, Father, Lord of heaven and of earth, for hiding these things from the learned and the clever and revealing them to little children. Yes, Father, for that is what it pleased you to do.

Everything has been entrusted to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, just as no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

Reflection

Context. The liturgical passage of Mt 11: 25-27 represents a turning point in the Gospel of Matthew: Jesus is asked the first questions regarding the coming of the Kingdom of

Heaven. The first one to ask the first questions on the identity of Jesus is John the Baptist, who through his disciples asks him a concrete question: "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to expect someone else?" (11: 3). Instead, the Pharisees, together with the Scribes, address words of reproach and judgment to Jesus: "Look, your disciples are doing something that is forbidden on the Sabbath" (12: 2). Up until now in chapter 1 to 10, the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven in the person of Jesus did not seem to find any obstacles, but beginning with chapter 11, we find some concrete difficulties. Or rather many begin to take a stand before Jesus: sometimes he is "the object of scandal", of fall (11: 6); "this generation", in the sense of this human descent, does not have an attitude of acceptance regarding the Kingdom that is to arrive; the cities along the lake are not converted (11: 20); concerning the behavior of Jesus a true and proper controversy springs up (chapter 12), and thus they begin to think how to lead him to death (12: 14). This is the climate of mistrust and of protest in which Matthew inserts this passage.

Now the moment has arrived in which to question oneself about the activity of Jesus: how to interpret the "works of Christ" (11: 2, 19)? How can these thaumaturgic actions be explained (11: 20, 21, 23)? Such questions concern the crucial question of Messiah ship of Jesus, and judge not only "this generation" but also the cities around the lake which have not converted as the Kingdom of Heaven gets closer in the person of Jesus.

- To become small. The most efficacious itinerary to carry out this conversion is to become "small". Jesus communicates this strategy of "smallness" in a prayer of thanksgiving (11: 27) which has a wonderful parallel in the witness rendered to the Father on the occasion of the Baptism (11: 27). Experts love to call this prayer a "hymn of rejoicing, exultation". The rhythm of the prayer of Jesus begins with a confession: "I praise you", "I confess to you". Such expressions of introduction render Jesus' words quite solemn. The prayer of praise that Jesus says presents the characteristics of an answer addressed to the reader. Jesus addresses himself to the God with the expression "Lord, of Heaven and earth", that is, to God as Creator and guardian of the world. In Judaism, instead, it was the custom to address God with the invocation "Lord of the world", but did not add the term "Father", a distinctive characteristic of the prayer of Jesus. The reason for the praise and the disclosing of God: because you have hidden..., revealed. The hiding referred to the "wise and intelligent" concerns the Scribes and the Pharisees completely closed up and hostile to the coming of the Kingdom (3: 7 ff; 7: 29; 9: 3, 11, 34). The revelation to the little ones, the Greek term says "infants", those who cannot speak as yet. Thus, Jesus indicates the privileged audience of the proclamation of the Kingdom of Heaven as those who are not experts of the Law and are not instructed.

Which are "these things" that are hidden or revealed? The content of this revelation or hiding is Jesus, the Son of God, the one who reveals the Father. It is evident for the reader that the revelation of God is linked indissolubly to the person of Jesus, to his Word, to his Messianic actions. He is the one who allows the revelation of God and not the Law or the premonitory events of the end of time.

The revelation of God from the Father to the Son. In the last part of the discourse Jesus makes a presentation of self as the one to whom everything has been communicated by the Father. In the context of the coming of the Kingdom, Jesus has the role and the mission to reveal the Heavenly Father in everything. In such a task and role he receives the totality of power, of knowledge and of the authority to judge. In order to confirm this role which is so committed, Jesus appeals to the witness of the Father, the only one who possesses a real knowledge of Jesus: "Nobody knows the Son but the Father", and vice-versa "and nobody knows the Father but the Son". The witness of the Father is irreplaceable so that the unique

dignity of Jesus as Son may be understood by his disciples. Besides, the unicity or uniqueness of Jesus is affirmed in the revelation of the Father; the Gospel of John had already affirmed this: "No one has ever seen God; it is the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart who has made him known" (1: 18). To summarize, the Evangelist makes his readers understand that the revelation of the Father takes place through the Son. Even more: the Son reveals the Father to whom he wants.

Personal Questions

- In your prayer do you feel the need to express all your gratitude to the Father for the gifts that he has given you in life? Does it happen to you to confess publicly, to exult in the Lord because of the wonderful works that he accomplishes in the world; in the Church, and in your life?
- In your search for God do you rely on your wisdom and intelligence or do you allow yourself to be guided by the wisdom of God? How attentive are you to your relationship with Jesus? Do you listen to his word? Do you assume his sentiments in order to discover his physiognomy of Son of the Heavenly Father?

Concluding Prayer

My lips shall proclaim your saving justice, your saving power all day long.
God, you have taught me from boyhood,
and I am still proclaiming your marvels. (Ps 71: 15, 17)

Thursday, July 20, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

God our Father, your light of truth
guides us to the way of Christ.
May all who follow him
reject what is contrary to the gospel.

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

Gospel Reading - Matthew 11: 28-30

Jesus said: 'Come to me, all you who labour and are overburdened, and I will give you rest. Shoulder my yoke and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. Yes, my yoke is easy and my burden light.'

Reflection

The Gospel today is composed only by three verses (Mt 11: 28-30) which form part of a brief literary unity, one of the most beautiful ones, in which Jesus thanks the Father for

having revealed the wisdom of the Kingdom to the little children and because he has hidden it to the doctors and the wise (Mt 11: 25-30). In the brief commentary which follows we will include all the literary unity.

- Matthew 11: 25-26: Only the little children accept and understand the Good News of the Kingdom. Jesus recites a prayer: "I thank you Father, Lord of Heaven and of earth, for hiding these things from the learned and the clever and revealing them to little children". The wise, the doctors of that time, have created a system of laws which they imposed on the people in the name of God (Mt 23: 3-4). They thought that God demanded this observance from the people. But the law of love, which Jesus has revealed to us, said the contrary. What is important to be saved, is not what we do for God, but what God, in his great love, does for us! God wants mercy and not sacrifice (Mt 9: 13). The simple and poor people understood this way of speaking of Jesus and rejoiced. The wise said that Jesus was in error. They could not succeed to understand his teaching. "Yes, Father for that is what it pleased you to do! It pleased the Father that the little children understand the message of the Kingdom and that the wise and the learned do not understand it! If they want to understand it they have to become the pupils of the little children! This way of thinking and of teaching makes people feel uncomfortable and change their community life together.
- Matthew 11: 27: The origin of the new Law: the Son knows the Father. What the Father has to tell us he has given to Jesus, and Jesus reveals it to the little children, so that they may be open to his message. Jesus, the Son, knows the Father. He knows what the Father wanted to communicate to us, when many centuries ago he gave his Law to Moses. Today also, Jesus is teaching many things to the poor and to the little children and, through them, to all his Church.
- Matthew 11: 28-30: The invitation of Jesus which is still valid today. Jesus invites all those who are tired to go to him, and he promises them rest. In our communities today, we should be the continuation of this invitation which Jesus addresses to people who were tired and oppressed by the weight of the observance asked by the laws of purity. He says: "Learn from me for I am meek and humble of heart". Many times, this phrase has been manipulated, to ask people for submission, meekness, and passivity. Jesus wants to say the contrary. He asks people not to listen to "the wise and learned", the professors of religion of that time and to begin to learn from him, from Jesus, a man who came from Galilee, without higher instruction, who says he is "meek and humble of heart". Jesus does not do like the Scribes who exalt themselves because of their science, but he placed himself at the side of the people who are exploited and humiliated. Jesus, the new Master, knows by experience what takes place in the heart of the people who suffer. He has lived this well and has known it during the thirty years of his life in Nazareth.
- How Jesus puts into practice what he taught in the Discourse of the Mission. Jesus has a passion: to announce the Good News of the Kingdom. He had a Passion for the Father and for the people of his country who are poor and abandoned. There where Jesus found people who listened to him, Jesus transmitted the Good News, in any place: In the Synagogues during the celebration of the Word (Mt 4: 23), in the houses of the friends (Mt 13, 36); walking along the way with the disciples (Mt 12: 1-8); along the shore of the sea, sitting in the boat (Mt 13: 3); on the Mountain from where he proclaims the Beatitudes (Mt 5: 1); in the squares and in the cities, where people would bring the sick to him (Mt 14: 34-36). Also in the Temple of Jerusalem, during the pilgrimage (Mt 26: 55)! In Jesus everything is revelation of everything which he bore inside himself! He not only announced the Good News of the Kingdom, He himself was and continues to be a living sign of the Kingdom. In him we see clearly what happens when a human being allows God to reign in his life. Today's Gospel

reveals the tenderness with which Jesus welcomes the little children. He wanted them to find rest and peace. And because of this choice of his for the little children and the excluded, he was criticized and persecuted. He suffered very much! The same thing happens today. When a community tries to open itself to be a place of welcome and consolation for the little children and the excluded of today who are the foreigners and the migrants, many persons do not agree and criticize.

Personal Questions

- Have you experienced some time the rest promised by Jesus?
- How can the words of Jesus help our community to be a place of rest for our life?

Concluding Prayer

In you is the source of life, by your light we see the light.

