

Lectio Divina August 2019

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Lectio Divina: Thursday, August 1, 2019

Ordinary Time

1) 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.

2) Gospel Reading - Matthew 13:47-53

Jesus said to the disciples: "The Kingdom of heaven is like a net thrown into the sea, which collects fish of every kind. When it is full they haul it ashore and sit down to put what is good into buckets. What is bad they throw away. Thus it will be at the end of the age. The angels will go out and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth." "Do you understand all these things?" They answered, "Yes." And he replied, "Then every scribe who has been instructed in the Kingdom of heaven is like the head of a household who brings from his storeroom both the new and the old." When Jesus finished these parables, he went away from there.

3) Reflection

- Today's Gospel presents the last parable of the discourse on the parables, the story of the net thrown into the sea. This parable is found only in the Gospel of Matthew without any parallel in the other three Gospels.
- Matthew 13:47-48: The parable of the dragnet cast into the sea. The Kingdom of Heaven is like a net that is cast into the sea and brings in all kinds of fish. When it is full, the fishermen haul it ashore; then sitting down; they collect the good ones in baskets and throw away those that are of no use." This story is well known by the people of Galilee who live around the lake. This is their work. The story clearly shows the end of a day of work. The fishermen go fishing with only one purpose: to cast the net and to catch a great number of fish, to haul the net ashore and to choose the good fish to take home and to throw away those that are no good. Describe the satisfaction of the fishermen, at the end of a day, being very tired after having worked hard. This story

must have brought a smile of satisfaction to the faces of the fishermen who listened to Jesus. The worst thing is to arrive at the shore at the end of the day without having caught anything (Jn 21:3).

- Matthew 13:49-50: The application of the parable. Jesus applies the parable, or better still, gives a suggestion in order that people can discuss and apply the parable to their life: “This is how it will be at the end of time, the angels will appear and separate the wicked from the righteous, to throw them into the blazing furnace where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth.” How are we to understand this blazing furnace? These are very strong images to describe the destiny of those who separate themselves from God or who do not want to know anything about God. In every city there is a place to throw away the garbage every day. There is a permanent furnace nourished every day by the daily garbage. The garbage place in Jerusalem was located in a valley called Gehenna, where, at the time of the kings, there was a furnace even to sacrifice to the false gods of Molok. For this reason, the furnace of Gehenna becomes the symbol of exclusion and of condemnation. God is not the one who excludes. God does not want the exclusion and the condemnation of anyone; He wants that all may have life and life in abundance. Each one of us excludes himself/herself.

- Matthew 13:51-53: The end of the discourse on the Parables. At the end of the discourse on the parables, Jesus concludes with the following question: "Have you understood these things?" They answered: “Yes.”. And Jesus finishes the explanation with another comparison which describes the result He wants to achieve through the parables: “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.”

Two points to clarify:

(a) Jesus compares the doctor of the law to the father in the family. What does the father of the family do? “He brings out from his treasure new things and old things.” Education at home takes place through the transmission to the sons and daughters of what the parents have received and learned over time. It is the treasure of the family wisdom where the richness of faith is enclosed, the customs of life, and many other things that the children learn with time. Now Jesus wants that in the community, that the people who are responsible for the transmission of faith be as a father within the family. Just like the parents are responsible for the life of the family, in the same way, these people who are responsible for the teaching should understand the things of the Kingdom and transmit it to the brothers and sisters in the community.

(b) Here there is the question of a doctor of the law who becomes a disciple of the Kingdom. Therefore, there were doctors of the law who accepted Jesus, and saw in Him the one who revealed the Kingdom. Is this what happened to a doctor when he discovers the Messiah in Jesus, the Son of God? Everything he has studied to be able to be a doctor of the law continues to be valid, but it receives a deeper dimension and a broader purpose. A comparison can clarify what has just been said. In a group of friends one shows a photo, where one sees a man with an angry face, with his finger up, almost attacking the public. Everybody thinks that it is a question of an inflexible person, demanding, who does not allow for any intimacy. At that moment a young boy arrives, he sees the photo and exclaims, “He is my father!” The others look at him and comment,

“A severe father, right?” He answers, “No! He is very affectionate. My father is a lawyer. That photo was taken in the tribunal, while he was denouncing the crime of a great landowner who wanted a poor family to abandon their home where they had lived for many years! My father won the case, and the poor family remained in the house!” All looked at him again and said, “What a pleasant person!” Almost like a miracle the photo lit up from within and assumed a different aspect. That very severe face acquired the features of great tenderness! The words of the son, the result of his experience of being the son, changed everything, without changing anything! The words and the gestures of Jesus, result of His experience as a Son, without changing a letter or a comma, illuminated from within the wisdom accumulated by the doctor of the law. And thus, God, who seemed to be so far away and so severe, acquired the features of a good Father and of enormous tenderness!

4) Personal questions

- Has the experience of Son entered in you and changed your perspective, making you discover the things of God in a different way?
- What has the discourse on the parables revealed to you about the Kingdom?

5) Concluding Prayer

Praise Yahweh, my soul!
I will praise Yahweh all my life,
I will make music to my God as long as I live. (Ps 146:1-2)

Lectio Divina Friday, August 2, 2019

1) 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.

2) Gospel Reading - Matthew 13:54-58

Jesus came to his native place and taught the people in their synagogue. They were astonished and said, “Where did this man get such wisdom and mighty deeds? Is he not the carpenter’s son? Is not his mother named Mary and his brothers James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas? Are not his sisters all with us? Where did this man get all this?” And they took offense at him. But Jesus said to them, “A prophet is not without honor except

in his native place and in his own house.” And he did not work many mighty deeds there because of their lack of faith.

3) Reflection

- The Gospel today tells us of Jesus’ visit to Nazareth, His native community. Passing through Nazareth was painful for Jesus. What was His community at the beginning, now is no longer so. Something has changed. Where there is no faith, Jesus can work no miracles.
- Matthew 13: 53-57^a: The reaction of the people of Nazareth before Jesus. It is always good for people to go back to their land. After a long absence, Jesus also returns, as usual, on a Saturday, and He goes to the meeting of the community. Jesus was not the head of the group, but just the same, He speaks. This is a sign that people could participate and express their own opinion. People were astonished. They did not understand Jesus’ attitude: “Where did the man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?” Jesus, son of that place, whom they knew since He was a child, how is it that now He is so different? The people of Nazareth are scandalized and do not accept Him: “This is the carpenter’s son, surely?” The people do not accept the mystery of God present in a common man, as they are, and as they had known Jesus. In order to speak about God He should be different. As one can see, not everything was positive. The people, who should have been the first ones to accept the Good News, are the first ones to refuse it. The conflict is not only with foreigners, but also with His relatives and with the people of Nazareth. They do not accept because they cannot understand the mystery which envelops Jesus: “Is not His mother, the woman called Mary, and His brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Jude, and His sisters too, are they not all here with us? So where did the man get it all?” They are not able to believe.
- Matthew 13:57b-58: Jesus’ reaction before the attitude of the people of Nazareth. Jesus knows very well that “no one is a prophet in his own country.” He says, “A prophet is despised only in his own country and in his own house.” In fact, where there is neither acceptance nor faith, people can do nothing. Prejudice prevents it. Jesus Himself, even wanting, can do nothing. He was astonished at their lack of faith.
- The brothers and sisters of Jesus. The expression “brothers of Jesus” causes much division between Catholics and Protestants. Based on this and other texts, the Protestants say that Jesus had many brothers and sisters and that Mary had more children! Catholics say that Mary did not have any other children. What are we to think of this? Both positions, that of Catholics as well as that of Protestants, contain arguments taken from the Bible and from the tradition of their respective Churches. We should consider that in our communities today we also call each other “brother” and “sister”, yet we don’t share immediate parents. In that day, children didn’t move far from their parents like they might do today, so many extended family relationships existed within the same community. For this reason, it is not helpful to discuss this question with arguments which are only intellectual, because it is a question of profound convictions, which have something to do with faith and with the sentiments of each one. An argument which is merely intellectual cannot change a conviction of the heart! It only irritates and repels! Even if I do not agree with the opinion of others, I have to respect it. In the second place, instead of talking about texts, all of us, Catholics and Protestants, should unite in order to fight for the defense of life, created by God, a life

disfigured by poverty, injustice, lack of faith. We should recall some other sayings of Jesus: "I have come so that they may have life and life to the full" (Jn 10:10); "That all may be one, so that the world may believe that You, Father, have sent Me" (Jn 17:21); "Do not prevent them! Anyone who is not against us is for us" (Mk 10:39,40).

4) Personal questions

- In Jesus something changed in His relationship with the community of Nazareth. Since you began to participate in community, has anything changed in your relationship with your family? Why?
- Has participation in the community helped you to accept and to trust people, especially the more simple and the poorest?
- When two join to form a new community in marriage, their relationship with their families also changes. Reconsider the previous questions in light of this as well.

5) Concluding Prayer

For myself, wounded wretch that I am,
by Your saving power raise me up!
I will praise God's name in song,
I will extol Him by thanksgiving. (Ps 69: 29-30)

Lectio Divina Saturday, August 3, 2019

Ordinary Time

1) 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.

2) Gospel Reading - Matthew 14:1-12

Herod the tetrarch heard of the reputation of Jesus and said to his servants, "This man is John the Baptist. He has been raised from the dead; that is why mighty powers are at work in him." Now Herod had arrested John, bound him, and put him in prison on account of Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip, for John had said to him, "It is not lawful for you to have her." Although he wanted to kill him, he feared the people, for they regarded him as a prophet. But at a birthday celebration for Herod, the daughter of Herodias performed a dance before the guests and delighted Herod so much that he

swore to give her whatever she might ask for. Prompted by her mother, she said, "Give me here on a platter the head of John the Baptist." The king was distressed, but because of his oaths and the guests who were present, he ordered that it be given, and he had John beheaded in the prison. His head was brought in on a platter and given to the girl, who took it to her mother. His disciples came and took away the corpse and buried him; and they went and told Jesus.

3) Reflection

- Today's Gospel describes the way in which John the Baptist was the victim of corruption and arrogance of the government of Herod. He was killed without due process, during a banquet of the king, with the powerful of the kingdom. The text gives us much information on the time in which Jesus lived and on the manner in which power was used by the powerful of that time.

- Matthew 14:1-2. Who is Jesus for Herod? The text begins by telling about the opinion which Herod had of Jesus: "This is John the Baptist himself, he has risen from the dead, and that is why miraculous powers are at work in Him." Herod tries to understand Jesus starting from the fear which assailed him after murdering John. Herod was very superstitious and hid his fear behind the ostentation of his riches and his power.

- Matthew 14:3-5: The hidden cause of the murder of John. Galilee, the land of Jesus, was governed by Herod Antipas, the son of King Herod the Great, from the year 4 BC until the year 38 AD. Forty-three years in all! During the lifetime of Jesus, there were no changes of government in Galilee! Herod was the absolute lord of everything; he did not render an account to anyone; he did whatever passed through his mind: arrogance, lack of ethics, absolute power, without control from the people! But the one who ruled Palestine since the year 63 BC was the Roman Empire. Herod, in Galilee, so as not to be dismissed, tried to please Rome in everything. Above all, he insisted on an efficient administration which would bring riches to the Empire. His concern was his own promotion and his security. For this reason, he repressed any type of subversion. Matthew says that the reason for murdering John was because John had denounced Herod, because Herod had married Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip. Flavius Joseph, a Jewish writer of that time, says that the true reason for the imprisonment of John the Baptist was Herod's fear that there would be a popular revolt. Herod liked to be called the benefactor of the people, but in reality he was a tyrant (Lk 22:25). John's denunciation of Herod was the drop that caused the glass to overflow: "It is against the Law for you to have her." And John was put in prison.

- Matthew 14:6-12: The plot of the murderer. An anniversary and a festive banquet, with dances and orgy! Mark says that in the feast were "the great of the court, the officials and the important people of Galilee" (Mk 6:21). This is the environment in which the murder of John the Baptist is planned. John, the prophet, was a living denunciation of that corrupt system. This is why he was eliminated, as a personal revenge. All this reveals the moral weakness of Herod. So much power accumulated in the hands of one man, unable to control himself! In the enthusiasm of the feast and from the wine, Herod makes a promise by oath to Salome, the young dancer, daughter of Herodias. Superstitious as he was, he thought that he had to respect this oath and respond to the caprice of the girl, and because of this he ordered the soldier to bring the head of John on a tray and give it to the dancer, who then gave it to her mother. For

Herod, the life of his subjects was worthless. He disposes of them as he would the staircases in his house!

The three characteristics of the government of Herod: the new capital, large estates, and the class of functionaries:

a) The New Capital. Tiberiade was inaugurated when Jesus was only 20 years old. It was called that in order to please Tiberius, the emperor of Rome. It was inhabited by the lords of the earth, the soldiers, the policemen, the unscrupulous judges (Lk 18:1-4). The taxes and the products of the people were channeled into it. It was there that Herod made his orgy of death (Mk 6:21-29). Tiberiades was the city of the palaces of the King, where those who wore soft, delicate dresses lived (cf. Mt 11:8). The Gospels do not record that Jesus ever entered this city.

b) The large estates. Scholars say that during the long government of Herod, the large estates grew, causing harm to community property. The Book of Enoch denounces the lords of the land and expresses the hope of the little ones: “And then the powerful and the great will no longer be the lords of the land” (En 38:4). The ideal of ancient times was the following: “Each one will peacefully sit under his vine and nobody will frighten them” (1 Mac 14:12; Mic 4:4; Zech 3:10). But the politics of the government of Herod made this ideal impossible.

c) The class of functionaries. Herod created a whole class of functionaries faithful to the project of the King: the Scribes, the merchants, the lords of the land, the officers of the market, the tax collectors, the militia, the policemen, the judges, the local heads. In every village there was a group of people which supported the government. In the Gospels, some Pharisees appear together with the Herodians (Mk 3:6; 8:15; 12:13), and that shows the alliance between the religious power and the civil power. The life of the people in the villages was very controlled, both by the government and by the religion. Much courage was necessary to begin anything new as John and Jesus did! It was the same as attracting to yourself the anger of the privileged ones, both from the religious and the civil powers.