Maintain your faithful love to those who acknowledge you, and your saving justice to the honest of heart. (Ps 36: 9-10)

Friday, July 21, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

God our Father, your light of truth

guides us to the way of Christ.

May all who follow him

reject what is contrary to the gospel.

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

Gospel Reading - Matthew 12: 1-8

At that time Jesus went through the cornfields one Sabbath day. His disciples were hungry and began to pick ears of corn and eat them.

The Pharisees noticed it and said to him, 'Look, your disciples are doing something that is forbidden on the Sabbath.'

But he said to them, 'Have you not read what David did when he and his followers were hungry-- how he went into the house of God and they ate the loaves of the offering although neither he nor his followers were permitted to eat them, but only the priests? Or again, have you not read in the Law that on the Sabbath day the Temple priests break the Sabbath without committing any fault? Now here, I tell you, is something greater than the Temple. And if you had understood the meaning of the words: Mercy is what pleases me, not sacrifice, you would not have condemned the blameless. For the Son of man is master of the Sabbath.'

Reflection

In today's Gospel we see that there are many conflicts between Jesus and the religious authority of that time. They are conflicts regarding the religious practices of that time: fasting, purity, observance of the Sabbath, etc. In normal terms, they would be conflicts regarding for example, matrimony between divorced persons, friendship with prostitutes, the acceptance of homosexuals, communion without being married by the Church, not to go to Mass on Sunday, not to fast on Good Friday. The conflicts were many: at home, in the school, in work, in the community, in the Church, in personal life, in society. Conflicts regarding growth, relationship, age, mentality. So many of them! To live life without conflicts is impossible! Conflict is part of life and springs up since the time of birth. We are born with birth pangs. Conflicts are not accidents along the way, but form part of the journey, of the process of conversion. What strikes us is the way in which Jesus faces the conflicts. In the discussion with his enemies, he was not trying to show them that he was right, but wished to make the experience which he, Jesus, had of God, Father and Mother, prevail. The image of God which others had was that of a severe Judge who only threatened and condemned. Jesus tries to have mercy on the blind observance of the norms and of the law, prevail, since it had nothing to do with the objective of the Law which is the practice of Love.

- Matthew 12: 1-2: *To pick ears of corn on the Sabbath day and the criticism of the Pharisees.* On a Sabbath day, the disciples went through the corn fields and they opened their way picking ears of corn to eat them. They were hungry. The Pharisees arrived and invoke the Bible to say that the disciples were transgressing the law of the Sabbath (cf. Ex 20: 8-11). Jesus also uses the Bible and responds invoking three examples taken from Scripture: (1) that of David, (2) that of the legislation on work of the priests in the temple and (3) from the action of the Prophet Hosea, that is, he quotes a historical book, a legislative book and a prophetic book.
- Matthew 12: 3-4: *The example of David.* Jesus recalls that David himself did something which was forbidden by the Law, because he took the sacred bread of the temple and gave it to the soldiers to eat, because they were hungry (1 S 21: 2-7). No Pharisee had the courage to criticize King David!
- Matthew 12: 5-6: *The example of the priests.* Accused by the religious authority, Jesus argues beginning from what they themselves, the religious authority, do on the Sabbath day. On the Sabbath day, in the Temple of Jerusalem, the priests worked very much, more than the other days of the week, because they had to sacrifice the animals for the sacrifices, they had to clean, sweep, carry burdens, kill the animals, etc. and nobody said that this was against the Law, they thought it as normal! The Law itself obliged them to do all this (Nb 28: 9-10).
- Matthew 12: 7: *The example of the prophets.* Jesus quotes the phrase of the Prophet Hosea: *I want mercy and not sacrifice.* The word mercy means to have the heart (cor) in the misery (*miseri*) of others, that is, the merciful person has to be very close to the suffering of the persons, has to identify himself/herself with them. The word sacrifice means to have (*ficio*) a thing consecrated (*sacri*), that is, that the one who offers a sacrifice separates the sacrificed object from the profane use and placed it at a distance from the daily life of the people. If the Pharisees had had this way of looking at the life of the Prophet Hosea, they would have known that the most pleasing sacrifice for God is not that the consecrated persons lives far away from reality, but that he/she placed totally his/her consecrated heart in the service of the brothers and sisters in order to relieve them from their misery. They would not have considered guilty those who in reality were innocent.

- Matthew 12: 8: *The Son of Man is the master of the Sabbath.* Jesus ends with this phrase: *The Son of Man is the Master of the Sabbath!* Jesus himself is the criterion of interpretation of the Law of God. Jesus knows the Bible by heart and invokes it to indicate that the arguments of the others had no foundation. At that time, there were no printed Bibles like we have them today. In every community there was only one Bible written by hand, which remained in the Synagogue. If Jesus knew the Bible so well, it means that during the thirty years of his life in Nazareth, he had participated intensely in the life of the community, where Scripture was read every Saturday. The new experience of God the Father, made Jesus discovered much better the intention of God in decreeing the Laws of the Old Testament. Having lived thirty years in Nazareth and feeling as his own the oppression and exclusion of so many brothers and sisters, in the name of the Law, Jesus must have perceived that this could not be the sense of the Law. If God is Father, then he accepts all as sons and daughters. If God is Father, then we should be brothers and sisters among ourselves. Jesus lived this and prayed for this, from the beginning until the end. The Law should be at the service of life and of fraternity. "The human being is not made for the Sabbath, but the Sabbath for the human being" (Mk 2: 27). Because of his great fidelity to this message, Jesus was condemned to death. He disturbed the system, and the system defended itself, using its force against Jesus, because he wished that the Law be placed at the service of life, and not vice-versa. We lack very much in order to know the Bible at depth and to participate deeply in the community, like Jesus did.

Personal Questions

- What type of conflicts do you live in the family, in society, in the Church? Which are the conflicts which concern religious practices which today, cause suffering to persons and which are a cause of discussion and polemics? Which is the image of God which is behind all these preconceptions, behind all these norms and prohibitions?
- What has conflict taught you during all these years? Which is the message which you draw from all this for our communities today?

Concluding Prayer

Lord, I muse on you in the watches of the night, for you have always been my help;
in the shadow of your wings I rejoice; my heart clings to you,
your right hand supports me. (Ps 63: 6-8)

Saturday, July 22, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Lord,
be merciful to your people.
Fill us with your gifts

and make us always eager to serve you in faith, hope and love.

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

Gospel Reading - John 20: 1-2, 11-18

It was very early on the first day of the week and still dark, when Mary of Magdala came to the tomb. She saw that the stone had been moved away from the tomb.

Mary was standing outside near the tomb, weeping. Then, as she wept, she stooped to look inside, and saw two angels in white sitting where the body of Jesus had been, one at the head, the other at the feet. They said, 'Woman, why are you weeping?' 'They have taken my Lord away,' she replied, 'and I don't know where they have put him.'

As she said this she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, though she did not realize that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping? Who are you looking for?' Supposing him to be the gardener, she said, 'Sir, if you have taken him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will go and remove him.'

Jesus said, 'Mary!' She turned round then and said to him in Hebrew, '*Rabbuni!*' -- which means Master. Jesus said to her, 'Do not cling to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to the brothers and tell them: I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.' So Mary of Magdala told the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord,' and that he had said these things to her.

Reflection

The Gospel today presents the apparition of Jesus to Mary Magdalene, whose feast we celebrate today. The death of Jesus, her great friend, makes her lose the sense of life. But she does not cease to look for him. She goes to the tomb to encounter anew the one whom death had stolen. There are moments in life in which everything crumbles down. It seems that everything has come to an end. Death, disasters, pain, disillusionments, betrayals! There are so many things that can make one lose the earth under our feet and produce in us a profound crisis. But something diverse can also take place. Unexpectedly, the encounter with a friend can give us back the sense of life and make us discover that love is stronger than death and defeat. In the way in which the apparition of Jesus to Mary Magdalene is described we distinguish the stages followed, from the painful seeking for the dead friend to the encounter of the risen Lord. These are also the stages that we all follow, along our life, seeking God and in living out the Gospel. It is the process of death and of resurrection which is prolonged day after day.

- John 20: 1: Mary Magdalene goes to the tomb. There was a profound love between Jesus and Mary Magdalene. She was one of the few persons who had the courage to remain with Jesus until the hour of his death on the Cross. After the obligatory rest of the Sabbath, she returned to the tomb, to be in the place where she had met the Beloved for the last time. But, to her great surprise, the tomb was empty!
- John 20: 11-13: Mary Magdalene weeps but seeks. As she wept, she stooped to look inside, and saw two angels in white sitting where the body of Jesus had been, one at the head, the other at the feet. The angels asked: "Why are you weeping?" Response: "They have taken my Lord away, and I do not know where they have put him!" Mary Magdalene looks for the Jesus she had known, the same one with whom she had lived for three years.
- John 20: 14-15: Mary Magdalene speaks with Jesus without recognizing him; the Disciples of Emmaus saw Jesus, but they did not recognize him (Lk 24: 15-16). The same thing happens to Mary Magdalene. She sees Jesus, but does not recognize him.

She thinks that it is the gardener. Jesus also asks, like the angels had done: "Why are you weeping?" And he adds "Who are you looking for?" Response: "If you have taken him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will go and remove him!" She is still looking for the Jesus of the past, the same one of three days before. The image of the past prevents her from recognizing the living Jesus, who is standing in front of her.