4) Personal questions

- Do you know any people who died victims of corruption and domination of the powerful? And here among us, in our community and in the Church, are there victims of authoritarianism and of the abuse of power?
- Herod, the powerful, who thought he was the lord of life and death of people, was a coward before the great and a corrupt flatterer before the girl who danced. Cowardice and corruption marked the exercise of Herod’s power. Compare all this with the exercise of religious power and civil corruption in the different levels of society.

5) Concluding Prayer

The humble have seen and are glad.

Let your courage revive, you who seek God.

For God listens to the poor;

He has never scorned His captive people. (Ps 69:32-33)

Lectio Divina Sunday, August 4, 2019

*The concern about riches
keeps us away from God and
prevents us from serving our neighbor*
Luke 12, 13-21

1. Let us recollect ourselves in prayer – Statio

We are here before You, O Holy Spirit; we feel the weight of our weakness, but we have all gathered here in Your name; come to us, help us, come to our hearts; teach us what we should do, show us the path that we should follow, fulfill what You ask of us. You alone be the one to suggest and to guide our decisions, because You alone, with God the Father and with the Son, have a holy and glorious name; do not allow justice to be hurt by us, You who love order and peace; may ignorance not cause us to deviate; may human sympathy not render us partial, nor charges or people influence us; keep us close to You so that we may not drift away from truth in anything; help us, we who are meeting in Your name, to know how to contemplate goodness and tenderness together, so as to do everything in harmony with You, in the hope that by the faithful fulfillment of our duty we may be given the eternal reward in the future. Amen.

2. Prayerful reading of the Word – Lectio

Of the Gospel according to Luke:

Someone in the crowd said to Jesus, “Teacher, tell my brother to share the inheritance with me.” He replied to him, “Friend, who appointed me as your judge and arbitrator?” Then he said to the crowd, “Take care to guard against all greed, for though one may be rich, one’s life does not consist of possessions.” Then he told them a parable. “There was a rich man whose land produced a bountiful harvest. He asked himself, ‘What shall I do, for I do not have space to store my harvest?’ And he said, ‘This is what I shall do: I shall tear down my barns and build larger ones. There I shall store all my grain and other goods and I shall say to myself,



“Now as for you, you have so many good things stored up for many years, rest, eat, drink, be merry!” But God said to him, ‘You fool, this night your life will be demanded of you; and the things you have prepared, to whom will they belong?’ Thus will it be for all who store up treasure for themselves but are not rich in what matters to God.”

3. To ponder the Word – Meditatio

3.1. Key to the reading:

The text of the liturgy for the 18th Sunday of Ordinary Time forms part of a long discourse from Jesus on trust in God, which drives away every fear (Lk 12:6-7), and on abandonment to God’s providence (Lk 12:22-23). The passage for today, in fact, is

precisely between these two texts. Here are some of the teachings given by Jesus, before He was interrupted by “one of the crowd” (Lk 12:13), about trust and abandonment:

Lk 12:4-7: “To you My friends I say: Do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. I will tell you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has the power to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, he is the one to fear. Can you not buy five sparrows for two pennies? And yet not one is forgotten in God's sight. Why, every hair on your head has been counted. There is no need to be afraid: you are worth more than many sparrows.”

Lk 12:11-12: “When they take you before synagogues and magistrates and authorities, do not worry about how to defend yourselves or what to say, because when the time comes, the Holy Spirit will teach you what you should say.”

It is precisely at this point that the man interrupts Jesus' discourse, showing his concern about the question of inheritance (Lk 12:13). Jesus preaches and says not to have “fear of those who kill the body and then can do nothing else” (Lk 12:4) and this man does not perceive the meaning of Jesus' words addressed to those whom he recognizes as “My friends” (Lk 12:4). From the Gospel of John we know that a friend of Jesus is one who knows Jesus, in other words, one who knows everything that He has heard from the Father (Jn 15:15). The friend of Jesus should know that his Master is deeply rooted in God (Jn 1:1) and that His only concern is to seek to do the will of the one who has sent Him (Jn 4:34). The advice and the example of Jesus given to His friends is not to worry or be troubled for material things because “life is worth more than food and the body worth more than what you will wear” (Mt 6:25). In an eschatological context Jesus admonishes, “be on guard or your hearts will be coarsened by debauchery and drunkenness and the cares of life” (Lk 21:34).

This is why the question of the man who asks Jesus to tell “his brother to give me a share of our inheritance (Lk 12:13) is superfluous before the Lord. Jesus refuses to act as judge between the parties (Lk 12:14) like in the case of the adulterous woman (Jn 8:2-11). We can see that, for Jesus, it is not important which of these two is right. He remains neutral before the question between the two brothers because His kingdom is not of this world (Jn 18:36). Jesus' behavior reflects the image which Luke gives us of the Lord, meek and humble. The accumulation of material goods, the inheritance, fame, power, do not form part of the hierarchy of Jesus' values. In fact, He uses the question of the two brothers to repeat and confirm that “life does not depend on goods” (Lk 12:15), even if they are abundant.

As usual, here too Jesus teaches by means of a parable in which He presents “a rich man” (Lk 12:16). We would say an insatiable rich man who does not know what to do with his goods which are so abundant. (Lk 12:17). This man reminds us of the rich man who closes himself in self and is not aware of the misery of poor Lazarus (Lk 16:1-31). It is certain that we cannot define this rich man as just. Just is the one who, like Job, shares with the poor the goods received from God's providence: “because I helped the poor who asked for help, the orphan who had no helper, the dying man's blessing rested on me and I gave the widow's heart cause to rejoice” (Job 29:12-13). The rich man of

the parable is a foolish man (Lk 12:20) who has his heart full of goods received, forgetting God, the Supreme and only One who is good. He “accumulates treasures for himself, but is not enriched before God” (Lk 12:21). In his foolishness he is not aware that everything is bestowed freely from God’s providence, not only his goods but also his life. The terminology used in the parable makes us notice this:

- **The harvest:** “The land [...] **had given** a good harvest” (Lk 12:16)

- The life: “This very night **the demand will be made** for your soul” (Lk 12:20).

It is not wealth in itself which constitutes the foolishness of this man but it is his avarice and greed which reveal his foolishness. In fact, he says, “My soul, you have plenty of good things laid by for many years to come; take things easy, eat, drink, have a good time” (Lk 12:19).

The attitude of the wise man instead is very different. We see this for example embodied in the person of Job who with great detachment, exclaims, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, naked I shall return again. Yahweh gave, Yahweh has taken back. Blessed be the name of Yahweh!” (Job 1:21). The wisdom tradition has handed down or transmitted to us some teachings on the right attitude to have before riches: Prov 27:1; Sir 11:19; Eccl 2:17-23; 5:17-6:2. The New Testament also admonishes on this point: Mt 6:19-34; I Cor 15:32; Jas 4:13-15; Rev 3:17-18.

4. Question to orientate the meditation and the application:

- What struck you most in this passage and in the reflection?
- What does it mean for you that Jesus remains neutral toward the rich man’s question?
- Do you believe that avarice has something to do with the social condition in which one finds oneself? (the answer may be the opposite of what you might expect)
- Do we believe in God’s providence?
- Are you conscious or aware that what you possess has been given to you by God, or rather do you feel that you are the absolute master of your goods?
- How does fear enter into our greed or our charity? Do you fear not having enough? Do you use fear (of being sued perhaps) as an excuse for not getting involved in helping your neighbor (as Jesus defines it) on a personal level?
- When you share your wealth, is it through an organization which provides return benefits? If you receive a tax deduction, discount, coupons, or other compensation, is it really a “gift” (and with spiritual benefit), or would Jesus say that you have had your repayment? (see Lk 14:13, Lk 6:35, Mt 6:2-4)

5. Oratio

1Chronicles 29:10-19

"May You be blessed, Yahweh, God of Israel our ancestor, for ever and for ever!
Yours, Yahweh, is the greatness, the power, the splendor, length of days and glory, everything in heaven and on earth is Yours. Yours is the sovereignty, Yahweh; You are exalted, supreme over all.

Wealth and riches come from You, You are ruler of all, in Your hand lie strength and power, and You bestow greatness and might on whomsoever You please.

So now, our God, we give thanks to You and praise Your majestic name, for who am I and what is my people, for us to be able to make this freewill offering like this? - since

everything has come from You and we have given You only what You bestowed in the first place, and we are guests before You, and passing visitors as were all our ancestors, our days on earth fleeting as a shadow and without hope.

Yahweh our God, all this wealth, which we have provided to build a house for Your holy Name, has come from You and all belongs to You.

Knowing, my God, how You examine our motives and how You delight in integrity, with integrity of motive I have willingly given all this and have been overjoyed to see Your people, now present here, willingly offering their gifts to You.

Yahweh, God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel our ancestors, watch over this for ever, shape the purpose of Your people's heart and direct their hearts to You, and give an undivided heart to Solomon my son to keep Your commandments, Your decrees and Your statutes, to put them all into effect and to build the palace for which I have made provision."

6. Contemplatio

Psalm 119:36-37

Bend my heart to Your instructions,
not to selfish gain.
Avert my eyes from pointless images,
by Your word give me life.

Lectio Divina Monday, August 5, 2019

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Father of everlasting goodness,
our origin and guide,
be close to us
and hear the prayers of all who praise You.
Forgive our sins and restore us to life.
Keep us safe 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.

2) Gospel Reading - Matthew 14:13-21

When Jesus heard of the death of John the Baptist, he withdrew in a boat to a deserted place by himself. The crowds heard of this and followed him on foot from their towns. When he disembarked and saw the vast crowd, his heart was moved with pity for them, and he cured their sick. When it was evening, the disciples approached him and said, "This is a deserted place and it is already late; dismiss the crowds so that they can go to

the villages and buy food for themselves." He said to them, "There is no need for them to go away; give them some food yourselves." But they said to him, "Five loaves and two fish are all we have here." Then he said, "Bring them here to me," and he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, he said the blessing, broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, who in turn gave them to the crowds. They all ate and were satisfied, and they picked up the fragments left over— twelve wicker baskets full. Those who ate were about five thousand men, not counting women and children.

3) Reflection

- Context. Chapter 14 of Matthew, which contains the account of the multiplication of the loaves, provides an itinerary that guides the reader in a progressive discovery of faith in Jesus: from the lack of faith on the part of His fellow countrymen to the acknowledgment of the Son of God, passing through the gift of bread. The fellow citizens of Jesus marvel at His wisdom but do not understand that this is what acts behind His works. Besides, having a direct knowledge of Jesus' family, of His mother, of His brothers, and of His sisters, they only succeed in seeing in Him His human condition alone: He is the son of the carpenter. Not being understood in His own home town, from now on, Jesus will live in the midst of His people, to whom He will give all His attention and His solidarity, healing and feeding the crowds.
- The dynamic of the account. Matthew has carefully narrated the episode of the multiplication of the loaves. The episode is enclosed between two expressions of transition in which he tells us that Jesus withdrew ("separated Himself") from the crowds, from the disciples, from the boat (vv.13-14; vv.22-23). Verse 13 does not only serve as transition but offers us the reason why Jesus went to a deserted place. Such a device serves to create the environment in which the miracle takes place. The evangelist concentrates the account on the crowd and on Jesus' attitude in regard to the crowd.
- Jesus was moved deeply to pity. At the moment when Jesus arrives He finds Himself before a crowd awaiting Him; on seeing the crowd He took pity on them and healed their sick. This is a "tired and depressed crowd, for they were like sheep without a shepherd" (9:36; 20:34). The verb that expresses Jesus' compassion is really meaningful: "Jesus' heart was broken"; and this corresponds to the Hebrew verb that expresses maternal visceral love. This is the same sentiment experienced by Jesus before the tomb of Lazarus (Jn 11:38). Compassion is the subjective aspect of the experience of Jesus that becomes effective with the gift of the bread.
- The gift of the bread. The account of the multiplication of the loaves is opened with the expression, "when evening came" (v.15) that will introduce the account of the Last Supper (Mt 26:20) and also that of the burial of Jesus (Mt 27:57). In the evening, then, Jesus invites the Apostles to feed the crowd. In the middle of the desert, far away from the villages and from the cities, Jesus and the disciples find themselves before a very

big human problem: to feed the big crowd that follows Jesus. They cannot take care of this task to provide for the material needs of the crowd without the power of Jesus. Their immediate response is to send the crowd back home. In the face of human limitations Jesus intervenes and works the miracle satisfying the hunger of all the people who follow Him. To feed the crowd is Jesus' response, from His heart which breaks in the face of a very concrete human need. The gift of the bread is not only sufficient to satisfy the crowd but it is so superabundant that it becomes necessary to gather what was left over. In v.19b we can see that Matthew gave a Eucharistic significance to the episode of the multiplication of the loaves: "He raised his eyes to heaven and said the blessing, and breaking the loaves He handed them to His disciples"; the role of the disciples is also made evident in their function of mediation between Jesus and the crowd: "and the disciples distributed to the crowd" (v.19c). The gestures that accompany the miracle are identical to those that Jesus will fulfill later, on the "night when He was betrayed". He raised his eyes, blessed the bread and breaks it. From here comes the symbolic value of the miracle: it can be considered an anticipation of the Eucharist. On the part of Jesus, feeding the crowds is "a sign" that He is the Messiah and that He prepares a banquet of joy for all humanity. The disciples learn from Jesus, who distributes the bread to them, the value of sharing. A symbolic gesture that contains a real fact that goes beyond the episode itself and is projected on the future: in our daily Eucharistic celebration, where we relive that gesture of the broken bread, it is necessary that it be multiplied throughout the whole day.