- John 20: 16: Mary Magdalene recognizes Jesus. Jesus pronounces the name "Mary!" (Miriam). This is the sign of recognition: the same voice, the same way of pronouncing the name. She answers "Master!" (*Rabbun*). Jesus turns. The first impression is that death has been only a painful accident on the way, but that now everything has turned back as it was in the beginning. Mary embraces Jesus intensely. He was the same Jesus who had died on the cross, the same one whom she had known and loved. Here takes place what Jesus had said in the Parable of the Good Shepherd: "He calls his by name and they know his voice". "I know my sheep and my sheep know me!" (Jn 10: 2, 4, 14).
- John 20: 17: Mary Magdalene receives the mission to announce the resurrection to the Apostles. In fact, it is the same Jesus, but the way of being with her is not the same. Jesus tells her: "Do not cling to me because I have not yet ascended to the Father!" Jesus is going to be together with the Father. Mary Magdalene should not cling to him, but she has to assume her mission: "But go and find my brothers and tell them: I am ascending to my Father and your Father". He calls the disciples "my brothers". Ascending to the Father Jesus opens the way for us so that we can be close to God. "I want them to be with me where I am" (Jn 17: 24; 14: 3).
- John 20: 18: The dignity and the mission of Magdalene and of the women. Mary Magdalene is called the disciple of Jesus (Lk 8: 1-2); witness of his crucifixion (Mk 15: 40-41; Mt 27: 55-56; Jn 19: 25), of his burial (Mk 15: 47; Lk 23: 55; Mt 27: 61), and of his resurrection (Mk 16: 1-8; Mt 28: 1-10; Jn 20: 1, 11-18). And now she receives the order, she is ordered to go to the Twelve and to announce to them that Jesus is alive. Without this Good News of the Resurrection, the seven lamps of the Sacraments would extinguish (Mt 28: 10); Jn 20: 17-18).

Personal Questions

- Have you ever had an experience that has produced in you an impression of loss and of death? What has given you new life and the hope and joy of living?
- Mary Magdalene looked for Jesus in a certain way and found him again in another way. How does this take place in our life today?

Concluding Prayer

God, you are my God, I pine for you; My heart thirsts for you,

My body longs for you,

As a land parched, dreary and waterless. (Ps 63: 1)

Sunday, July 23, 2023

16th Sunday of Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Spirit of truth, sent by Jesus to guide us to the whole truth, enlighten our minds so that we may understand the Scriptures. You who overshadowed Mary and made her fruitful ground where the Word of God could germinate, purify our hearts from all obstacles to the Word. Help us to learn like her to listen with good and pure hearts to the Word that God speaks to us in life and in Scripture, so that we may observe the Word and produce good fruit through our perseverance.

Reading

Division of the Text:

The text is made up of three parables, a break, and the explanation of the first parable. The three parables of the darnel and the wheat (13: 24-30), the mustard seed (13: 31-32) and the leaven (13: 33), have the same purpose. They wish to correct the expectations of Jesus' contemporaries who thought that the Reign of God would come with vehemence and immediately eliminate whatever was contrary to it. Through these parables, Jesus wishes to explain to his listeners that he did not come to restore the Reign by force, but to inaugurate a new era gradually, in the day-to-day history, in a way often unobserved. And yet his work has an inherent strength, dynamism and a transforming power that gradually changes history from inside according to God's plan...if one has eyes to see!

In 13: 10-17, between the parable of the sower and its explanation, the evangelist inserts a dialogue between Jesus and his disciples where the Master explains to them why it is that he speaks to the crowds only in parables. Here too, between the parables and the explanation, the evangelist inserts a brief comment on the reason why Jesus speaks in parables (13: 34-35). Then follows the explanation of the parable of the darnel and the wheat (13: 36-43). What is striking in this explanation is that, while many of the details of the parable are interpreted, not a single reference is made to the core of the parable, that is, the dialogue between the owner and his servants concerning the darnel that grew together with the wheat. Many scholars deduce that the explanation of the parable is not from Jesus, but from the evangelist who changes the original sense of the parable. While Jesus meant to correct the messianic impatience of his contemporaries, Matthew addresses lukewarm Christians and exhorts them, almost threatens them, with God's judgement. However, the parable and the explanation are part of the canonical text and, therefore, both should be considered because both contain the Word of God addressed to us today.

The Text:

vv24-30: He put another parable before them, 'The kingdom of Heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. While everybody was asleep his enemy came, sowed darnel all among the wheat, and made off. When the new wheat sprouted and ripened, then the darnel appeared as well. The owner's labourers went to him and said, "Sir, was it not good seed that you sowed in your field? If so, where does the darnel come from?" He said to them, "Some enemy has done this." And the laborers said, "Do you want us to go and weed it out?" But he said, "No, because when you weed out the darnel you might pull up the wheat with it. Let them both grow till the harvest; and at harvest time I shall say to the reapers: First collect the darnel and tie it in bundles to be burnt, then gather the wheat into my barn." '

vv31-32: He put another parable before them, 'The kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed which a man took and sowed in his field. It is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the biggest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air can come and shelter in its branches.'

v33: He told them another parable, 'The kingdom of Heaven is like the yeast a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour till it was leavened all through.'

vv34-35: In all this Jesus spoke to the crowds in parables; indeed, he would never speak to them except in parables. This was to fulfil what was spoken by the prophet: I will speak to you in parables, unfold what has been hidden since the foundation of the world.

vv36-43: Then, leaving the crowds, he went to the house; and his disciples came to him and said, 'Explain to us the parable about the darnel in the field.' He said in reply, 'The sower of the good seed is the Son of man. The field is the world; the good seed is the subjects of the kingdom; the darnel, the subjects of the Evil One; the enemy who sowed it, the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; the reapers are the angels. Well then, just as the darnel is gathered up and burnt in the fire, so it will be at the end of time. The Son of man will send his angels and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of falling and all who do evil, and throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth. Then the upright will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Anyone who has ears should listen!

A Moment of Prayerful Silence

so that the Word of God may enter into us and enlighten our life.

Some Questions

to help us in our personal reflection.

- What is your reaction towards the evil that you see in the world and in yourself? Is it the reaction of the servants or that of the owner?
- What are the signs of the presence of the Reign that you can see in the world and in your life?
- What image of God appears from these three parables? Is this your image of God?

A Key to the Reading

for those who wish to go deeper into the text.

The Reign of God:

In the two compendia that Matthew offers us on the ministry of Jesus, he presents him preaching the Gospel or the good news of the Reign and healing (4: 23; 9: 35). The expression "Reign of Heaven" appears 32 times in Matthew. It is the same as the "Reign of God", found only once in Matthew, whereas it is the more usual expression found in the rest of the New Testament. As a matter of respect, the Jews avoid not only the use of the Name of God as revealed to Moses (see Ex 3: 13-15), but also the word "God" which is substituted by various expressions such as "Heaven" or "The heavens". Matthew, the most Jewish of the Gospels, conforms to this practice.

The expression is not found in the Old Testament, where, however, we often find the idea of the royalty of God over Israel and over the universe and the verbal equivalent of the New Testament's "God reigns". In fact, the Reign of God, as presented also in the New Testament, is above all the action of God who rules and the new situation because of his ruling. God has always been ruler, but because of sin, Israel and the whole of humanity avoid his royalty and create a situation opposed to his original plan. The Reign

of God will be established when everything will be once more subjected to his dominion, that is, when humanity will accept his sovereignty and thus realize his plan.

Jesus proclaimed the coming of this new era (see for example Mt 3: 2). Somehow the reality of God's Reign is made present and anticipated in him and in the community he founded. But the Church is not yet the Reign. The Reign grows mysteriously and gradually until it reaches its fulfilment at the end of time.

God's Logic:

The reality of the Reign and its growth, as described by Jesus, place us before the mystery of God whose thoughts are not our thoughts. We confuse royalty and force, and impositions, and triumphalism. We like things done on a grand scale. We see success as an undertaking praised and involving many people. However, these are temptations which seduce even the community, and instead of serving the Reign, the community finds itself opposing it. God, on his part, prefers to advance his plan through small, poor and insignificant things and while we are always in a hurry to complete our plans, God waits with great patience and forbearance.

Psalm 145

Hymn to the Lord Ruler

I will extol thee, my God and King, and bless thy name for ever and ever. Every day I will bless thee,

and praise thy name for ever and ever.

Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, and his greatness is unsearchable.

One generation shall laud thy works to another and shall declare thy mighty acts.

On the glorious splendor of thy majesty, and on thy wondrous works, I will meditate.

Men shall proclaim the might of thy terrible acts, and I will declare thy greatness.

They shall pour forth the fame of thy abundant goodness and shall sing aloud of thy righteousness.

The Lord is gracious and merciful,

slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. The Lord is good to all,

and his compassion is over all that he has made.

All thy works shall give thanks to thee,

O Lord, and all thy saints shall bless thee! They shall speak of the glory of thy kingdom, and tell of thy power,

to make known to the sons of men thy mighty deeds, and the glorious splendour of thy kingdom.

Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom,

and thy dominion endures throughout all generations.

The Lord is faithful in all his words, and gracious in all his deeds. The Lord upholds all who are falling,

and raises up all who are bowed down. The eyes of all look to thee,

and thou gives them their food in due season. Thou opens thy hand,

thou satisfies the desire of every living thing.

The Lord is just in all his ways, and kind in all his doings.

The Lord is near to all who call upon him, to all who call upon him in truth.