4) Personal questions

- Do you try to extend gestures of solidarity toward those who are close to you or who are close to you along the journey of life? In the face of very concrete problems of your friends or relatives, do you know how to offer your help and your availability to collaborate to find a solution?
- Before breaking the bread, Jesus raised His eyes to heaven: do you know how to thank the Lord for the daily gift of bread? Do you know how to share your goods with others, especially with the poorest?
- Do you share your life with the poorest (as well as immigrants) or just share from your excess? Do you know of their lives personally or just from the news, statistics, or the internet?

5) Concluding Prayer

Keep me far from the way of deceit,
grant me the grace of Your Law.
Do not deprive me of that faithful word,
since my hope lies in Your judgments. (Ps 119:29,43)

Lectio Divina Tuesday, August 6, 2019

The Transfiguration of Jesus

A new way of fulfilling the prophecies

Luke 9:28-36

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

2. Reading

a) A key to the reading:

A few days earlier, Jesus had said that He, the Son of Man, had to be tried and crucified by the authorities (Lk 9:22; Mk 8:31). According to the information in the Gospels of Mark and Matthew, the disciples, especially Peter, did not understand what Jesus had said and were scandalized by the news (Mt 16:22; Mk 8:32). Jesus reacted strongly and turned to Peter calling him Satan (Mt 16:23; Mk 8:33). This was because Jesus' words did not correspond to the ideal of the glorious Messiah whom they imagined. Luke does not mention Peter's reaction and Jesus' strong reply, but he does describe, as do the other Evangelists, the episode of the Transfiguration. Luke sees the Transfiguration as an aid to the disciples so that they may be able to overcome the scandal and change their idea of the Messiah (Lk 9:28-36). Taking with Him three disciples, Jesus goes up the mountain to pray, and while He is praying, is transfigured. As we read the text, it is good to note what follows: Who appears with Jesus on the mountain to converse with Him? What is the theme of their conversation? What is the disciples' attitude?"

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

- i) Luke 9:28: The moment of crisis.
- ii) Luke 9:29: The change that takes place during the prayer.
- iii) Luke 9:30-31: The appearance of the two men and their conversation with Jesus.
- iv) Luke 9:32-34: The disciples' reaction.
- v) Luke 9:35-36: The Father's voice.

c) The text:

Jesus took Peter, John, and James and went up a mountain to pray. While he was praying his face changed in appearance and his clothing became dazzling white. And behold, two men were conversing with him, Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of his exodus that he was going to accomplish in Jerusalem. Peter and his companions had been overcome by sleep, but becoming fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him. As they were about to part from him, Peter said to Jesus, “Master, it is good that we are here; let us make three tents, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” But he did not know what he was saying. While he was still speaking, a cloud came and cast a shadow over them, and they became frightened when they entered the cloud. Then from the cloud came a voice that said, “This is my chosen Son; listen to him.” After the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. They fell silent and did not at that time tell anyone what they had seen.



3. A moment of prayerful silence

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

4. Some questions

to help us in our personal reflection.

- a) What pleased you most in this episode of the Transfiguration? Why?
- b) Who are those who go to the mountain with Jesus? Why do they go?
- c) Moses and Elijah appear on the mountain next to Jesus. What is the significance of these two people from the Old Testament for Jesus, for the disciples, and for the community of the 80s? And for us today?
- d) Which prophecy from the Old Testament is fulfilled in the words of the Father concerning Jesus?
- e) What is the attitude of the disciples during this episode?
- f) Has there been a transfiguration in your life? How have such experiences of transfiguration helped you to fulfill your mission better?
- g) Compare Luke’s description of the Transfiguration of Jesus (Lk 9:28-36) with his description of the agony of Jesus in the garden (Lk 22:39-46). Try to see whether there are any similarities. What is the significance of these similarities?

5. A key to the reading

for those who wish to go deeper into the theme.

a) The context of Jesus' discourse:

In the two previous chapters of Luke's Gospel, the innovation brought by Jesus stands out and tensions grow between the new and the old. In the end, Jesus realized that no one had understood His meaning and much less His person. People thought that He was like John the Baptist, Elijah or some old prophet (Lk 9:18-19). The disciples accepted Him as the Messiah, but a glorious Messiah, according to the thought promulgated by the government and the official religion of the temple (Lk 9:20-21). Jesus tried to explain to His disciples that the journey foreseen by the prophets was one of suffering because of its commitment to the excluded and that a disciple could only be a disciple if he/she took up his/her cross (Lk 9:22-26), although he did not meet with much success. It is in such a context of crisis that the Transfiguration takes place.

In the 30s, the experience of the Transfiguration had a very important significance in the life of Jesus and the disciples. It helped them overcome the crisis of faith and to change their ideals concerning the Messiah. In the 80s, when Luke was writing for the Christian communities in Greece, the meaning of the Transfiguration had already been deepened and broadened. In the light of Jesus' resurrection and of the spread of the Good News among the pagans in almost every country, from Palestine to Italy, the experience of the Transfiguration began to be seen as a confirmation of the faith of the Christian communities in Jesus, *Son of God*. The two meanings are present in the description and interpretation of the Transfiguration in Luke's Gospel.

b) A commentary on the text:

Luke 9:28: *The moment of crisis.*

On several occasions Jesus entered into conflict with the people and the religious and civil authorities of His time (Lk 4:28-29; 5:21-20; 6:2-11; 7:30,39; 8:37; 9:9). He knew they would not allow Him to do the things He did. Sooner or later they would catch Him. In that society, the proclamation of the Kingdom, in the way Jesus did, was not to be tolerated. He either had to withdraw or face death! There were no other alternatives. Jesus did not withdraw. Hence, the cross appears on the horizon not just as a possibility, but as a certainty (Lk 9:22). Together with the cross there is also the temptation to go on with the idea of the *Glorious Messiah* and not of the *crucified, suffering servant*, announced by the prophet Isaiah (Mk 8:32-33). At this difficult moment Jesus goes up the mountain to pray, taking with Him three disciples, Peter, James and John. Through His prayer, Jesus seeks strength not to lose the sense of direction in His mission (cf. Mk 1:35).

Luke 9:29: *The change that takes place during the prayer.*

As soon as Jesus starts praying, His appearance changes and He appears *glorious*. His face changes and His clothes become white and shining. It is *the glory* that the disciples imagined for the Messiah. This transformation told them clearly that Jesus was indeed the Messiah expected by all. What follows the episode of the Transfiguration will point out that the way to glory is quite different from what they imagined. The transfiguration will be a call to conversion.

Luke 9:30-31: *Two men appear speaking with Jesus.*

Together with Jesus and in the same glorious state there appeared Moses and Elijah, the two major exponents of the Old Testament, representing the law and the prophets. They speak with Jesus about “the Exodus brought to fulfillment in Jerusalem”. Thus, in front of the disciples, the law and the prophets confirm that Jesus is truly the *glorious* Messiah, promised in the Old Testament and awaited by the whole people. They further confirm that the way to *glory* is through the painful way of the exodus. Jesus’ exodus is His passion, death and resurrection. Through His “exodus” Jesus breaks the dominion of the false idea concerning the Messiah spread by the government and by the official religion and that held all ensnared in the vision of a glorious, nationalistic messiah. The experience of the Transfiguration confirmed that Jesus as Messiah Servant constituted an aid to free them from their wrong ideas concerning the Messiah and to discover the real meaning of the Kingdom of God.

Luke 9:32-34: *The disciples’ reaction*

The disciples were in deep sleep. When they woke up, they saw Jesus in His glory and the two men with Him, but Peter’s reaction shows that they were not aware of the real meaning of the *glory* in which Jesus appeared to them. As often happens with us, they were only aware of what concerned them. The rest escapes their attention. “Master, it is good for us to be here!” They do not want to get off the mountain any more! When it is question of the cross, whether on the Mount of the Transfiguration or on the Mount of Olives (Lk 22:45), they sleep! They prefer the *glory* to the *cross*! They do not like to speak or hear of the cross. They want to make sure of the moment of glory on the mountain, and they offer to build three tents. Peter did not know what he was saying. While Peter was speaking, a cloud descended from on high and covered them with its shadow. Luke says that the disciples became afraid when the cloud enfolded them. The cloud is the symbol of the presence of God. The *cloud* accompanied the multitude on their journey through the desert (Ex 40:34-38; Num 10:11-12). When Jesus ascended into heaven, He was covered by a cloud and they no longer saw Him (Acts 1:9). This was a sign that Jesus had entered forever into God’s world.

Luke 9:35-36: *The Father’s voice*

A voice is heard from the cloud that says, “This is My Son, the chosen, listen to Him”. With this same sentence the prophet Isaiah had proclaimed the Messiah-Servant (Isa 42:1). First Moses and Elijah, now God Himself presents Jesus as the Messiah-Servant who will come to glory through the cross. The voice ends with a final admonition: “Listen to Him!” As the heavenly voice speaks, Moses and Elijah disappear, and only Jesus is left. This signifies that from now on only He will interpret the scriptures and the will of God. He is the Word of God for the disciples: “Listen to Him!”

The proclamation “This is My Son, the chosen; listen to Him” was very important for the community of the late 80s. Through this assertion God the Father confirmed the faith of Christians in Jesus as *Son of God*. In Jesus’ time, that is, in the 30s, the expression *Son of Man* pointed to a very high dignity and mission. Jesus Himself gave a relative meaning to the term by saying that all were children of God (cf. John 10:33-35). But for some, the title *Son of God* became a resume of all titles, over one hundred, that the first Christians gave Jesus in the second half of the first century. In succeeding

centuries, it was the title of *Son of God* that the Church concentrated all its faith in the person of Jesus.

c) A deepening:

i) The Transfiguration is told in three of the Gospels: Matthew (Mt 17:1-9), Mark (Mk 9:2-8), and Luke (Lk 9:28-36). This is a sign that this episode contained a very important message. As we said, it was a matter of great help to Jesus, to His disciples and to the first communities. It confirmed Jesus in His mission as Messiah-Servant. It helped the disciples to overcome the crisis that the cross and suffering caused them. It led the communities to deepen their faith in Jesus, Son of God, the One who revealed the Father and who became the new key to the interpretation of the law and the prophets. The Transfiguration continues to be of help in overcoming the crisis that the cross and suffering provoke today. The three sleeping disciples are a reflection of all of us. The voice of the Father is directed to us as it was to them: “This is My Son, the chosen; listen to Him!”

ii) In Luke’s Gospel there is a great similarity between the scene of the Transfiguration (Lk 9:28-36) and the scene of the agony of Jesus in the Garden of Olives (Lk 22:39-46). We may note the following: in both scenes Jesus goes up the mountain to pray and takes with Him three disciples, Peter, James and John. On both occasions, Jesus’ appearance is transformed and He is transfigured before them; glorious at the Transfiguration, and perspiring blood in the Garden of Olives. Both times, heavenly figures appear to comfort Him, Moses and Elijah and an angel from heaven. Both in the Transfiguration and in the Agony, the disciples sleep. They seem to be outside the event and they seem not to understand anything. At the end of both episodes, Jesus is reunited with His disciples. Doubtless, Luke intended to emphasize the resemblance between these two episodes. What would that be? It is in meditating and praying that we shall succeed in understanding the meaning that goes beyond words, and to grasp the author’s intention. The Holy Spirit will guide us.

iii) Luke describes the Transfiguration. There are times in our life when suffering is such that we might think, “God has abandoned me! He is no longer with me!” And then suddenly we realize that He has never deserted us, but that we had our eyes bandaged and were not aware of the presence of God. Then everything is changed and transfigured. It is the transfiguration! This happens every day in our lives.

6. Psalm 42 (41)

“My soul thirsts for the living God!”

As a hart longs for flowing streams,
so longs my soul for Thee, O God.
My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.
When shall I come and behold the face of God?

My tears have been my food day and night,

while men say to me continually, "Where is your God?"
These things I remember, as I pour out my soul:
how I went with the throng,
and led them in procession to the house of God,
with glad shouts and songs of thanksgiving,
a multitude keeping festival.

Why are you cast down, O my soul,
and why are you disquieted within me?
Hope in God; for I shall again praise Him,
my help and my God.
My soul is cast down within me;
therefore I remember Thee from the land of Jordan
and of Hermon, from Mount Mizar.
Deep calls to deep at the thunder of Thy torrents;
all Thy waves and Thy billows have gone over me.

By day the Lord commands His steadfast love;
and at night His song is with me,
a prayer to the God of my life.
I say to God, my rock:
"Why hast Thou forgotten me?
Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?"
As with a deadly wound in my body,
my adversaries taunt me,
while they say to me continually,
"Where is your God?"

Why are you cast down, O my soul,
and why are you disquieted within me?
Hope in God; for I shall again praise Him,
my help and my God.

7. Final Prayer

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

Lectio Divina Wednesday, August 7, 2019

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Father of everlasting goodness,
our origin and guide,
be close to us
and hear the prayers of all who praise You.
Forgive our sins and restore us to life.
Keep us safe 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.

2) Gospel Reading - Matthew 15:21-28

At that time Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. And behold, a Canaanite woman of that district came and called out, "Have pity on me, Lord, Son of David! My daughter is tormented by a demon." But he did not say a word in answer to her. His disciples came and asked him, "Send her away, for she keeps calling out after us." He said in reply, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." But the woman came and did him homage, saying, "Lord, help me." He said in reply, "It is not right to take the food of the children and throw it to the dogs." She said, "Please, Lord, for even the dogs eat the scraps that fall from the table of their masters." Then Jesus said to her in reply, "O woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed from that hour.

3) Reflection

Context. The bread of the children and the great faith of a Canaanite woman is the theme presented in the liturgical passage taken from chapter 15 of Matthew, who proposes to the reader of his Gospel a further deepening of faith in Christ. The episode is preceded by an initiative of the Pharisees and scribes, who go down to Jerusalem and cause a dispute to take place with Jesus, but which did not last long, because He, together with His disciples, withdrew to go to the region of Tyre and Sidon. While He is on the way, a woman from the pagan region comes to Him. This woman is presented by Matthew by the name of "a Canaanite woman" who, in the light of the Old Testament, is presented with great harshness. In the Book of Deuteronomy the inhabitants of Canaan were considered people full of sins: evil and idolatrous people.

- The dynamic of the account. While Jesus carries out His activity in Galilee and is on the way toward Tyre and Sidon, a woman comes up to Him and begins to bother Him with a petition for help for her sick daughter. The woman addresses Jesus using the title "Son of David," a title which sounds strange pronounced by a pagan and that could be justified because of the extreme situation in which the woman finds herself. It could be thought that this woman already believes in some way, in the person of Jesus as final

Savior, but this is excluded because it is only in v. 28 that her act of faith is recognized precisely by Jesus. In the dialogue with the woman Jesus seems to show that distance and diffidence which reigned between the people of Israel and the pagans. On one side Jesus confirms to the woman the priority for Israel to have access to salvation, and before the insistent prayer of His interlocutor Jesus seems to withdraw, to be at a distance; an incomprehensible attitude for the reader, but in the intention of Jesus it expresses an act of pedagogical value. To the first invocation “Have pity on me, Lord, Son of David” (v. 22) Jesus does not respond. To the second intervention, this time on the part of the disciples, who invite Him to listen to the woman’s prayer, He only expresses rejection that stresses that secular distance between the chosen people and the pagan people (vv. 23b-24). But at the insistence of the prayer of the woman who bows before Jesus, a harsh and mysterious response follows: “It is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to little dogs” (v. 26). The woman goes beyond the harsh response of Jesus’ words and gets a small sign of hope: the woman recognizes that God’s plan being carried out by Jesus initially concerns the chosen people, and Jesus asks the woman to recognize that priority; the woman takes advantage of that priority to present a strong reason to obtain the miracle: “Ah yes, Lord, but even little dogs eat the scraps that fall from their masters’ table” (v. 27). The woman has exceeded the test of faith: “Woman, you have great faith” (v. 28); in fact, to the humble insistence of her faith corresponds a salvific gesture.

This episode addresses an invitation to every reader of the Gospel to have that interior attitude of “openness” toward everyone, believers or not, that is to say, availability and acceptance without distinction toward all people.

4) Personal questions

- The disturbing word of God invites you to break open your smugness and all of your small plans. Are you capable of accepting all the brothers and sisters who come to you?
- Are you aware of your poverty to be able, like the Canaanite woman, to entrust yourself to Jesus’ word of salvation?

5) Concluding Prayer

Lord, do not thrust me away from Your presence;
do not take away from me Your spirit of holiness.
Give me back the joy of Your salvation,
sustain in me a generous spirit. (Ps 51:11-12)

Lectio Divina Thursday, August 8, 2019

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Father of everlasting goodness,
our origin and guide,
be close to us
and hear the prayers of all who praise You.
Forgive our sins and restore us to life.
Keep us safe 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.

2) Gospel Reading

Jesus went into the region of Caesarea Philippi and he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" They replied, "Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter said in reply, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus said to him in reply, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah. For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father. And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys to the Kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." Then he strictly ordered his disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ. From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer greatly from the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed and on the third day be raised. Then Peter took Jesus aside and began to rebuke him, "God forbid, Lord! No such thing shall ever happen to you." He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are an obstacle to me. You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do."

3) Reflection

- We are now in the narrative part between the discourse on the Parables (Mt 13) and the discourse on the community (Mt 18). In these narrative parts which link together the five discourses, Matthew usually follows the sequence of the Gospel of Mark. Once in a while, he gives other information, also known by Luke. Here and there, he quotes texts which appear only in the Gospel of Matthew, like, for example, the conversation between Jesus and Peter in today's Gospel. This text has different interpretations and even contradictory ones among the diverse Christian Churches.
- At that time, the communities fostered a very strong affective bond of union with the leaders who had given origin to the community. For example, the communities of Antioch in Syria fostered their relationship with Peter. Those of Greece promoted their

relationship with Paul; some communities of Asia, with the Beloved Disciple and others with the person of John of the Apocalypse. Identification with these leaders to whom they owed their origin helped the communities to build better their identity and spirituality. But this could also be a reason for dispute, like in the case of the community of Corinth (1 Cor 1:11-12).

- Matthew 16:13-16: The opinions of the people and of the disciples concerning Jesus. Jesus asks the opinion of the people concerning Himself, the Son of Man. The responses are varied: John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, one of the Prophets. When Jesus asks the disciples' opinion, Peter becomes the spokesman and says, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God!" The response is not a new one. Previously, the disciples had said the same thing (Mt 14:33). In John's Gospel, the same profession of faith is made by Martha (Jn 11:27). It means that the prophecies of the Old Testament are realized in Jesus.

- Matthew 16:17: Jesus' response to Peter: "Blessed are you, Simon!" Jesus proclaims Peter "Blessed" because he has received a revelation from the Father. Here, also, the response of Jesus is not new. Before, Jesus had praised the Father because He had revealed the Son to the little ones and not to the wise (Mt 11:25-27) and had made the same proclamation of joy to the disciples who were seeing and hearing new things which, up until then, nobody had known or heard (Mt 13:16).

- Matthew 16:18-20: The attributions of Peter: To be rock and to receive the keys of the Kingdom.

(a) To be rock: Peter has to be Rock that is the stable basis for the Church in such a way that it can prevail against the gates of hell. With these words which Jesus addressed to Peter, Matthew encourages the persecuted community of Syria and Palestine, to see in Peter the leader who belongs to their origin. In spite of persecution and weakness, the community has a firm basis, guaranteed by the word of Jesus. The notion of being rock based on faith evokes the word of God to the people in exile: "Listen to Me, you who pursue saving justice, you who seek Yahweh; consider the rock (pietra) from which you were hewn, the quarry from which you were dug; consider Abraham your father, and Sarah who gave birth to you. When I called him, he was the only one, but I blessed him and made him numerous" (Isa 51:1-2). This indicates that a new beginning of the People of God is with Peter.

(b) The keys of the Kingdom: Peter receives the keys of the Kingdom. The same power of binding and loosing is also given to the communities (Mt 18:18) and to the other disciples (Jn 20:23). One of the points on which the Gospel of Matthew insists is reconciliation and pardon. It is one of the more important tasks of coordinators of the communities. By imitating Peter, they should bind and loosen, that is, do in such a way that there is reconciliation and reciprocal acceptance, construction of fraternity, even up to seventy times (Mt 18:22).

- Matthew 16:21-22: Jesus completes what was missing in Peter's response, and Peter reacts. Jesus begins saying that He had "to go to Jerusalem and suffer very much on the part of the Elders, of the high priests and of the scribes, and be killed and on the third day, rise from the dead.". Saying that He had to go and would be killed, or that it was necessary to suffer, He indicated that suffering had been foreseen by the prophecies. The way of the Messiah is not only one of triumph and glory, but also one of suffering and of the cross! If Peter accepts Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God, he has to accept

Him also as Messiah servant who will be killed. But Peter does not accept Jesus' correction and tries to draw Him away. Taking Jesus aside, he began to rebuke Him: Heaven preserve You, Lord, this must not happen to You!"

• Matthew 16:23: Jesus' reply to Peter: stumbling stone. Jesus' response is surprising. Peter wanted to steer Jesus in another direction. Jesus reacts: "Get behind Me, Satan. You are an obstacle in My path, because you are thinking not as God thinks but as human beings do." Peter has to follow Jesus, and not the contrary. Jesus is the one who gives the directions. Satan is the one who draws people away from the road traced by Jesus. Once again the expression rock – pietra - appears, but now in the contrary sense. Peter, at one time, is the supporting rock; at other times, the stumbling block! The communities at the time of Matthew were like that, characterized by ambiguity. This is the way we all are, according to what John Paul II said, that the papacy itself was characterized by the same ambiguity of Peter: rock of support for the faith and stumbling block in the faith.

4) Personal questions

- What are the opinions about Jesus which exist in our community? These differences in the way of living and of expressing faith, do they enrich the community or do they render the way more difficult?
- What type of rock is our community? What is our mission?

5) Concluding Prayer

Give me back the joy of Your salvation,
sustain in me a generous spirit.
I shall teach the wicked Your paths,
and sinners will return to You. (Ps 51:12-13)

Lectio Divina Friday, August 9, 2019

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Father of everlasting goodness,
our origin and guide,
be close to us
and hear the prayers of all who praise You.
Forgive our sins and restore us to life.
Keep us safe 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.

2) Gospel Reading - Matthew 16:24-28

Jesus said to his disciples, “Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. What profit would there be for one to gain the whole world and forfeit his life? Or what can one give in exchange for his life? For the Son of Man will come with his angels in his Father’s glory, and then he will repay each according to his conduct. Amen, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his Kingdom.”

3) Reflection

- The five verses of today’s Gospel continue with the words of Jesus to Peter which we meditated on yesterday. Jesus does not hide nor lessen the demands of discipleship. He does not allow Peter to take the initiative and puts him in his place: “*Far from Me!*” Today’s Gospel makes explicit these demands for all of us.
- Matthew 16:24: “*Take up his cross and follow Me*”. Jesus draws the conclusions which are valid even until now: “*If anyone wants to follow Me, let him renounce himself and take up his cross and follow Me*”. At that time, the cross was the death sentence which the Roman Empire inflicted on marginalized persons and bandits. To take up the cross and carry it behind Jesus was the same as to accept to be marginalized by the unjust system which legitimized injustice. The Cross is not fatalism, nor exigency from the Father. The Cross is the consequence of the commitment freely taken up by Jesus to reveal the Good News that God is Father, and therefore, we all have to be accepted and treated as brothers and sisters. Because of this revolutionary announcement, Jesus was persecuted and He was not afraid to give His life. *Nobody has greater love than this: to give one’s life for his friends* (Jn 15:13). The witness of Paul in the letter to the Galatians indicates the concrete significance and importance of all this: “*But as for me, it is out of the question that I should boast at all, except of the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world*”. (Gal 6:14). He ends by referring to the marks of the tortures which he suffered: “*After this, let no one trouble me, I carry branded on my body the marks of Jesus*” (Gal 6:17).
- Matthew 16:25-26: “*Anyone who loses his life for My sake will find it*”. These two verses make explicit universal human values which confirm the experience of many Christians and non Christians: to save one’s life, to lose one’s life, to find one’s life. The experience of many is the following: anyone who is always seeking goods and riches is never satisfied. Anyone who gives himself to others, forgetting himself, experiences great happiness. This is the experience of the mothers who give themselves and of so many people who do not think of self, but think of others. Many do this and live in this way almost out of instinct, as something which comes from the bottom of the heart. Others act in this way because they have had a painful experience of frustration which has led them to change attitude. Jesus is right in saying, “*Anyone who wants to save his life will lose it; but anyone who loses his life for My sake will find it*”. The reason is important: “*For My sake*”, or like Mark says: “*For the sake of the Gospel*” (Mk 8:35). He ends saying, “*What, then will anyone gain by winning the whole world and forfeiting his life? Or what can anyone offer in exchange for his life?*” This

last phrase recalls the psalm where it is said that no one is capable of paying the ransom for his life: *“But no one can ever redeem himself or pay his own ransom to God; the price for himself is too high, it can never be that he will live on for ever and avoid the sight of the abyss”* (Ps 49: 8-10).

- Matthew 16:27-28: *The Son of Man is going to come in the glory of the Father and He will reward each one according to his behavior.* These two verses refer to the hope regarding the coming of the Son of Man in the last times, as judge of humanity, as he is presented in the vision of the prophet Daniel (Dan 7:13-14). The first verse says, *“The Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels and will reward each one according to his behavior”*. (Mt 16:27). This phrase speaks about the justice of the Judge. Each one will receive according to his own behavior. The second verse says, *“There are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming with His kingdom”*. (Mt 16:28). This phrase is an advertisement to help us perceive the coming of Jesus, the Judge of the actions of life. Some thought that Jesus would have come afterwards (1 Thess 4:15-18). But in fact, Jesus was already present in persons, especially in the poor. They did not perceive this, even though Jesus Himself had said, *“Every time that you have helped the poor, the sick, the homeless, the prisoner, the pilgrim, you helped Me, it was Me!”* (cf. Mt 25: 34-45).

4) Personal questions

- Anyone who loses his life will find it. What experience do I have regarding this?
- The words of Paul: *“As for me, instead, there is no other glory than the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified for me and I for the world”*. Do I have the courage to repeat these words in my life?
- From Matt 16:25, to Lk 9:24, to Jn 21:18 we learn of the importance of following rather than leading. In my life, do I follow, give my life to others, or do I "lead my own life"?

5) 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)

Lectio Divina Saturday, August 10, 2019

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Almighty and ever-living God,
your Spirit made us Your children,
confident to call You Father.
Increase your Spirit within us
and bring us to our promised inheritance.

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

2) Gospel Reading - John 12:24-26

Jesus said to his disciples: "Amen, amen, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will preserve it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there also will my servant be. The Father will honor whoever serves me."