He fulfils the desire of all who fear him, he also hears their cry, and saves them. The Lord preserves all who love him; but all the wicked he will destroy.

My mouth will speak the praise of the Lord,

and let all flesh bless his holy name for ever and ever.

Closing Prayer

For thou lovest all things that exist,

and hast loathing for none of the things which thou hast made, for thou wouldst not have made anything if thou hadst hated it. How would anything have endured if thou hadst not willed it?

Or how would anything not called forth by thee have been preserved? Thou sparest all things, for they are thine,

O Lord who lovest the living.

Therefore, thou dost correct little by little those who trespass, and dost remind and warn them of the things wherein they sin, that they may be freed from wickedness and put their trust in thee, O Lord.

Thou art righteous and rulest all things righteously, deeming it alien to thy power to condemn him

who does not deserve to be punished.

For thy strength is the source of righteousness,

and thy sovereignty over all causes thee to spare all.

For thou dost show thy strength

when men doubt the completeness of thy power,

and dost rebuke any insolence among those who know it. Thou who art sovereign in strength dost judge with mildness, and with great forbearance thou dost govern us;

for thou hast power to act whenever thou dost choose. Wisdom 11: 24-12,2: 15-18

Monday, July 24, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Lord,

be merciful to your people.

Fill us with your gifts

and make us always eager to serve you

in faith, hope and love.

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

Gospel Reading - Matthew 12: 38-42

Some of the scribes and Pharisees spoke up. 'Master,' they said, 'we should like to see a sign from you.' He replied, 'It is an evil and unfaithful generation that asks for a sign! The only sign it will be given is the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah remained in the belly of the sea-monster for three days and three nights, so will the Son of man be in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights.

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

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

Reflection

Today's Gospel presents to us a discussion between Jesus and the religious authority of the time. This time, the doctors of the law and the Pharisees are those who ask Jesus for a sign. Jesus had made many signs: he had cured the leper (Mt 8: 1-4), the servant of the centurion (Mt 8: 5-13), Peter's mother-in-law (Mt 8: 14-15), the sick and the possessed of the city (Mt 8: 16), he had calmed down the storm (Mt 8: 23-27), had cast out the devils (Mt 8: 28-34) and had worked many other miracles. The people seeing all these signs recognize in Jesus the Servant of Yahweh (Mt 8: 17; 12: 17-21). But the doctors and the Pharisees were not capable to perceive the significance of so many signs which Jesus had made. They wanted something different.

- Matthew 12: 38: The request for a sign made by the Pharisees and the doctors. The Pharisees arrived and said to Jesus: Master, we should like to see a sign from you". They want Jesus to make a sign for them, a miracle, and thus they will be able to verify and examine if Jesus is or not the one who is sent by God according to what they imagined and expected. They wanted to ascertain it, to be sure. They wanted to submit Jesus to their own criteria, in such a way as to be able to place him into their own Messianic frame. There is no openness in them for a possible conversation. They had understood nothing of all that Jesus had done.
- Matthew 12: 39: The response of Jesus: the sign of Jonah. Jesus does not submit himself to the request of the religious authority, because it is not sincere: "An evil and unfaithful generation that asks for a sign! The only sign that will be given them is the sign of the prophet Jonah". These words constitute a very strong judgment regarding the doctors and the Pharisees. They evoke the oracle of Hosea who denounced the people, accusing it of being an unfaithful and adulterous spouse (Ho 2: 4). The Gospel of Mark says that Jesus before the request of the Pharisees sighed profoundly (Mk 8: 12), probably out of indignation and of sadness before such a great blindness: because it is not worthwhile to place a beautiful picture before someone who does not want to open the eyes. Anyone who closes the eyes cannot see! The only sign which will be given to them is the sign of Jonah.
- Matthew 12: 41: There is something greater than Jonah here. Jesus looks toward the future: "For as Jonah remained in the belly of the sea monster for three days and three nights, so will the son of man be in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights". Therefore, the only sign will be the resurrection of Jesus which will be

prolonged in the resurrection of his followers. This is the sign which will be given to the doctors and the Pharisees in the future.

They will be placed before the fact that Jesus, condemned to death by them and to the death of the cross, God will raise him from the dead and he will continue, in many ways to raise those who believe in him., for example, he will raise them in the witness of the apostles, "persons without instruction" who will have had the courage to face authority announcing the resurrection of Jesus (Ac 4: 13). What converts is witness, not miracles: "On Judgment day the men of Nineveh will appear against this generation and they will be its condemnation, because when Jonah preached they repented". The people of Nineveh converted because of the witness of the preaching of Jonah and they denounced the unbelief of the doctors and the Pharisees: because "Look, there is something greater than Jonah here".

- Matthew 12: 42: There is something greater than Solomon here. The reference to the conversion of the people of Nineveh is associated and makes one recall the episode of the Queen of the South. "On Judgment Day the Queen of the South will appear against this generation and be its condemnation, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon and look, there is something greater than Solomon here!" This reminder of the episode of the Queen of the South who recognizes the wisdom of Solomon, indicates how the Bible was used at that time. By association: the principal rule of interpretation was the following: "The Bible is explained through the Bible". Up until now this is one of the more important norms for the interpretation of the Bible, especially for the prayerful reading of the Word of God.

Personal Questions

- To be converted means to be completely changed morally, but also to change the ideas and the way of thinking. A moralist is one who changes behavior but keeps unaltered his way of thinking. And I how am I?
- Before the renewal of the Church today, am I a Pharisee who asks for a sign or am I like the people who recognize that this is the way wanted by God?

Concluding Prayer

Better your faithful love than life itself; my lips will praise you.

Thus, I will bless you all my life,

in your name lift up my hands. (Ps 63: 3-4)

Tuesday, July 25, 2023

St. James the Apostle

Opening Prayer

Lord,

be merciful to your people.

Fill us with your gifts

and make us always eager to serve you in faith, hope and love.

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

Gospel Reading - Matthew 20: 20-28

Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came with her sons to make a request of him, and bowed low; and he said to her, 'What is it you want?' She said to him, 'Promise that these two sons of mine may sit one at your right hand and the other at your left in your kingdom.'

Jesus answered, 'You do not know what you are asking. Can you drink the cup that I am going to drink?' They replied, 'We can.' He said to them, 'Very well; you shall drink my cup, but as for seats at my right hand and my left, these are not mine to grant; they belong to those to whom they have been allotted by my Father.'

When the other ten heard this they were indignant with the two brothers. But Jesus called them to him and said, 'You know that among the gentiles the rulers lord it over them, and great men make their authority felt. Among you this is not to happen. No; anyone who wants to become great among you must be your servant, and anyone who wants to be first among you must be your slave, just as the Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.'

Reflection

Jesus and the Disciples are on the way toward Jerusalem (Mt 20: 17). Jesus knows that he will be killed (Mt 20: 8). The Prophet Isaiah had already announced it (Is 50: 4-6; 53: 1-10). His death will not be the fruit of a blind destiny or of a pre-established plan, but it will be the consequence of the commitment freely taken of being faithful to the mission which he received from the Father together with the poor of the earth. Jesus had already said that the disciple has to follow the Master and carry his cross behind him (Mt 16: 21, 24). But the disciples did not understand well what was happening (Mt 16: 22-23; 17: 23). Suffering and the cross did not correspond to the idea that they had of the Messiah.

- Matthew 20: 20-21: The petition of the mother of the sons of Zebedee. The Disciples only not understand but they continue to think about their personal ambitions. The mother of the sons of Zebedee, the spokesperson of her sons John and James, gets close to Jesus to ask for a favor: "Promise that these two sons of mine may sit one at your right hand and the other at your left in your Kingdom."
They had not understood the proposal of Jesus. They were concerned only about their own interests. This clearly shows the tensions in the communities, both at the time of Jesus and of Matthew, as also we see it in our own communities.
- Matthew 20: 22-23: The response of Jesus. Jesus reacts firmly. He responds to the sons and not to the mother: "You do not know what you are asking. Can you drink the cup that I am going to drink? It is a question of the chalice of suffering. Jesus wants to know if they, instead of the place of honour, accept to give their own life up to death. Both answer: "We can!" This was a sincere response and Jesus confirms it: "You shall drink my cup". At the same time, it seems to be a hasty response, because a few days later, they abandon Jesus and leave him alone at the hour of suffering (Mt 26: 51). They do not have a strong critical conscience, and they are not even aware of their own personal reality. And Jesus completes the phrase saying: "But it is not mine to grant that you sit at my right hand and my left, these seats belong to those to

whom they have been allotted by my Father". What Jesus can offer is the chalice of the suffering of the cross.

- Matthew 20: 24-27: "Among you this is not to happen". "When the other ten heard this, they were indignant with the two brothers". The request made by the mother in the name of the sons, causes a heated discussion in the group. Jesus calls the disciples and speaks to them about the exercise of power: "The rulers of nations, you know, dominate over them and the great exercise their power over them. Among you this is not to happen: anyone who wants to become great among you must be your servant and anyone who wants to be first among you must be your slave". At that time, those who held power had no interest for the people. They acted according to their own interests (cf. Mc 14: 3-12). The Roman Empire controlled the world submitting it with the force of arms and, in this way, through taxes, customs, etc., succeeded to concentrate the riches through repression and the abuse of power. Jesus had another response. He teaches against privileges and against rivalry. He overthrows the system and insists on the attitude of service which is the remedy against personal ambition. The community has to prepare an alternative. When the Roman Empire disintegrates, victim of its own internal contradictions, the communities should be prepared to offer to the people an alternative model of social living together.
- Matthew 20: 28: The summary of the life of Jesus. Jesus defines his life and his mission: "The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many". In this definition of self-given by Jesus are implied three titles which define him and which were for the first Christians the beginning of Christology: Son of Man, Servant of Yahweh and older brother (close relative or Joel). Jesus is the Messiah, Servant, announced by the Prophet Isaiah (cf. Is 42: 1-9; 49: 1-6; 50: 4-9; 52: 13-53: 12). He learnt from his mother who said: "Behold the servant of the Lord!" (Lk 1: 38). This was a totally new proposal for the society of that time.

Personal Questions

- James and John ask for favours. Jesus promises suffering. And I, what do I seek in my relationship with God and what do I ask for in prayer? How do I accept the suffering that comes to my life and which is the contrary of what we ask in prayer?
- Jesus says: "May it not be like that among you!" Do our way of living in the Church and in the community agree with this advise of Jesus?

Concluding Prayer

Then the nations kept saying,

'What great deeds Yahweh has done for them!' Yes, Yahweh did great deeds for us, and we were overjoyed. (Ps 126: 2-3)

Wednesday, July 26, 2023

Opening Prayer

Lord,

be merciful to your people.

Fill us with your gifts

and make us always eager to serve you in faith, hope and love.

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

Gospel Reading – Matthew 13: 1-9

That same day, Jesus left the house and sat by the lakeside, but such large crowds gathered round him that he got into the boat and sat there. The people all stood on the shore and he told them many things in parables.

He said, 'Listen, a sower went out to sow.

As he sowed, some seeds fell on the edge of the path, and the birds came and ate them up. Others fell on patches of rock where they found little soil and sprang up at once, because there was no depth of earth; but as soon as the sun came up they were scorched and, not having any roots, they withered away. Others fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Others fell on rich soil and produced their crop, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Anyone who has ears should listen!'

Reflection

In chapter 13 of the Gospel of Matthew the third great discourse begins, *the Discourse of the Parables*. As we already said before, in the commentary on the Gospel of July 9th, Matthew organized his Gospel like a new edition of the Law of God or like a new "Pentateuch" with its five books. For this reason, his Gospel is composed of five great discourses or teachings of Jesus, followed by narrative parts, in which he describes how Jesus put into practice what he had taught in the discourses. The following is the outline:

- *Introduction:* birth and preparation of the Messiah (Mt 1 to 4)
- Sermon on the Mountain: the entrance door to the Kingdom (Mt 5 to 7)
- Narrative Mt 8 and 9
- Discourse of the Mission: how to announce and diffuse the Kingdom (Mt 10)
- Narrative Mt 11 and 12
- Discourse of the Parables: the mystery of the Kingdom present in life (Mt 13)
- Narrative Mt 14 to 17
- Discourse of the Community: the new way of living together in the Kingdom (Mt 18)
- Narrative 19 to 23
- Discourse of the future coming of the Kingdom: the utopia which sustains hope (Mt 24 and 25)
- *Conclusion:* Passion, Death and Resurrection (Mt 26 to 28).

In today's Gospel we will meditate on the parable of the seed. Jesus had a way of speaking so popular by means of comparisons and parables. Generally, when he finished telling a parable, he did not explain it, but used to say: "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" (Mt 11: 15; 13: 9, 43). Sometimes he would explain the meaning to the Disciples (Mt 13: 36). The parables speak of the things of life; seed, lamp, mustard seed, salt, etc. These are things that exist in daily life, for the people of that time as well as today for us. Thus, the experience that we have today of these things becomes for us a means to discover the presence of the mystery of God in our life. To speak in parables means to reveal the mystery of the Kingdom present in life.

- Matthew 13: 1-3: *Sitting in the boat, Jesus taught the people.* As it happened in the Sermon on the Mountain (Mt 5: 1-2), here also Matthew makes a brief introduction to the *discourse of the Parables*, describing Jesus who teaches in the boat, on the shore, and many people around him who listen. Jesus was not a person who was instructed (Jn 7: 15). He had not been to a higher school in Jerusalem. He came from inside the country, from Nazareth. He was unknown, a farmer and craftsman or artisan at the same time. Without asking permission from the religious authority, he began to teach the people. People liked to listen to him. Jesus taught especially by means of parables. We have already heard some of them: fishermen of men (Mt 4: 19), the salt (Mt 5: 13), the lamp (Mt 5: 15), the birds of the sky and the lilies of the field (Mt 6: 26, 28), the house constructed on the rock (Mt 7: 24). And now, in chapter 13, the parables begin to have a particular meaning: they serve to reveal the mystery of the Kingdom of God present in the midst of people and the activity of Jesus.
- Matthew 13: 4-8: *The parable of the seed taken from the life of the farmer.* At that time, it was not easy to live from farming. The land was full of stones. There was little rain, too much sun. Besides, many times, people in order to shorten the way, passed through the fields and destroyed the plants (Mt 12: 1). But in spite of all that, every year, the farmer would sow and plant, with trust in the force of the seed, in the generosity of nature. The parable of the sower describes that which we all know and do: the seed thrown by the agriculturer falls on the ground along the road, another part falls among the stones and thistles; still another part falls on good earth, where, according to the quality of the land, will produce thirty, sixty and even up to one hundred. A parable is a comparison. It uses things known by the people and which are visible, to explain that the Kingdom of God is an invisible and unknown thing. The people of Galilee understood about seeds, ground, rain, sun and harvest. And so now Jesus uses exactly these things that were known to people to explain the mystery of the Kingdom.
- Matthew 13: 9: *He, who has ears to hear, let him listen.* The expression “*He, who has ears, let him listen*” means: “*It is this! You have heard. Now try to understand!*” The way to be able to understand the parable is to search: “*To try to understand!*” The parable does not give everything immediately but pushes one to think and to make one discover starting from the experience which the listeners have of the seed. It opens to creativity and to participation. It is not a doctrine which comes ready to be taught. The parable does not give water in bottles, but the source. The agriculturer who listens to the parable says: “Seed in the round, I know what that means! But Jesus says that it has something to do with the Kingdom of God. What would that be?” And it is easy to imagine the long conversations of the people! The parable leads to listen to nature and to think of life. Once a person asked in a community: “Jesus says that we have to be salt. For what is salt good?” There was discussion and then at the end, ten different purposes that salt can have, were discovered. Then all this was applied to the life of the community, and it was discovered that to be salt is difficult and demanding. The parable worked well!

Personal Questions

- When you were a child how was catechism taught to you? How do you compare some parts of life? Do you remember some important comparison that the catechist told you? How is the catechesis today in your community?
- Sometimes we are the roadside, sometimes the rock; other times the thorns or thistles, and other times good earth. What am I? What are we in our community?

Which are the fruits which the Word of God is producing in my life, in my family, and in our community: thirty, sixty, one hundred?

Concluding Prayer

Yahweh in his holy temple! Yahweh, his throne is in heaven; his eyes watch over the world,

his gaze scrutinizes the children of Adam. (Ps 11: 4)

Thursday, July 27, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Lord,

be merciful to your people.

Fill us with your gifts

and make us always eager to serve you in faith, hope and love.

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

Gospel Reading - Matthew 13: 10-17

Then the disciples went up to Jesus and asked, 'Why do you talk to them in parables?' In answer, he said, 'Because to you is granted to understand the mysteries of the kingdom of Heaven, but to them it is not granted. Anyone who has will be given more and will have more than enough; but anyone who has not will be deprived even of what he has. The reason I talk to them in parables is that they look without seeing and listen without hearing or understanding. So in their case what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah is being fulfilled: Listen and listen, but never understand! Look and look, but never perceive! This people's heart has grown coarse, their ears dulled, they have shut their eyes tight to avoid using their eyes to see, their ears to hear, their heart to understand, changing their ways and being healed by me.

'But blessed are your eyes because they see, your ears because they hear! In truth I tell you, many prophets and upright people longed to see what you see, and never saw it; to hear what you hear, and never heard it.

Reflection

Chapter 13 speaks to us about the discourse of the Parables. Following the text of Mark (Mk 4: 1-34), Matthew omits the parable of the seed which germinates alone (Mk 4: 26-29), and he stops on the discussion of the reason for the Parable (Mt 13: 10-17) adding the parable of the wheat and the darnel (Mt 13: 24-30), of the yeast (Mt 13: 33), of the treasure (Mt 13: 44), of the pearl (Mt 13: 45-46) and of the dragnet (Mt 13: 47-50).

Together with the parable of the sower (Mt 13: 4-11) and of the mustard seed (Mt 13: 31-32), there are seven parables in the *Discourse of the Parables* (Mt 13: 1-50).