3) Reflection

- This passage contains solemn and crucial words concerning the method by which the mission of Jesus and His disciples "produces much fruit." This solemn and central declaration of Jesus; "unless a wheat grain falls into the ground and dies, it remains only a single grain; but if it dies, it yields a large harvest" (v. 24), is inserted in the narrative of 12:12-36 where the encounter of Jesus as Messiah with Israel and the rejection by the Jews of His messianic proposal is told. What are the principal themes that describe the messianism of Jesus? The Jews expected a messiah who would be a powerful king, who would continue with the royal style of David and would restore to Israel its glorious past. Instead, Jesus, places in the center of His messianism the gift of His life and the possibility given to humanity of accepting God's plan for His life.
- The story of a seed. The gift of His life, as a crucial characteristic of His messianism. Jesus outlines it with a mini parable. He describes a central and decisive event of His life drawing from the agricultural environment, where He takes the images to render His parables interesting and immediate. It is the story of a seed: a small parable to communicate with the people in a simple and transparent way: a seed begins its course or journey in the dark matter of the earth, where it is suffocated and withers but in the spring it becomes a green stalk and in the summer a spike charged with grain. The focal points of the parable are both the production of much fruit and the finding of eternal life. The seed that breaks through the darkness of earth has been interpreted by the early Fathers of the Church as a symbolical reference to the Incarnation of the Son of God. In the ground it seems that the vital force of the seed is destined to get lost because the seed withers and dies. But then the surprise of nature: in the summer when the spikes turn golden, the profound secret of that death is revealed. Jesus knows that death is becoming imminent, threatens His person, even though he does not see it as a beast that devours. It is true that it has the characteristics of darkness and of being ripped, but for Jesus it contains the secret force typical of child birth, a mystery of fecundity and of life. In the light of this vision one can understand another expression used by Jesus: "Anyone who loves his life will lose it and anyone who hates his own life in this world will preserve it for eternal life." Anyone who considers his own life as a cold property to be lived in egoism is like a seed enclosed in itself and without any hope for life. On the contrary, if one who "hates his life," a very sharp semitic expression, it is only then that life becomes creative: it is a source of peace, of happiness and of life. It is the reality of the seed that sprouts. But the reader can also see in the

mini parable of Jesus another dimension: that of the “Passover.” Jesus knows that in order to lead humanity to the threshold of divine love He has to go through the dark way of death on the cross. On the trail of this life the disciple also faces his own “hour”, that of death, with the certainty that it will lead to eternal life, that is to say, to full communion with God.

- In synthesis. The story of the seed is that of dying in order to multiply itself; its function is that of service to life. The annihilation of Jesus is comparable to the seed of life buried in the earth. In Jesus’ life, to love is to serve and to serve is to lose oneself in the life of others, to die to oneself in order to allow others to live. While His “hour” is approaching, the conclusion of His mission, Jesus assures His own with the promise of a consolation and of a joy without end, accompanied by every type of disturbance or trouble. He gives the example of the seed that has to wither and of the woman who has to endure the pangs of childbirth. Christ has chosen the cross for Himself and for His own: anyone who wants to be His disciple is called to share the same path. He always spoke to His disciples in a radical way: “Anyone who wants to save his life will lose it; but anyone who loses his life for My sake, will save it” (Lk 9: 24).

4) Personal questions

- Does your life express the gift of yourself? Is it a seed of love that makes love be born? Are you aware that in order to be a seed of joy, so that there will be joy in the wheat grain, the moment of sowing is necessary?
- Can you say that you have chosen the Lord if later you do not embrace the cross with Him? When the hard struggle breaks out in you between “yes” or “no,” between courage and fear, between faith and unbelief, between love and egotism, do you feel lost, thinking that such temptations are not suitable for those who follow Jesus?

5) Concluding Prayer

All goes well for one who lends generously,
who is honest in all his dealing;
for all time to come he will not stumble,
for all time to come the upright will be remembered. (Ps 112:5-6)

Lectio Divina Sunday, August 11, 2019

The teaching of Jesus concerning vigilance
Luke 12:32-48

1. Opening prayer

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of Your faithful.
You who have already come to make us faithful,
come now to make us blessed.
You who have come so that, with Your help,

we may glory in the hope of sharing
in the glory of the children of God,
come again that we may also glory in its possession.
It is You who confirm, consolidate,
perfect and bring to fulfillment.
The Father created us, the Son redeemed us:
fulfill then that which is Yours.
Introduce us to the whole truth,
to the enjoyment of the highest Good,
to the vision of the Father, the abundance of all delights,
the joy of joys. Amen
(Gualtiero di S. Vittore)

2. Lectio

a) A key to the reading:

We have here a double context: the formation of the disciples during Jesus' journey towards Jerusalem (9:51-19:28) and the reaction of the converted pagans in the communities of Luke after their initial enthusiasm and the prolonged coming of the Lord. The disciples are scared (9:45) at the new idea of the mission of Jesus who has to suffer (9:22,43-44), and in them the more comforting idea of a glorious Messiah continues to dominate. Similarly, in the new Christian communities (in the 80's), a revival of the pagan spirit begins to grow. Perhaps, before converting definitely and deeply, put off this change of life and way of thinking? Jesus assures His disciples with three parables and makes them reflect on the meaning of meeting with God, on the meaning of vigilance and of the responsibility of each one in the present situation.

b) A suggested division of the text:

12:32-35 introduction.

12:36-38 the parable of the master who returns from his wedding.

12:39 the parable of the thief who forces his way.

12:40-41 the disciples implicated.

12:42-46 the parable of the steward.

12:47-48 conclusion.

c) The text:

Jesus said to his disciples: “Do not be afraid any longer, little flock, for your Father is pleased to give you the kingdom. Sell your belongings and give alms. Provide money bags for yourselves that do not wear out, an inexhaustible treasure in heaven that no thief can reach nor moth destroy. For where your treasure is, there also will your heart be. “Gird your loins and light your lamps and be like servants who await their master’s return from a wedding, ready to open immediately when he comes and knocks. Blessed are those servants whom the master finds vigilant on his arrival. Amen, I say to you, he will gird himself, have them recline at table, and proceed to wait on them. And should he come in the second or third watch and find them prepared in this way,



blessed are those servants. Be sure of this: if the master of the house had known the hour when the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. You also must be prepared, for at an hour you do not expect, the Son of Man will come.” Then Peter said, “Lord, is this parable meant for us or for everyone?” And the Lord replied, “Who, then, is the faithful and prudent steward whom the master will put in charge of his servants to distribute the food allowance at the proper time? Blessed is that servant whom his master on arrival finds doing so. Truly, I say to you, the master will put the servant in charge of all his property. But if that servant says to himself, ‘My master is delayed in coming,’ and begins to beat the menservants and the maidservants, to eat and drink and get drunk, then that servant’s master will come on an unexpected day and at an unknown hour and will punish the servant severely and assign him a place with the unfaithful. That servant who knew his master’s will but did not make preparations nor act in accord with his will shall be beaten severely; and the servant who was ignorant of his master’s will but acted in a way deserving of a severe beating shall be beaten only lightly. Much will be required of the person entrusted with much, and still more will be demanded of the person entrusted with more.”

3. A moment of prayerful silence

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

a) A few questions:

- What did I feel when I read the text: fear, trust, surprise, joy, hope, confusion. . . ?
- How far does Christian life mean joy to me and how far is it a burden? How far is it a matter of duty and how far of love?
- What do I feel when I think of a sudden death for me?
- How far is communion with God still an expectation for me and how far something that I already possess?
- How does the pagan thinking of “carpe diem”, contrary to Gospel values, manifest itself today?
- In my life, what does it mean to be vigilant, faithful, working for the Kingdom and prepared?

b) A commentary:

This is a catechesis on the return of the Lord.

12:32 There is no reason for fear.

Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you His kingdom. When the disciples are facing fear, Jesus consoles them with the metaphor of the flock (Jn 10; 21:15-17) and the good shepherd. One must fear false prophets (Mt 7:15). The Father's will is that not one be lost (Mt 18:12-16), He will give us everything (Rom 8:28-32). A place has been prepared for us from the beginning of time (Mt 25:34). We are heirs with the Son (1Pet 1:3-5).

12:33-34 Today we welcome the richness of possessing God, the only good. God alone suffices!

Sell your possessions, and give alms; provide yourselves with purses that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

Jesus had said that we must not store up physical treasures (Mt 6:20-21). The Christian community had understood the meaning of freedom from attachment to goods and the sharing of them (Acts 4:34) because time was short (1Cor 7:29-31). The new life in Christ becomes the criterion for ownership of any possession.

12:35 A daily commitment.

Let your loins be girded and your lamps burning;

Because it has pleased the Father to give us the kingdom, we must be ready to take possession of it, after we have left behind every hindrance. The Jews girded their long robes at the waist so as to be able to work better. Elijah girds himself in order to run (1Kings 18:46). The attitude that Jesus recommends to those who are expecting His coming is that of getting down to work and not to give in to mediocrity (1Thess 5:6-8; 1Pet 5:8; 1:13). Vigilance is fundamental for the Christian. The Christian's way of life is more than just an attitude for he/she has now put on Christ and is dedicated to His Kingdom.

12:37-38 Meeting God will be wonderful.

Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes; truly, I say to you, he will gird himself and have them sit at table, and he come and serve them. If he comes in the second watch, or in the third, and finds them so, blessed are those servants!

The action of the master who serves his servants is quite surprising! This was what Jesus did when He washed the feet of His disciples (Jn 13:4-5). The division of the night into parts (Mk 13:35) according to Roman custom, makes it more difficult for those watching. For those who are creatively faithful to the Lord, the future is guaranteed.

12:39 Let us not waste time (and money!) in trying to look into the future.

But know this: that if the householder had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would have been awake and would not have left his house to be broken into.

One argument in favor of vigilance is that we do not know when the Lord will come (Mt 24:42-51). Both the day of the final judgment and of our individual death are

unknown. His coming cannot be foreseen (Rev 3:3). This made a great impression on the disciples (1Thess 2:1-2; 2Pet 3:10).

12:40-41 Love not formal membership must be our strength.

You also must be ready; for the Son of man is coming at an unexpected hour. Peter said, "Lord, are You telling this parable for us or for all?"

Peter, his old self, still thinks of getting some privileges because he had left everything behind to follow Jesus (Mt 19:27). Jesus helps Peter grow in conscience by answering indirectly through the parable of the good steward.

Conversion is a life-long process, also for those who feel close to the Lord.

12:42-44 Combining vigilance and faithful service to the task entrusted to us.

And the Lord said, "Who then is the faithful and wise steward, whom his master will set over his household, to give them their portion of food at the proper time? Blessed is that servant whom his master when he comes will find so doing. Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions.

Luke uses "steward" rather than "servant" (Mt 24:45) almost suggesting the question made by Peter. Those responsible, particularly, have to be faithful in their service.

12:45-46 Not putting off our conversion to an indefinite tomorrow.

But if that servant says to himself, "My master is delayed in coming," and begins to beat the manservants and the maidservants, and to eat and drink and get drunk, the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know, and will punish him with the unfaithful.

There are those who welcomed enthusiastically the Gospel message, but now, faced with present difficulties and consequent commitments, begin to take up once more their old habits: violence, intemperance, not following instincts, all values that are contrary to the Gospel.

12:47 Giving according to the measure that we have received.

That servant who knew his master's will, but did not make ready or act according to his will, shall receive a severe beating. But he who did not know, and did what deserved a beating, shall receive a light beating.

The Lord will reward each one according to his/her deeds (Mt 16:27) and according to the grace received (Rom 11:11-24). Jews, pagans, converted persons or those faithful to their religion will be judged according to their right conscience.

12:48 For great will be the eternal communion with God.

Every one to whom much is given, of him will much be required; and of him to whom men commit much they will demand the more.

St. John of the Cross says that at the end of life we will be judged on love. See also Mt 25:15-16.

4. Psalm 33:1-5; 13-15; 18-22

Rejoice in the Lord, O you righteous!

Praise befits the upright.

Praise the Lord with the lyre,

make melody to Him with the harp of ten strings!

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

The Lord looks down from heaven,
He sees all the sons of men;
from where He sits enthroned
He looks forth on all the inhabitants of the earth,
He who fashions the hearts of them all,
and observes all their deeds.

Behold, the eye of the Lord is on those who fear Him,
on those who hope in His steadfast love,
that He may deliver their soul from death,
and keep them alive in famine.
Our soul waits for the Lord;
He is our help and shield.
Yea, our heart is glad in Him,
because we trust in His holy Name.
Let Thy steadfast love, O Lord, be upon us,
even as we hope in Thee.

5. Closing prayer

Father, may the same faith burn in our hearts as that flame that urged Abraham to live on earth as a pilgrim. May our light never dim, so that, vigilant in expectation of Your hour, we may be ushered by You into our eternal homeland (Collect 19th Sunday C). Amen.

Lectio Divina Monday, August 12, 2019

1) Opening prayer

Almighty and ever-living God,
your Spirit made us Your children,
confident to call You Father.
Increase Your Spirit within us
and bring us to our promised inheritance.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, Your Son,
who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

2) Gospel Reading - Matthew 17:22-27

As Jesus and his disciples were gathering in Galilee, Jesus said to them, "The Son of Man is to be handed over to men, and they will kill him, and he will be raised on the third day." And they were overwhelmed with grief. When they came to Capernaum, the collectors of the temple tax approached Peter and said, "Does not your teacher pay the temple tax?" "Yes," he said. When he came into the house, before he had time to speak, Jesus asked him, "What is your opinion, Simon? From whom do the kings of the earth take tolls or census tax? From their subjects or from foreigners?" When he said, "From foreigners," Jesus said to him, "Then the subjects are exempt. But that we may not offend them, go to the sea, drop in a hook, and take the first fish that comes up. Open its mouth and you will find a coin worth twice the temple tax. Give that to them for me and for you."