- Matthew 13: 10: *The question.* In the Gospel of Mark, the Disciples ask for an explanation of the parables (Mk 4: 10). Here in Matthew, the prospective is diverse. They want to know why Jesus, when he speaks to the people, speaks only in parables: "*Why do you talk to them in parables?*" Which is the reason for this difference?
- Matthew 13: 11-13: "*Because to you is granted to understand the mysteries of the kingdom of Heaven, but to them it is not granted. Anyone who has will be given more and will have more than enough; but anyone who has not will be deprived even of what he has. The reason I speak to them in parables is that they look without seeing and listen without hearing or understanding.*" Jesus answers: "*Because to you is granted to understand the mysteries of the kingdom of Heaven. Anyone who has will be given more and will have more than enough; but anyone who has not will be deprived even of what he has.*" Why is it granted to the Apostles to know and not to others? Here is a comparison to help us to understand. Two persons listen to the mother who teaches: *is someone who does not cut and sew*". One of them is the daughter and the other is not. The daughter understands and the other one understands nothing. Why? Because in the house of the mother the expression "*cut and sew*" means to slander. Thus, the teaching of the mother helps the daughter to understand better how to put into practice love, helping her so that what she already knows may grow, develop. *Anyone who has will be given more.* The other person understands nothing and loses even the little that she knew regarding love and slander. She remains confused and does not succeed in understanding what love has to do with cutting and sewing! *Anyone who has not will be deprived even of what he has.* A parable reveals and hides at the same time! It reveals for "those who are inside", who accept Jesus as the Messiah Servant. It hides from those who insist in saying that the Messiah will be and should be a Glorious King. These understand the image presented by the parable, but they do not succeed to understand the significance. The Disciples, instead grow in what they already know concerning the Messiah. The others do not understand anything and lose even the little that they thought they knew on the Kingdom and on the Messiah.
- Matthew 13: 14-15: "*The fulfilment of the prophecy of Isaiah.* Just like some other time (Mt 12: 18-21), in this different reaction of the people and of the Pharisees before the teaching of the parables, Matthew again sees here the fulfilment of the prophecy of Isaiah. He even quotes at length the text of Isaiah which says: "*Listen and listen, but never understand! Look and look, but never perceive! This people's heart has grown coarse, their ears dulled, they have shut their eyes tight to avoid using their eyes to see, their ears to hear, their heart to understand, changing their ways and being healed by me*".
- Matthew 13: 16-17: "*But blessed are your eyes because they see, your ears because they hear.*" All this explains the last phrase: "*But blessed are your eyes because they see your ears because they hear. In truth I tell you, many prophets and upright people longed to see what you see and never saw it, to hear what you hear and never heard it!*"
- *The Parables: a new way of speaking to the people about God.* People remained impressed about the way in which Jesus taught. "A new way of teaching! Given with authority! Different from that of the Scribes! (Mk 7: 28). Jesus had a great capacity for finding very simple images to compare the things of God with the things of life which people knew and experienced in the daily struggle to survive. This presupposes two things: to be inside the things of the life of the people, and to be inside the things of God, of the Kingdom of God. In some parables there are things that happen and that seldom arrive in life. For example, when has it ever happened that a shepherd, who has one hundred sheep, abandons the flock with 99 to go and look for the lost sheep?

(Lk 15: 4). Where have we ever seen a father who accepts with joy and a feast his son who had squandered all his goods, without saying a word of reproach to him? (Lk 15: 20-24). When has it been seen that a Samaritan man is better than a Levite, than a priest? (Lk 10: 29-37). The parable makes one think. It leads the person to enter into the story beginning from the experience of life. And through our experience it urges us to discover that God is present in our daily life. The parable is a participative form of teaching and of educating. It does not change everything in one minute. It does not make one know, it makes one discover. The parable changes our look, it renders the person who listens to be a contemplative, it helps her to observe reality. This is the novelty of the teaching of the parables of Jesus, different from that of the doctors who taught that God manifests himself only in the observance of the law. "The Kingdom is present in your midst" (Lk 17: 21). But those who listened did not always understand.

Personal Questions

- Jesus says: "To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the Kingdom". When I read the Gospels am I like those who understand nothing or like those to whom it has been granted to know the Kingdom?
- Which is the parable of Jesus with which I identify myself more? Why?

Concluding Prayer

Yahweh, your faithful love is in the heavens, your constancy reaches to the clouds,
your saving justice is like towering mountains, your judgements like the mighty deep.
(Ps 36: 5-6)

Friday, July 28, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Lord,
be merciful to your people.
Fill us with your gifts
and make us always eager to serve you in faith, hope, and love.
You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading - Matthew 13: 18-23

Jesus said to his disciples: 'So pay attention to the parable of the sower. When anyone hears the word of the kingdom without understanding, the Evil One comes and carries off what was sown in his heart: this is the seed sown on the edge of the path.

The seed sown on patches of rock is someone who hears the word and welcomes it at once with joy. But such a person has no root deep down and does not last; should some trial come, or some persecution on account of the word, at once he falls away.

The seed sown in thorns is someone who hears the word, but the worry of the world and the lure of riches choke the word and so it produces nothing.

And the seed sown in rich soil is someone who hears the word and understands it; this is the one who yields a harvest and produces now a hundredfold, now sixty, now thirty.'

Reflection

- Context. Beginning with chapter 12 on the one side we see there is opposition between the religious heads of Israel, the Scribes and the Pharisees, on the other side, within the crowds who listen to Jesus and are admired because of his marvelous actions, gradually, little by little a group of disciples is being formed, still of uncertain features, but who follow Jesus with perseverance. To twelve of these disciples Jesus has given the gift of his authority and of his power; he has sent them as messengers of the Kingdom, giving them demanding and radical instructions (10: 5-39). Now at the moment when controversy breaks out with his opponents, Jesus recognizes his true kinship, not in the lines of the flesh (mother, brothers), but in those who follow him, listen to him and fulfil the will of the Father (12: 46-50). This last account offers us the possibility to imagine that the audience to whom Jesus addressed his words is two-fold: on the one side the disciples to whom he has given to know the mysteries of the Kingdom (13: 11) and who have the possibility to understand them (13: 50) and on the other side the crowds who seem to be deprived of this deep understanding (13: 11, 34- 36). Before the large crowds which gather together to listen to Jesus is presented, above all, the parable of the sower. Jesus speaks about a seed that falls or not on the earth. Its growth depends on the place where it falls; it is possible that it be hindered so that it cannot bear fruit. This is what happens in the first three types of earth "along the roadside" (the ground hardened by the passing of men and animals), "the rocky earth" (formed by rocks), «on the thorns" (it is the earth covered with thorns). Instead, the seed that falls on "good ground" bears excellent fruit even if at different levels. The reader is directed to be more attentive to the yield of the grain than to the gesture of the sower. Besides, Matthew focuses the attention of the listener on the good earth and the fruit that this earth is capable of producing in an exceptional manner.
- The first part of the parable ends with an admonition: "Anyone who has ears should listen" (v. 9); it is an appeal to the liberty of the listener. The word of Jesus may remain a "parable" for a crowd incapable to understand; it can reveal "the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven" for those who allow themselves to be upset or affected by its force. It is the acceptance of the Word of Jesus that distinguishes the disciples from the indeterminate crowds; the faith of the first ones reveals the blindness of the others and obliges them to look "beyond" the parable.
- To listen and to understand. It is always Jesus who leads the disciples on the right path for the understanding of the parable. In the future through the disciples, it is the Church to be guided in the understanding of the Word of Jesus. In the explanation of the parable the pair of two verbs "to listen" and "to understand" appears in 13: 33: That which has been sown in the good ground is the one who listens to the Word and understands it..." It is in the understanding that the disciple is distinguished, the one who daily listens to the Word of Jesus, from the crowds which, instead, listen to it occasionally.

- Hindrances to understanding. Jesus recalls, above all, the negative response to his preaching on the Kingdom of Heaven given by his contemporaries. Such a negative response is bound to the diverse impediments among them. The earth on the edge of the road; is that transformed by passers by into a trodden road; it is totally negative: "Throw the seeds on the pavement of the street, everybody knows that it serves nothing: the necessary conditions for growth do not exist. And, then people go by, step over it, and ruin the seed. The seed should not be thrown just any place" (Carlos Mesters). Above all, there is the personal responsibility of the individual: to accept God's Word in one's own heart; on the contrary, if it falls on a "trodden" heart, which is obstinate because of its own convictions and indifferent, he sides with the evil one who completes that persisting attitude of closeness to the Word of God. Then the rocky earth: If the first impediment was constituted by an insensitive, indifferent heart, now the image of the seed that falls on the rocks, on stones, and among bushes indicates a heart immersed in a superficial and worldly life. Such life styles are energies that prevent the Word of God to bear fruit. They begin to listen, but immediately it is blocked, not only by tribulations and trials that are unavoidable, but also because of the involvement of the heart in concerns and riches. It is a life that is not profound but superficial, worldly, it is similar to instability. The good earth: is the heart that listens and understands the Word; this one bears fruit. Such fruit is the work of the Word in the heart that accepts it. It is a question of an active understanding, that allows itself to get involved by God's action present in the Word of Jesus. The understanding of his Word will continue to be inaccessible if we neglect the encounter with Him and, therefore, we do not allow it to overflow in us.

Personal Questions

- Does listening lead to the deep understanding of God's Word or does it remain only an intellectual exercise?
- Are you a heart that accepts, that is available, docile to attain to a full understanding of the Word?

Concluding Prayer

The Law of Yahweh is perfect, refreshment to the soul; The precepts of Yahweh are honest, light for the eyes. (Ps 19: 7-8)

Saturday, July 29, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

God our Father and protector, without you nothing is holy, nothing has value.

Guide us to everlasting life by helping us to use wisely the blessings you have given to the world.

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

Gospel Reading - Luke 10: 38-42

In the course of their journey Jesus came to a village, and a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. She had a sister called Mary, who sat down at the Lord's feet and listened to him speaking. Now Martha, who was distracted with all the serving, came to him and said, 'Lord, do you not care that my sister is leaving me to do the serving all by myself? Please tell her to help me.'

But the Lord answered, 'Martha, Martha,' he said, 'you worry and fret about so many things, and yet few are needed, indeed only one. It is Mary who has chosen the better part, and it is not to be taken from her.'

Reflection

- The dynamics of the account. The condition of Jesus as an itinerant Teacher offers Martha the possibility to receive him in her house. This account presents the attitude of both sisters: Mary sitting down at Jesus' feet is all taken up listening to his Word; Martha, instead, is taken up completely by many services and she gets close to Jesus to protest about her sister's behavior. The dialogue between Jesus and Martha occupies a long space in the account (vv.40b-42): Martha begins with a rhetorical question, "Lord, do you not care that my sister is leaving me to do the serving all by myself?"; then she asks for the intervention of Jesus so that he can call the sister back to the domestic work which she has abandoned: «Tell her to help me». Jesus answers in an affectionate tone; this is the sense of the repetition of the name, "Martha, Martha": he reminds her that she is concerned about "many things", and in reality she needs "only one" and he concludes recalling that the sister has chosen the best part, and will not be taken away from her. Luke has built up this account on a contrast: the two different personalities of Martha and Mary; the first one is all taken up by "many things", the second one does not do even one, she is all taken up with listening to the Master. The purpose of this contrast is to underline the attitude of Mary who dedicates herself to listen fully and totally to the Master, thus becoming the model of every believer.
- The person of Martha. She is the one who takes the initiative to receive Jesus in her house. In dedicating herself to receive the Master she is full of anxiety for the multiplicity of things to be prepared and by the tension of seeing herself alone to do it all. She is taken up by so much work, she is anxious, and experiences a great tension. Therefore, Martha "goes to Jesus" and addresses him a legitimate question for help: why should she be left alone by the sister. Jesus answers seeing that she is only worried, she is divided in the heart between the desire of serving Jesus with a meal worthy of his person and the desire to dedicate herself to listen to him. Jesus, therefore, does not disapprove the service of Martha, but only the anxiety with which she does it. But before, Jesus had explained in the parable of the sower that the seed that fell among the thorns recalls the situation of those who listen to the Word, but allow themselves to be taken up by other concerns (Lk 8: 14). Therefore, Jesus does not disapprove the work of Martha, the value of acceptance and welcoming concerning his person but he warns the woman about the risks in which she may fall: the anxiety and agitation. Jesus had already said something about these risks: "Seek first the Kingdom of Heaven, and everything else will be given to you as well" (Lk 12: 31).
- The person of Mary. She is the one who accepts the Word: she is described with the imperfect form: "she listened", a continuing action in listening to the Word of Jesus.

Mary's attitude is in contrast with that full of anxiety and tension of her sister. Jesus says that Mary has preferred "the best part" that corresponds to the listening of his Word. From the Word of Jesus, the reader learns that there are not two parts of which one is qualitatively better than the other, but there is only the good one: to accept His Word. This attitude does not mean the evasion from one's own tasks or daily responsibilities, but only the knowledge that listening to the Word precedes every service, every activity.

- Balance between action and contemplation. Luke is particularly attentive to link listening to the Word, to relationship with the Lord. It is not a question of dividing the day in times dedicated to prayer and others to service, but attention to the Word precedes and accompanies the service. The desire to listen to God cannot be substituted by other activity: it is necessary to dedicate a certain time and place to seek the Lord. The commitment to cultivate listening to the Word comes from the attention to God: everything can contribute: the environment of the place, the time. However, the desire to encounter God should come from within one's own heart. There is no technical element which automatically leads one to encounter God. It is a problem of love: it is necessary to listen to Jesus, to be with Him, and then the gift is communicated, and falling in love begins. The balance between listening and service involves all believers; in family life as well as in professional and social life: What can we do so that baptized persons persevere and attain the maturity of faith? We should educate ourselves to listen to the Word of God. This is the most difficult but surest way to attain maturity of faith.

Personal Questions

- Do I know how to create in my life situations and itineraries of listening? Do I limit myself only to listen to the Word of God in Church, or rather, do I dedicate myself to personal and profound listening looking for suitable times and places?
- Do you limit yourself to a private use of the Word or do you proclaim it in order to become light for others and not only a lamp which lights one's own private life?

Concluding Prayer

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

Whoever lives blamelessly, who acts uprightly, who speaks the truth from the heart. (Ps 15: 1-2)

Sunday, July 30, 2023

17th Sunday of Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

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

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

Reading

A Division of the Text as an Aid to the Reading:

- Matthew 13: 44: The parable of the hidden treasure
- Matthew 13: 45-46: The parable of the merchant looking for precious pearls
- Matthew 13: 47-50: The parable of the dragnet cast into the sea
- Matthew 13: 51-52: A parable to conclude the discourse of the parables

A Key to the Reading:

On this 17th Sunday of ordinary time we meditate on the three parables that make up the final section of the Discourse of the Parables: the hidden treasure, the merchant of precious pearls and the dragnet cast into the sea. Jesus' parables help us adjust our sight to better see the presence of the Kingdom of God in the most ordinary things of life. As we read, it would be good to keep in mind the following: "What is for me a hidden treasure, a merchant of precious pearls or a dragnet cast into the sea? How does my experience help me understand the parables of the treasure, of the pearl and of the dragnet?"

The Text:

44 'The kingdom of Heaven is like treasure hidden in a field which someone has found; he hides it again, goes off in his joy, sells everything he owns and buys the field. 45 'Again, the kingdom of Heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls; 46 when he finds one of great value he goes and sells everything he owns and buys it.

47 'Again, the kingdom of Heaven is like a dragnet that is cast in the sea and brings in a haul of all kinds of fish. 48 When it is full, the fishermen bring it ashore; then, sitting down, they collect the good ones in baskets and throw away those that are no use. 49 This is how it will be at the end of time: the angels will appear and separate the wicked from the upright, 50 to throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth.

51 'Have you understood all these?' They said, 'Yes.'

52 And he said to them, 'Well then, every scribe who becomes a disciple of the kingdom of Heaven is like a householder who brings out from his storeroom new things as well as old.'

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 part of the text struck me most? Why?
- In my experience of life, what do I understand by a hidden treasure, a merchant of precious pearls, or a dragnet cast into the sea?
- How does this experience of mine help me understand the parables of the treasure, the pearl and the dragnet?
- What difference is there between the parable of the treasure and that of the pearl?
- What does the text say about the mission to be carried out as disciples of Christ?

To Go Deeper Into the Theme

The Context of the Parables told by Jesus:

The Gospels contain many parables of Jesus. Matthew even says: “All these things Jesus said to the crowd in parables and did not speak to them unless in parables” (Mt 13: 34). This was a common method of teaching used in those days. It was in this way that Jesus made himself understood by the people. In the parables, he starts from very ordinary things of life and he uses them as terms of comparison to help people better understand the less known things of the Kingdom of God. In this Sunday’s Gospel, Jesus starts with three well-known things in the lives of people: the treasure hidden in the field, the merchant who seeks pearls and the dragnet that fishermen cast into the sea.

A Commentary on the Text:

- Matthew 13: 44: The parable of the hidden treasure
Here the term of comparison used to shed light on the things of the Kingdom of God is the treasure hidden in the field. No one knows that there is a treasure in that field. By chance, a man finds it. He did not know he was going to find it. He finds it and rejoices and gratefully welcomes the unexpected. The discovered treasure does not belong to him yet, it will be his if he succeeds in buying the field. Such were the laws in those days. So he goes, sells all he owns and buys that field. By buying the field he also acquires the treasure.
Jesus does not explain the parable. The same applies here as was said on previous occasions: “He who has ears to hear let him hear” (Mt 13: 9, 43). Or: “The Kingdom of God is this. You have heard. Now try to understand!” If Jesus does not explain the parable, nor will I. This is the task of each one of us. But I would like to offer a suggestion beginning from what I have understood. The field is our life. In our lives there is no hidden treasure, no precious treasure, more precious than all else. Will anyone who comes across such a treasure give away everything that he or she owns in order to buy this treasure? Have you found it?
- Matthew 13: 45-46: The parable of the merchant of precious pearls
In the first parable, the term of comparison is “the treasure hidden in the field”. In this parable, the accent is different. The term of comparison is not the precious pearl, but the activity, the effort of the merchant who seeks precious pearls. We all know that such pearls exist. What is important is not to know that they exist, but to seek them ceaselessly until we come across them.
Both parables have some common and some different elements. In both cases, it is about something precious: a treasure and a pearl. In both cases there is a finding of the object desired, and in both cases the person goes and sells all he owns so as to be able to buy the precious thing found. In the first parable, the finding is by chance. In

the second, the finding is the result of the effort of seeking. Here we see two basic aspects of the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom exists, it is hidden in life, waiting for those who will find it. The Kingdom is the result of a seeking (obtaining). These are the two basic dimensions of human life: gratitude of love that welcomes us and comes to meet us, and the faithful observance that brings us to meet the Other.