3) Reflection

- The five verses of today's Gospel speak about two very different themes between them. (a) The second announcement of the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus (Mt 17:22-23); and (b) they report Jesus' conversation with Peter about paying the taxes and the dues to the temple (Mt 17:24-27).
- Matthew 17:22-23: The prediction of the death and resurrection of Jesus. The first prediction (Mt 16:21) had produced a strong reaction in Peter, who did not want to know anything about suffering nor the cross. Jesus had answered just as strongly: "Get behind Me, Satan!" (Mt 16:23). Here, in the second prediction, the reaction of the disciples is less strong, less aggressive. The prediction produces sadness. It seems that now they begin to understand that the cross forms part of the journey. The proximity of the death and the suffering weigh heavily on them, giving rise to a great discouragement. Even if Jesus tries to help them, the resistance of centuries against the idea of a crucified Messiah, was much greater.
- Matthew 17:24-25a: The question which the tax collectors ask Peter concerning the taxes. When they reached Capernaum, the tax collector of the taxes of the Temple asks Peter, "Does your Master not pay the half-shekel for the Temple?" Peter answered: "Yes." From the time of Nehemiah (V Century BC), the Jews who had returned from the Babylonian exile committed themselves solemnly in the Assembly to pay the various taxes and dues in order to allow the Temple to continue to function and to take care of the maintenance both of the priestly service and of the building of the Temple. (Neh 10:33-40). From what we can see from Peter's response, Jesus paid the taxes like any other Jew.
- Matthew 17:25b-26: Jesus' question to Peter concerning the taxes. The conversation between Jesus and Peter is very strange. When they reach home, Jesus asked, "Simon, what is your opinion? From whom do earthly kings take toll or tribute? From their sons or from foreigners?" Peter responds, "From foreigners." And Jesus says, "Therefore, the sons are exempt!" Probably, here we can see a discussion among the Christian Jews before the destruction of the Temple in the year 70. They asked themselves if they had to continue to pay the taxes of the Temple, as they did before. By Jesus' response they discover that they are not obliged to pay this tax: "The sons are exempt!" The sons are the Christians, but even if they are not obliged to pay, the recommendation of Jesus is

to pay in order not to cause scandal.

- Matthew 17:27: The conclusion of the conversation on the paying of the tax. The solution which Jesus gives to this situation is even stranger. He tells Peter, “However, so that we shall not be the downfall of others, go to the lake and cast a hook: take the first fish that rises, open its mouth and there you will find a shekel; take it and give it to them for Me and for yourself.” This was a strange miracle, strange as that of the 2000 pigs which rushed down into the sea (Mk 5:13). Whichever is the interpretation of this miraculous fact, this way of resolving the problem suggests that it is a question that is not too important for Jesus.

4) Personal questions

- The suffering of the Cross discourages and saddens the disciples. Has this ever happened in your life?
- How do you interpret the episode of the coin found in the mouth of the fish?
- What is the significance of using a fish here? Is there meaning to this that would be lost if it were just a matter of finding or having a coin instead?

5) Concluding Prayer

Praise Yahweh from the heavens,
praise Him in the heights.
Praise Him, all His angels,
praise Him, all His host! (Ps 148:1-2)

Lectio Divina Tuesday, August 13, 2019

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Almighty and ever-living God,
Your Spirit made us Your children,
confident to call You Father.
Increase Your Spirit within us
and bring us to our promised inheritance.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, Your Son,
who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

2) Gospel Reading - Matthew 18:1-5, 10, 12-14

The disciples approached Jesus and said, “Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven?” He called a child over, placed it in their midst, and said, “Amen, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will not enter the Kingdom of heaven. Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven. And

whoever receives one child such as this in my name receives me. “See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that their angels in heaven always look upon the face of my heavenly Father. What is your opinion? If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them goes astray, will he not leave the ninety-nine in the hills and go in search of the stray? And if he finds it, amen, I say to you, he rejoices more over it than over the ninety-nine that did not stray. In just the same way, it is not the will of your heavenly Father that one of these little ones be lost.”

3) Reflection

- Here, in Chapter 18 of the Gospel of Matthew begins the fourth great discourse on the New Law, the discourse on the community. As has already been said before (on Monday of the 10th week of the year), the Gospel of Matthew, written for the communities of the Christian Jews of Galilee and Syria, presents Jesus as the new Moses. In the Old Testament, the Law of Moses was codified in the five books of the Pentateuch. Imitating the ancient model, Matthew represents the New Law in five great discourses: (a) The Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5:1-7, 29); (b) the discourse on the mission (Mt 10:1-42); (c) The discourse on the parables (Mt 13:1-52); (d) The discourse on the community (Mt 18:1-35); (e) The discourse on the future of the Kingdom (Mt 24:1-25,46). The narrative parts which are inserted among the five discourses describe the practice of Jesus and show how He practiced and embodied the New Law in His life.
- The Gospel today gives the first part of the discourse on the community (Mt 18:1-14) which has as key word “the little ones”. The little ones are not only the children, but also the poor, those who are not important in society and in the community, and also the children. Jesus asks that these “little ones” should always be the center of the concern of the communities because “The Father in Heaven does not will that one of these little ones should be lost” (Mt 18:14).
- Matthew 18:1: The question of the disciples which provokes the teaching of Jesus. The disciples want to know who is greater in the Kingdom. The simple fact of this question reveals that they have not understood anything or very little of the message of Jesus. The whole discourse on the community is given in order to make them understand that among the followers of Jesus the spirit of service should prevail, the gift of self, of pardon, of reconciliation and of gratuitous love, without seeking one’s own interest and one’s own advancement.
- Matthew 18:2-5: The fundamental criterion: the little one and the greater one. The disciples ask for a criteria so as to be able to measure the importance of the people in the community: “Who is the greater in the Kingdom of Heaven?” Jesus answers that it is the little ones! The little ones are not socially important; they do not belong to the world of the powerful. The disciples have to become children. Instead of growing up, to the heights, they must grow down and toward the periphery, where the poor and the little ones live. In this way, they will be greater in the Kingdom! The reason is the following: “Anyone who receives one of these little ones receives Me”. Jesus identifies Himself with them. The love of Jesus for the little ones cannot be explained. Children have no merit. It is the complete gratuity of the love of God which manifests itself and asks to be imitated in the community of those who call themselves disciples of Jesus.
- Matthew 18:6-9: Do not scandalize the little ones. These four verses concerning the scandal to little ones are omitted from today’s Gospel. We give a brief commentary on

them. To scandalize the little ones means this: to be the cause for them to lose their faith in God and to abandon the community. Matthew keeps a very hard saying of Jesus: “Anyone who scandalizes even one of these little ones who believe in Me, it would be better for him to have a mill stone tied around his neck and then be thrown into the sea”. It is a sign that at that time many little ones no longer identified themselves with the community and sought another refuge. And today, in Latin America, for example, every year approximately three million people abandon the historical Church and go to the Evangelical churches. This is a sign that they do not feel at home among us. What is lacking in us? What is the cause of this scandal to the little ones? In order to avoid the scandal, Jesus orders them to cut off their foot or take out their eye. This sentence cannot be taken literally. It means that we should be very firm, strict in fighting against any scandal which draws the little ones away. We cannot, in any way, allow that the little ones feel marginalized in our community, because in this case, the community would not be a sign of the Kingdom of God.

- Matthew 18:10-11: The angels of the little ones see the face of the Father. Jesus recalls Psalm 91. The little ones take Yahweh as their refuge and make the most High their fortress (Ps 91:9) and because of this, “No disaster can overtake you, no plague come near your tent; He has given angels orders about you to guard you wherever you go. They will carry you in their arms in case you trip over a stone” (Ps 91:10,12).

- Matthew 18:12-14: The parable of the one hundred sheep. According to Luke, this parable reveals the joy of God on the conversion of a sinner (Lk 15: 3-7). According to Matthew, it reveals that the Father does not want even one of the little ones to be lost. In other words, the little ones should be the pastoral priority of the community, of the Church. They should be in the center of the concern of all. Love for the little ones and the excluded should be the axis of the community of those who want to follow Jesus, because it is in this way that the community becomes the proof of the gratuitous love of God, who accepts all.

4) Personal questions

- Who are the poorest people of our neighborhood? Do they participate in our community? Do they feel at home or do they find in us a cause to withdraw?
- God the Father does not want any of the little ones to get lost. What does this mean for our community?
- Should the pastor of a community spend his time on the “little ones” in the community, the poor and neglected, or on the rich who might be able to provide for the economics of the community? Is there a balance, or is “balance” just another word for compromise – a compromise on Jesus’ instructions? Does your answer also apply to members of the community as well?
- Many who leave the Church do so because of disagreement over teachings, such as the Church’s stand on abortion or remarriage. Some believe that there is no such thing as sin. How could, or should, the community bring these “lost sheep” back, without sacrificing the truth?

5) Concluding Prayer

Your instructions are my eternal heritage,
they are the joy of my heart.
I devote myself to obeying Your statutes,
their recompense is eternal. (Ps 119:111-112)

Lectio Divina Wednesday, August 14, 2019

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Almighty and ever-living God,
Your Spirit made us Your children,
confident to call You Father.
Increase Your Spirit within us
and bring us to our promised inheritance.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, Your Son,
who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

2) Gospel Reading - Matthew 18:15-20

Jesus said to his disciples: "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have won over your brother. If he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, so that every fact may be established on the testimony of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell the Church. If he refuses to listen even to the Church, then treat him as you would a Gentile or a tax collector. Amen, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again, amen, I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything for which they are to pray, it shall be granted to them by my heavenly Father. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

3) Reflection

- In the Gospel of today and of tomorrow we read and meditate on the second half of the Discourse on the Community. Today's Gospel speaks about fraternal correction (Mt 18:15-18) and of prayer in common (Mt 18:19-20). The Gospel of tomorrow speaks about pardon (Mt 18:21-22) and presents the parable of pardon without limitations (Mt 18:23-35). The key word in this second part is "to forgive". The accent is on reconciliation. In order that there may be reconciliation which will allow the little ones to return, it is important to know how to dialogue and to forgive, because the foundation of fraternity is the gratuitous love of God. It is only in this way that the community will be a sign of the Kingdom. It is not easy to forgive. There is a certain grief which continues to strike the heart as with a hammer. There are those who say, "I forgive, but I do not forget!" There is resentment, tensions, clashes, diverse opinions, and offenses,

provocations which render pardon and reconciliation difficult.

- The organization of the words of Jesus in the five Great Discourses of the Gospel of Matthew indicates that at the end of the first century, the communities had very concrete forms of catechesis. The Discourse of the Community (Mt 18:1-35), for example, gives updated instructions of how to proceed in case of any conflict among the members of the community and how to find criteria to solve the conflicts. Matthew gathers together those sayings of Jesus which can help the communities of the end of the first century to overcome the two more acute problems which they had to face at that moment, that is, the exodus of the little ones because of the scandal given by some and the need to dialogue in order to overcome the rigor of others in accepting the little ones, the poor, in the community.

- Matthew 18:15-18: Fraternal correction and the power to forgive. These verses give simple norms of how to proceed in case of conflicts in the community. If a brother or a sister should sin, if they had behavior not in accordance to the life of the community, they should not be denounced immediately. First, it is necessary to try to speak with them alone. Then it is necessary to try to know the reasons of the other. If no results are obtained, then it is necessary to take two or three persons of the community to see if it is possible to obtain some result. Only in extreme cases is it necessary to expose the problem to the whole community. If the person refuses to listen to the community, then they should be considered by you as “a sinner or a pagan”, that is, as someone who is not part of the community. Therefore, it is not you who excludes, but it is the person himself/herself who excludes himself/herself. The community gathered together only verifies or ratifies the exclusion. The grace to be able to forgive and to reconcile in the name of God was given to Peter (Mt 16:19), to the Apostles (Jn 20: 23) and, here in the Discourse on the Community, to the community itself (Mt 18:18). This reveals the importance of the decisions which the community assumes in regard to its members.

- Matthew 18:19: Prayer in common. The exclusion does not mean that the person is abandoned to his/her own fate. No! The person may be separated from the community, but will never be separated from God. In the case in which the conversation in the community does not produce any result, and the person does not want to be integrated in the life of the community, there still remains the last possibility to remain together with the Father to obtain reconciliation, and Jesus guarantees that the Father will listen: “If two of you agree to ask anything at all, it will be granted to you by My Father in Heaven; for where two or three meet in My Name, I am there among them”.

- Matthew 18:20: The presence of Jesus in the community. The reason of the certainty of being heard by the Father is the promise of Jesus: “Because where there are two or three who meet in My name, I am there among them!” Jesus is the center, the axis, of the community, and, as such, together with the community, will always be praying with us to the Father, in order that He may grant the gift of the return of the brother or the sister who have excluded themselves.

4) Personal questions

- Why is it so difficult to forgive? In our community, is there some space for reconciliation? In which way?

- Jesus says: "For wherever there are two or three who meet in My Name, I am also there among them". What does this mean for us today?

- What is the balance between forgiveness and the protection of others which we have responsibility for? Both as individuals and as a society or community, what does it mean to forgive, forget, and still protect the vulnerable?

5) Concluding Prayer

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

Lectio Divina Thursday, August 15, 2019

The visit of Mary to Elizabeth, Lk 1:39-56

1) Opening Prayer:

Holy Spirit, Spirit of Wisdom, of Science, of Intelligence, of Counsel, fill us, we pray, with the knowledge of the Word of God. Fill us with every kind of spiritual wisdom and intelligence, so as to be able to understand it in depth.

May we, under Your guidance, be able to understand the Gospel of this Marian solemnity. Holy Spirit, we need You, You, the only one who continually molds in us the figure and the form of Jesus. And we turn to you, Mary, Mother of Jesus and of the Church, you who have lived the inebriating and total presence of the Holy Spirit, you who have experienced the power of His force in you, who has seen it operating in your Son Jesus from the time when He was in the maternal womb. Open our heart and our mind, so that they may be docile to listen to the Word of God.

2) Reading of the Gospel:

Mary set out and traveled to the hill country in haste to a town of Judah, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the infant leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, cried out in a loud voice and said, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For at the moment the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled."