- Matthew 13: 47-50: The parable of the dragnet cast into the sea
Here the Kingdom is likened to a dragnet, not any kind of net, but a net cast into the sea and that gathers fish of all kinds. It is something typical of the life of those who were listening, most of whom were fishermen who lived by fishing. This is an experience they are familiar with, the casting of the net that gathers all, some good and some less good. The fisherman cannot prevent the less good fish to enter the net, because he cannot control what happens in the deep waters of the sea where he drags his net. He will only know when he pulls up the net and sits with his mates to sort the fish out. Then they will separate what is worthwhile from what is worthless. Again, Jesus does not explain the parable. He just gives a hint: "This is how it will be at the end of time". Then the good will be separated from the evil.
- Matthew 13: 51-52: Conclusion of the discourse of parables
In Matthew's Gospel, the discourse of parables ends with a brief dialogue between Jesus and his listeners and that acts as a key to the reading of all the parables. Jesus asks, "Have you understood all these?" The people reply, "Yes!" Then Jesus concludes with these very beautiful words, "Well then, every scribe who becomes a disciple of the kingdom of Heaven is like a householder who brings out from his storeroom new things as well as old". These closing words are another parable. "The things new as well as old that the householder brings out from his storeroom" are the things of the life that Jesus has just suggested in the parables: seeds cast in the field (Mt 13: 4-8), the mustard seed (Mt 13: 31-32), the leaven (Mt 13: 33), the treasure hidden in the field (Mt 13: 44), the merchant of precious pearls (Mt 13: 45-46), the dragnet cast into the sea (Mt 13: 47-48). Each person's experience of these things is his or her treasure. It is in such experiences that each person finds the term of comparison that will permit him or her to better understand the things of the Kingdom of God! Sometimes when the parables do not mean much to us and do not yield their message, the cause may not be a lack of study, but a lack of experience in life or a lack of depth in one's life. Those who live superficially without any depth of the experience of life, have no storeroom from which to bring out things new as well as old.

A Deepening: The Teaching of the Parables

The parables of Jesus are a pedagogical device that uses daily life to show us how the things of daily life speak to us of God. The parables make reality transparent and reveal the presence and action of God. They transform one's sight into a contemplative gaze. A parable is about the things of life and thus is an open teaching that involves us. We all have experience of the things of life. The teaching in parables begins with a person's experience of common things so as to be able to understand the Kingdom: seed, salt, light, sheep, flowers, woman, children, father, net, fish, treasure, pearl, etc.

Jesus did not usually explain his parables. Generally he ended with this phrase: "He who has ears to hear let him hear!" (Mt 11: 15; 13: 9, 43), or, "That's it. You've heard! Now try to understand!" Jesus left his parables open ended, he did not finish them. This is a sign that Jesus believed in the ability of people to discover the meaning of the parable starting from their own experience of life. Occasionally, at the request of his disciples, he would explain the meaning. (Mt 13: 10, 36). For instance, verses 36-43 explain the

parable of the wheat and the weeds. It is also possible that these explanations are the reflection of the catechesis given to the communities of first Christians. The communities met and discussed the parables of Jesus, seeking to understand what Jesus meant to say. Thus, gradually, the teaching of Jesus started to be assimilated into the catechesis of the community and this then becomes an explanation of the parable.

Psalm 19: 7-14

The Law of Yahweh is Perfect

The Law of Yahweh is perfect, refreshment to the soul;
the decree of Yahweh is trustworthy, wisdom for the simple.
The precepts of Yahweh are honest, joy for the heart;
the commandment of Yahweh is pure, light for the eyes.
The fear of Yahweh is pure, lasting forever; the judgements of Yahweh are true,
upright, everyone,
more desirable than gold, even than the finest gold;
his words are sweeter than honey, that drips from the comb.

Thus your servant is formed by them; observing them brings great reward. But who can detect his own failings? Wash away my hidden faults.

And from pride preserve your servant, never let it be my master.

So shall I be above reproach, free from grave sin.

May the words of my mouth always find favor, and the whispering of my heart,
in your presence, Yahweh, my rock, my redeemer.

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, July 31, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

God our Father and protector, without you nothing is holy, nothing has value.

Guide us to everlasting life by helping us to use wisely the blessings you have given to the world.

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

Gospel Reading - Matthew 13: 31-35

Jesus put another parable before them, 'The kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed which a man took and sowed in his field. It is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the biggest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air can come and shelter in its branches.'

He told them another parable, 'The kingdom of Heaven is like the yeast a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour till it was leavened all through.'

In all this Jesus spoke to the crowds in parables; indeed, he would never speak to them except in parables. This was to fulfil what was spoken by the prophet: I will speak to you in parables, unfold what has been hidden since the foundation of the world.

Reflection

- We are meditating on the Discourse of the Parables, the objective of which is that of revealing, by means of comparisons, the mystery of the Kingdom of God present in the life of the people. Today's Gospel presents to us two brief parables, the mustard seed and the yeast. In these Jesus tells two stories taken from daily life, which will serve as terms of comparison to help the people to discover the mystery of the Kingdom. When meditating these two stories it is not necessary to try to discover what each element of the stories want to tell us about the Kingdom. First of all, one must look at the story itself, as a whole and try to discover which is the central point around which the story was constructed. This central point will serve as a means of comparison to reveal the Kingdom of God. Let us try to discover which is the central point of the two parables.
- Matthew 13: 31-32: The parable of the mustard seed. Jesus says: "The Kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed" and then immediately he tells the story: a mustard seed which is very small is cast into the ground; being very small, it grows and becomes larger than other plants and attracts the birds which come and build their nests on it. Jesus does not explain the story. Here applies what he said on another occasion: "Anyone who has ears to hear, let him hear!" That is, "It is this. You have heard, and so now try to understand!" It is up to us to discover what the story reveals to us about the Kingdom of God present in our life. Thus, by means of this story of the mustard seed, Jesus urges us to have fantasy, because each one of us understands something about the seed. Jesus expects that the persons, all of us, begin to share that which each one has discovered. Now, I share three points that I have discovered on the Kingdom, beginning with this parable:
 - Jesus says: "The Kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed". The Kingdom is not something abstract, it is not an idea. It is a presence in our midst (Lk 17: 21). How is this presence? It is like the mustard seed: a very small presence, humble, which can hardly be seen. It is about Jesus, a poor carpenter, who goes through Galilee, speaking about the Kingdom to the people of the towns. The Kingdom of God does not follow the criteria of the great of the world. It has a different way of thinking and of proceeding.
 - The prophecy evokes a prophecy of Ezekiel, in which it is said that God will take a small twig of the cedar and will plant it on the mountain of Israel. This small twig of cedar "will bring forth branches and will bear fruit and will become a

magnificent cedar. Under it all the birds will live, every kind of birds will rest under it. All the trees of the forest will know that I am the Lord, who humiliated the tall tree and exalted the low one; I dry the green tree and make the dry tree come to life. I the Lord have spoken and I will do it" (Ez 17: 22-23).

- The mustard seed, even if very small, grows and gives hope. Like the mustard seed, in the same way the Kingdom has an interior force and it grows. How does it grow? It grows through the preaching of Jesus and of the disciples in the towns of Galilee. It grows up until today, through the witness of the community and becomes good news of God which radiates light and attracts persons. The person, who gets close to the community, feels welcomed, accepted, at home, and builds in it her nest, her dwelling. Finally, the parable leaves in the air a question: who are the birds? The question will receive an answer later, in the Gospel. The text suggests that it is a question of the pagans who will be able to enter into the Kingdom (Mt 15: 21-28).
- Matthew 13: 33: The parable of the yeast. The story of the second parable is the following: A woman took a bit of yeast and mixed it with three measures of flour, till it is leavened all through. Once again, Jesus does not explain, he only says: "The Kingdom of Heaven is like the yeast..." Like in the first parable, it is up to us to discover the significance which this has for us today. The following are some points which I have discovered and which have made me think:
 - What grows is not the yeast, but the dough.
 - It is a question of something of a house, well known to a woman in her house.
 - The yeast is mixed up with the pure dough of flour, and contains something fermented.
 - The objective is to have all the dough fermented, and not only one part.
 - The yeast is not an end in itself but serves to make the dough grow.
- Matthew 13: 34-35: Why Jesus speaks in parables. Here, at the end of the Discourse of the Parables, Matthew clarifies the reason which urged Jesus to teach the people using the form of parables. He says that it was in order that the prophecy would be fulfilled which said: "I will open the mouth to use parables; I will proclaim hidden things since the creation of the world". In reality, the text that has been quoted is not of a prophet, but rather it is a Psalm (Ps 78: 2).

For the first Christians the whole of the Old Testament was a great prophecy which announced in a veiled way the coming of the Messiah and the fulfilment of the promises of God. In Mark 4: 34-34, the reason which urged Jesus to teach the people by means of parables was to adapt the message to the capacity of the people. With these examples taken from the life of the people, Jesus helped the persons to discover the things of God in the life of every day. Life then became transparent. He made them perceive that what was extraordinary in God is hidden in the ordinary and common things of daily life. People understood the things of life. In the parables they received the key to open them and to find in them the signs of God. At the end of the Discourse of the Parables, in Matthew 13: 52, as we shall see later, another reason will be explained why Jesus chose to teach with parables.

Personal Questions

- Which point of these two parables did you like best or which struck you more? Why?

- Which is the seed that without being aware has grown in you and in your community?

Concluding Prayer

I will sing of your strength,
in the morning acclaim your faithful love; you have been a stronghold for me,
a refuge when I was in trouble. (Ps 59: 16)