And Mary said:

"My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my Savior for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant. From this day all generations will call me blessed: the Almighty has done great things for me and holy is his Name. He has mercy on those who fear him in every generation. He has shown the strength of his arm, and has scattered the proud in their conceit. He has cast down the mighty from their thrones, and has lifted up the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. He has come to the help of his servant Israel for he has

remembered his promise of mercy, the promise he made to our fathers, to Abraham and his children forever." Mary remained with her about three months and then returned to her home.

3) Moments of prayerful silence:

Silence is a quality of the one who knows how to listen to God. Try to create in yourself an atmosphere of peace and of silent adoration. If you are able to be in silence before God, you will be able to listen to His breath, which is Life.

4) Meditatio

a) Key to the Reading:

Blessed are you among women

In the first part of today's Gospel, Elizabeth's words resound: "Blessed are you among women", preceded by a spatial movement. Mary leaves Nazareth, situated in the north of Palestine, to go to the south, approximately fifty kilometers, to a place which tradition has identified as the present day Ain Karem, not too far from Jerusalem. The physical movement shows the interior sensibility of Mary, who is not closed in on herself, to contemplate, in a private and intimate way, the mystery of the Divine Maternity, which is being accomplished in her, but she is impelled toward the path of charity. She moves in order to go and help her elderly cousin. Mary's going to Elizabeth has the added connotation "in haste," which Saint Ambrose interprets as follows: "Mary set out in haste to the hill country, not because she did not believe the prophecy or because she was uncertain of the announcement or looked for proof, but because she was pleased with the promise and desired to render a service with devotion, with the impulse that she received from her intimate joy... The grace of the Holy Spirit does not entail slowness". The reader, though, knows that the true reason for the trip is not indicated, but can get it through information deduced from the context. The angel had told Mary that Elizabeth was pregnant, already in the sixth month (cf. v. 37). The fact that she remained there three months (cf. v. 56), just the time so that the child could be born, allows us to understand that Mary intended to help her cousin. Mary runs, and goes where there is an urgent need, the need for help, showing, in this way, a clear sensibility and concrete availability.

Together with Mary, Jesus, in His mother's womb, moves with her. From here it is easy to deduce the Christological value of the episode of Mary's visit to her cousin: above all, the attention is for Jesus. At first sight, it could seem to be a scene concentrated on the two women. In reality, what is important for the Evangelist is the prodigious fact of their conceptions. Mary's movement leads, in the final analysis, to the encounter between the two women.

As soon as Mary enters into the house and greets Elizabeth, John leaps in Elizabeth's womb. According to some, this leap is not comparable to the changing place of the fetus, which is experienced by every pregnant woman. Luke uses a particular Greek verb which precisely means "jumping". Wishing to interpret the verb a bit literally, it could connote "danced", thus excluding a physical phenomenon only. Someone has thought that this "dance" could be considered as a form of "homage" which John renders

to Jesus, inaugurating, though not yet born, that attitude of respect and of subjection which will characterize his life: “After me is coming someone who is more powerful than I, and I am not fit to kneel down and undo the strap of His sandals” (Mk 1:7). One day, John himself will give witness: “it is the bridegroom who has the bride; and yet the bridegroom’s friend, who stands there and listens to him, is filled with joy at the bridegroom’s voice. This is the joy that I feel and it is complete. He must grow greater, I must grow less” (Jn 3:29-30). Thus Saint Ambrose comments: “Elizabeth was the first one to hear the voice, but John is first to perceive the grace”. We find a confirmation of this interpretation in Elizabeth’s words, which, repeating the same Greek verb in v. 44 already employed in v. 41, when she says, “The child in my womb leapt for joy”. Luke, with these particular details, has wished to recall the wonders which took place in the intimacy of Nazareth. It is only now, thanks to this dialogue, that the mystery of the divine maternity leaves aside its secrecy and its individual dimension, to become a notable fact, and an object of appreciation and of praise.

Elizabeth’s words, “Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb! Why should I be honored with a visit from the mother of my Lord?” (vv. 42-43). With a Semitic expression which is equivalent to a superlative (“among women”), the Evangelist wishes to attract the attention of the reader on Mary’s role: to be the “Mother of the Lord”. And, then, a blessing is reserved for her (“Blessed are you”) and a beatitude. In what does this consist? It expresses Mary’s obedience to the Divine Will. Mary is not only the receiver of a mystery which makes her blessed, but also a person who knows how to accept and adhere to God’s will. Mary is a creature who believes, because she trusts in a simple word and which she has answered with her “yes” of love. And Elizabeth acknowledges this service of love, identifying her as “blessed as mother and blessed as believer”.

In the meantime, John perceives the presence of his Lord and exults, expressing with that interior movement the joy which springs from that contact of salvation. Mary will be the interpreter of that event in the Magnificat.

b) A song of love:

In this song Mary considers herself part of the anawim, of the “poor of God”, of those who “fear God” placing in Him all their trust and hope and who, on the human level, do not enjoy any right or prestige. The spirituality of the anawim can be synthesized in the words of Psalm 37:9: “In silence he is before God and hopes in Him”, because “those who hope in the Lord will possess the earth”.

In Psalm 86:6 the one who prays, turning to God says, “Give Your servant Your force.” Here the term “servant” expresses his being subjected, as well as the sentiment of belonging to God, of feeling secure with Him.

The poor, in the Biblical sense, are those who place their trust unconditionally in God; this is why they are to be considered, qualitatively, the best part of the people of Israel. The proud, on the other hand, are those who place all their trust in themselves.

Now, according to the Magnificat, the poor have a thousand reasons to rejoice, because God glorifies the anawim (Psalm 149:4) and humbles the proud. An image taken from the New Testament, which expresses very well the attitude of the poor of the Old Testament, is that of the Publican who with humility beats his breast, while the Pharisee,

boastful of his merits, is being consumed by his pride (Lk 19:9-14). Definitively, Mary celebrates all that God has done in her and all that He works in every creature. Joy and gratitude characterize this hymn of salvation which recognizes the greatness of God, but which also makes great the one who sings it.

5) Some questions for meditation:

- Is my prayer, above all, the expression of a sentiment or celebration and acknowledgment of God's action?
- Mary is presented as the believer in the Word of the Lord. How much time do I dedicate to listening to the Word of God?
- Is your prayer nourished from the Bible, as was Mary's? Or rather are you dedicated to devotions which produce a continuous tasteless and dull prayer? Are you convinced that to return to Biblical prayer is the assurance of finding solid nourishment, chosen by Mary herself ?
- Do you accept the logic of the Magnificat, which exalts the joy of giving, of losing in order to find, of accepting, the happiness of gratuity, of donation?

6) Oratio

a) Psalm 44 (45)

The Psalm in this second part, glorifies the Queen. In today's Liturgy these verses are applied to Mary and celebrate her greatness and beauty.

In your retinue are daughters of kings,
the consort at your right hand in gold of Ophir.

Listen, my daughter,
attend to my words and hear;
forget your own nation
and your ancestral home,
then the king will fall in love with your beauty;
He is your lord, bow down before Him.

Her companions are brought to her,
they enter the king's palace with joy and gladness.

b) Final Prayer:

The prayer which follows is a brief meditation on the maternal role of Mary in the life of the believer: "Mary, woman who knows how to rejoice, who knows how to exult, who allows herself to be visited by the full consolation of the Holy Spirit, teach us to pray so that we may also discover the source of joy. In the house of Elizabeth, your cousin, feeling accepted and understood in your most intimate secret, you burst out in a hymn of exultation of the heart, speaking of God, of you, about your relationship with Him, and of the unprecedented adventure of being the Mother of Christ and of all of us, holy people of God. Teach us to give our prayer a rhythm of hope and tremors of joy. The Gospel speaks to us about you, Mary, and of Elizabeth: both of you kept something in your heart which you did not dare or you did not wish to manifest to anyone. But each one of you felt understood by the other, on that prophetic day of the Visitation,

and you pronounced words of prayer and of feast. Your encounter becomes a liturgy of thanksgiving and of praise to your ineffable God. You, woman of profound joy, you sang the Magnificat, in rapture and amazed at all that the Lord was accomplishing in His humble servant. Magnificat is the cry, the explosion of joy, which explodes within each one of us, when one feels accepted and understood.”

7) Contemplatio

The Virgin Mary, the temple of the Holy Spirit, accepted with faith the Word and surrendered herself completely to the power of Love. Because of this she became the icon of interiority, that is, completely recollected under the gaze of God and abandoned to the power of the Most High. Mary keeps silence about herself, because everything in her can speak about the wonders of the Lord in her life.

Lectio Divina Friday, August 16, 2019

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Almighty and ever-living God,
Your Spirit made us Your children,
confident to call You Father.
Increase Your Spirit within us
and bring us to our promised inheritance.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, Your Son,
who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

2) Gospel Reading - Matthew 19:3-12

Some Pharisees approached Jesus, and tested him, saying, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause whatever?" He said in reply, "Have you not read that from the beginning the Creator made them male and female and said, For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, man must not separate." They said to him, "Then why did Moses command that the man give the woman a bill of divorce and dismiss her?" He said to them, "Because of the hardness of your hearts Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. I say to you, whoever divorces his wife (unless the marriage is unlawful) and marries another commits adultery." His disciples said to him, "If that is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry." He answered, "Not all can accept this word, but only those to whom that is granted. Some are incapable of marriage because they were born so; some, because they were made so by others; some, because they have renounced marriage for the sake of the Kingdom of heaven. Whoever can accept this ought to accept it."

3) Reflection

Context. Up to chapter 18 Matthew has shown how the discourses of Jesus have marked the different phases of the progressive constitution and formation of the community of disciples around their Master. Now in chapter 19, this small group withdraws from the territory of Galilee and arrives in the territories of Judea. The call of Jesus that involves His disciples advances more until the decisive choice: the acceptance or rejection of the person of Jesus. Such a phase takes place along the road that leads to Jerusalem (chapters 19-20), and finally with the arrival in the city and at the Temple (chapters 21-23). All of the encounters that Jesus experiences in the course of these chapters take place during this journey from Galilee to Jerusalem.

- The encounter with the Pharisees. Passing through Transjordan (19:1) the first encounter is with the Pharisees and the theme of Jesus' discussion with them becomes a reason for reflection for the group of the disciples. The question of the Pharisees concerns divorce and challenges Jesus. The Pharisees want to accuse Jesus because of His teaching. Matthew considers it "testing Him," "a way of tempting Him." The question is really a crucial one: "Is it against the Law for a man to divorce his wife on any pretext whatsoever?" (19:3). The malicious attempt of the Pharisees to interpret the text of Deut 24:1 to place Jesus in difficulty does not escape the attention of the reader: "Suppose a man has taken a wife and consummated the marriage, but she has not pleased him and he has found some impropriety of which to accuse her, he has, therefore, made out a writ of divorce for her and handed it to her and then dismissed her from his house." This text had given cause, throughout the centuries, for innumerable discussions: to admit divorce for any reason whatsoever; to request a minimum of bad behavior, is a true adultery.

- It is God who unites. Jesus responds to the Pharisees having recourse to Gen 2:24, which presents the question about the primary will of God, the Creator. The love that unites man to woman, comes from God and because of its origin, it unifies and cannot be separated. If Jesus quotes Gn 2:24: "This is why a man leaves his father and mother and becomes attached to his wife and they become one flesh" (19:5), it is because he wants to underline a particular and absolute principle: it is the creating will of God that unites man and woman. When a man and a woman unite together in marriage, it is God who unites them; the term "coniugi" - couple – comes from the verb joined together, to unite, that is to say, that the joining together of the two partners sexually is the effect of the creative word of God. Jesus' response to the Pharisees reaches its summit: marriage is indissoluble from its original constitution. Jesus continues this time drawing from Mal 2:13-16: to repudiate the wife is to break the covenant with God and according to the prophets this covenant has to be lived, above all, by the spouses in their conjugal union (Hos 1-3; Isa 1: 21-26; Jer 2:2; 3:1,6-12; Ezek 16; 23; Isa 54:6-10; 60-62). Jesus' response appears as a contradiction to the Law of Moses which grants the possibility of granting a writ of divorce. To justify His response Jesus reminds the Pharisees, "If Moses gave this possibility it is because you were so hardhearted" (v. 8), more concrete, because of your lack of acceptance to the Word of God. The Law of Gen 1:26; 2:24 had never been modified, but Moses was obliged to adapt it to an attitude of indocility. The first marriage was not annulled by adultery. To contemporary man, and particularly to the ecclesial community, the word of Jesus clearly says that there should be no divorces. Nevertheless, we see that there are; in pastoral life divorced people are accepted. The

possibility of entering into the Kingdom is always open to them. The reaction of the disciples is immediate: “If that is how things are between husband and wife, it is advisable not to marry” (v. 10). Jesus’ response continues to uphold the indissolubility of matrimony, impossible for the human mentality but possible for God. The eunuch of whom Jesus speaks is also not the one who is unable to generate but the one who, separated from his wife, continues to live in continence. He remains faithful to the first conjugal bond: he is a eunuch as regards all other women.

4) Personal questions

- With regard to marriage, do we know how to accept the teaching of Jesus with simplicity, without adapting it to our own choice to be comfortable?
- The evangelical passage has reminded us that the design of the Father for man and for woman is a wonderful project of love. Are you aware that love has an essential law: it implies the total and full gift of one’s own person to the other?

5) Concluding Prayer

God, create in me a clean heart,
renew within me a resolute spirit,
do not thrust me away from Your presence,
do not take away from me Your spirit of holiness. (Ps 51:10-11)

Lectio Divina Saturday, August 17, 2019

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Almighty and ever-living God,
Your Spirit made us Your children,
confident to call You Father.

Increase Your Spirit within us
and bring us to our promised inheritance.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, Your Son,
who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

2) Gospel Reading

Children were brought to Jesus that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples rebuked them, but Jesus said, "Let the children come to me, and do not prevent them; for the Kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." After he placed his hands on them, he went away.

3) Reflection

- The Gospel today is very brief: only three verses. The Gospel describes how Jesus accepts the children.

- Matthew 19:13: The attitude of the disciples concerning the children. People brought little children to Jesus, for Him to lay His hands on them and pray. The disciples scolded the mothers. Why? Children were, as they were not long ago, kept to themselves. “Seen and not heard” as the saying goes. As has been said before, they were the insignificant of society. This was different than the laws of purity where it was important to avoid their getting close to Him and touching Him. It already had happened one time, when a leper touched Jesus. Jesus became unclean, impure and could no longer enter the city. He had to remain in deserted places (Mk 1:4-45).

- Matthew 19:14-15: Jesus’ attitude: He accepts and defends the life of the children. Jesus reprimanded the disciples and said, “Let the little children alone, and do not stop them from coming to Me, for it is to such as these that the Kingdom of Heaven belongs.” Jesus does not care about transgressing the norms which prevent fraternity and acceptance to be given to the little ones. The new experience of God the Father has marked the life of Jesus and gives Him new eyes to perceive and to value the relationships among people. Jesus gets on the side of the little ones, of the excluded, and takes on their defense. It is impressive when we see everything which the Bible says regarding the attitudes of Jesus in defense of the life of the children, of the little ones:

- a) To give thanks for the Kingdom present in the little ones. Jesus’ joy is great when He sees that the children, the little ones, understand the things of the Kingdom which He announced to the people. “Father, I thank You!” (Mt 11:25-26) Jesus recognizes that the little ones understand more about the things of the Kingdom than the doctors!

- b) To defend the right to shout or cry out. When Jesus entered the Temple, He upset the tables of the money changers, and the children were those who shouted, “Hosanna to the Son of David!” (Mt 21:15). Criticized by the high priests and the Scribes, Jesus defends them and in His defense He recalls the Scriptures (Mt 21:16).

- c) To identify with the little ones. Jesus embraces the little ones and identifies Himself with them. Anyone who accepts a little one accepts Jesus (Mk 9:37). “Insofar as you have done it to one of the least of these brothers of Mine, you did it to Me”. (Mt 25:40).

- d) To accept and not to scandalize. One of the hardest words of Jesus is against those who are a cause of scandal for the little ones, that is, who are the reason why the little ones no longer believe in God. Because of this, it would have been better for them to be thrown into the sea with a millstone around their neck (Lk 17:1-2; Mt 18:5-7). Jesus condemns the system, both the political one as well as the religious one, which causes the little ones, the humble people, to lose faith in God.

- e) To become like children. Jesus asks His disciples to become like children and to accept the Kingdom as children do. Without this, it is impossible to enter the Kingdom (Lk 9:46-48). It indicates that the children are teachers of the adults. That was not normal. We are accustomed to the contrary.

- f) To accept and to touch. (Today’s Gospel). The mothers with their children who get close to Jesus to ask Him to bless the children. The Apostles react and drive them away. Jesus corrects the adults and accepts the mothers with the children. He touches the children and embraces them. “Let the little children come to Me, and do not stop them!” (Mk 10:13-16; Mt 19:13-15).

- g) To accept and to take care. Many are the children and the young people whom He accepts, takes care of and raises from the dead: the twelve year-old daughter of

Jairus, (Mk 5:41-42), the daughter of the Canaanite woman (Mk 7:29-30), the son of the widow of Nain (Lk 7:14-15), the epileptic child (Mk 9:25-26), the son of the Centurion (Lk 7:9-10), the son of the public officer (Jn 4:50), the boy with five loaves of bread and two fishes (Jn 6:9).

4) Personal questions

- Children: what have you learned from children throughout the years of your life? And what do children learn about God, about Jesus and His life, from you?
- Which image of Jesus do I give to children? A severe God, a good God, a distant or absent God?

5) Concluding Prayer

Lord, give me back the joy of Your salvation,
sustain in me a generous spirit.
I shall teach the wicked Your paths,
and sinners will return to You. (Ps 51:12-13)

Lectio Divina Sunday, August 18, 2019

Attentive to the events.

Jesus teaches to read the signs of the times

Luke 12, 49-59

Opening prayer

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

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

1. LECTIO

a) The text:

Jesus said to his disciples: "I have come to set the earth on fire, and how I wish it were already blazing! There is a baptism with which I must be baptized, and how great is my anguish until it is accomplished! Do you think that I have come to establish peace on the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. From now on a household of five will be divided, three against two and two against three; a father will be divided against his son and a son against his father, a mother against her daughter and a daughter against her mother, a mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law." He also said to the crowds, "When you see (a) cloud rising in the west you say immediately that it is going to rain - and so it does; and when you notice that the wind is blowing from the south you say that it is going to be hot - and so it is. You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of the earth and the sky; why do you not know how to interpret the present time? "Why do you not judge for yourselves what is right? If you are to go with your opponent before a magistrate, make an effort to settle the matter on the way; otherwise your opponent will turn you over to the judge, and the judge hand you over to the constable, and the constable throw you into prison. I say to you, you will not be released until you have paid the last penny."



b) A moment of silence:

Let us allow the voice of the Word to resonate within us.

2. MEDITATIO

a) Some questions:

- *I have come to bring fire to the earth:* Fire presupposes a vehemence of sentiment and a center of life because where there is light, heat, force, movement, there is life, and not a life which is stagnant, but a life which is continuously nourished. Does the fire of the life of God burn in me?

- *Why not judge for yourselves what is upright?* The invitation to discern personally is even more urgent in a world in which opinions run after each other and form a "mass"... How much do I allow myself to be conditioned by the judgments and criteria chosen by others?

- *Make an effort to settle with him on the way...* You are walking to go to the tribunal because you think you are right, but the opponent also has the same certainty. How do I feel before the one who I feel is hostile toward me? Do I feel sure of myself to the point of going to the tribunal or rather do I try to agree with my opponent on the way?

b) Detailed Analysis of the Text:

v. 49. I have come to bring fire to the earth; and how I wish it were blazing already! The fire which is not extinguished comes from Heaven, it is the fire of the Spirit which

makes of all things that exist, the luminous and warm expression of the divine Presence among us. The Baptism of love. The light is born, the bread is born, the water is born, God is born! The cross, a new Bethlehem, house of the perfect bread, a new Emmaus, the hostel of the broken bread, a new Bethany, house of the perfumed bread offered to men forever.

v. 50. *There is a baptism I must still receive; and what constraint I am under until it is completed!* Anguish, the symptom of those fears which from within get hold of one and disfigure, distort and leave without breath, Jesus also experienced this. What can one do against anguish? Nothing can be done but only wait so that what is good is fulfilled and that the fears be involved in the event itself. Anguish clasps tightly and can demolish every possibility of interior movement. The anguish of the one who trusts and accepts life, even if it clasps the person tightly in a terrible vice like grip, does not demolish, but rather fortifies in so far as it renders the waiting free or devoid of illusions and of easy hopes.

v. 51. *Do you suppose that I am here to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division.* Man seeks peace. But what peace? The peace of “do not disturb me”, the peace of “let us not make problems”, the peace of “everything is fine”, a superficial peace. This peace is the earthly peace. Jesus has come to bring us the true peace, the fullness of the gifts of God. This peace then, is no longer called peace, but in so far as it is against the apparent peace, it is called, in the eyes of man “division”. It can well be said that the peace of Christ elects or chooses and in so far as it elects, it distinguishes, like a magnet which with its magnetic field attracts to itself what is of the same “nature”, but it does not attract anything which is not of a similar nature.

vv. 52-53. For from now on, a household of five will be divided: three against two and two against three; father opposed to son, son to father, mother to daughter, daughter to mother, mother-in-law to daughter-in-law, daughter-in-law to mother-in-law. Everything which divides does not come from God, because in God there is unity. But, in His name it is possible to go beyond the natural commandment. Honor your father and mother, says the ancient law, and the new law, which is that of love without limit, even says: He who loves father and mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. Division in this case can be understood as the priority of love, a hierarchy of values. To God, the source of life corresponds to the first place. To the father and the mother who have accepted, welcomed life, goes the second place... Such an order is in the logical nature of that order. It is not an honor to the father and the mother to disobey God or to love Christ less, because the love for father and mother is a love of response, the love of God is generating love.

vv. 54-55. He said again to the crowds, “When you see a cloud looming up in the west you say at once that rain is coming, and so it does. When the wind is from the south you

say it is going to be hot, and it is. Before reproaching the crowds, Jesus appreciates the good that they are capable of doing. If a cloud comes from the west, it is rain that comes. Man has this certainty as a result that he has been observing the natural phenomena up to the point of formulating laws. If the wind comes from the south, it will be hot. Confirmed and reflected upon, it regulates the consequences for us.

v. 56. Hypocrites! You know how to interpret the face of the earth and the sky. How is it you do not know how to interpret these times? Why not use the same criteria for the events of the present moment? History speaks for itself. Why not evaluate it on the basis of experience? The logic which binds premises and consequences is the same one on human events and on supernatural ones. The world of relationships, the world of religious convictions, the world of human expectations... everything is subject to the same law. Then, if Christ has been expected for centuries as the fulfillment of the promises of God, and if this Jesus of Nazareth fulfills the works of faith with the finger of God, why doubt that the Kingdom of God has arrived? This is hypocrisy. It is not to want to admit God's fidelity and to insist and persist in waiting for the fulfillment of what we have seen.

v. 57. *Why not judge for yourselves what is upright? What is upright can always be judged. It does not serve to wait for the judgment of others, and just the same, we are always bound to the thought, and the words, of others, to what happens and to what is projected, to perspectives of success and to thousands of hesitations. To trust one's correct judgment is wise!*

v. 58. *When you are going to court with your opponent, make an effort to settle with him on the way, or he may drag you before the judge and the judge hand you over to the officer and the officer have you thrown into prison.* The wisdom and the judgment of Jesus are directed toward something truly useful. Do not expect to receive justice, because no one is just to the point of being able to avoid being condemned to prison. We are all sinners! Therefore, instead of appealing to a false justice, that for which you consider yourself worthy to be absolved, it is better to appeal to harmony. Try to reach an agreement so as not to be led before the judge. You judge the facts and conclude that it is always better not to feel oneself free from guilt. Saint Paul says it: Neither do I judge myself... my judge is the Lord.

v. 59. *I tell you, you will not get out till you have paid the very last penny.* Who has no debts? Why do we want to live our life in a court to constantly decide who is guilty and who is innocent? Would it not be better to live simply, in agreement and harmony with everyone, since all seek to want what is good and all have fragility and weakness as the coin with which to pay?

c) Reflection:

If we too could bring fire to the earth of our heart! A fire capable of extending itself without causing a great fire, but creating cordial bonds of union and a lively exchange... The one who plays with fire will certainly have his hands burnt, but what a great benefit for all. Fire divides, it creates circles of encounter and barriers of inaccessible passages. Like in all divine things we find ourselves in at a crossroads: with Christ or against Him. Yes, because we must never forget that He is a sign of contradiction for all times, a stumbling stone for those who look to the top expecting miracles and prodigies and a corner stone for the one who looks at His tired hands and grasps tightly the hands of a carpenter trying to construct the house of hope, the Church. A time of grace: How not recognize it? If you go by a lighted fire, you feel the heat. Christ is the lighted fire or flame! If you cross a torrent flowing with water, on a suffocating hot day of summer, you feel the freshness and feel attracted by the movement of the water which comes toward you to quench your thirst and to give you moments of relief. Christ is the water which gushes out for eternal life! If at night you listen to the silence, you cannot but feel anxious waiting for the light of the new day which will rise. Christ is the Sun who rises! It is the word which at night is silence and in the East it becomes a syllable of a new dialogue. Why not become aware that it is just that all hostility falls and walk with anyone recognizing him as a brother? If you consider him an enemy, you are going to seek justice... If you consider him as a brother, the thought comes to your mind to take care of him and to walk together on a part of the road, to share with him your anguishes and your anxieties, and to listen to him about his difficulties.

3. ORATIO

Psalm 32

How blessed are those whose offense is forgiven,
whose sin blotted out.
How blessed are those to whom Yahweh imputes no guilt,
whose spirit harbors no deceit.

I said not a word,
but my bones wasted away from groaning all the day;
day and night Your hand lay heavy upon me;
my heart grew parched as stubble in summer drought.

I made my sin known to You,
did not conceal my guilt.
I said, "I shall confess my offense to Yahweh."
And You, for Your part,
took away my guilt,
forgave my sin.

That is why each of Your faithful ones
prays to You in time of distress.
Even if great floods overflow,
they will never reach Your faithful.

You are a refuge for me,
You guard me in trouble,
with songs of deliverance You surround me.

I shall instruct you
and teach you the way to go;
I shall not take my eyes off you.

Be not like a horse or a mule;
that does not understand bridle or bit;
if you advance to master them,
there is no means of bringing them near.

Countless troubles are in store for the wicked,
but one who trusts in Yahweh
is enfolded in His faithful love.

Rejoice in Yahweh,
exult all you upright,
shout for joy,
you honest of heart.

4. CONTEMPLATIO

Lord, You who search into my heart and make of my fears the paths to create the newness of gifts, enter into my anguish. There where I lose my hope and where the tremor devours me, there where every spark of grace burns my securities and makes of me a pile of ashes, there enkindle anew the fire of Your love. Give a look or gaze capable of penetrating reality and of fixing it on Your gaze which waits for me beyond the veil of all appearances. Do not allow that I be driven away from my desire of communion. And also there where in Your name I would find opposition, resistance, adversity, may be able to enter into the anguish of division to maintain alive the flame of the encounter with You!

Lectio Divina Monday, August 19, 2019

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

God our Father,
may we love You in all things and above all things
and reach the joy You have prepared for us
beyond all our imagining.

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

2) Gospel Reading - Matthew 19:16-22

A young man approached Jesus and said, "Teacher, what good must I do to gain eternal life?" He answered him, "Why do you ask me about the good? There is only One who is good. If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments." He asked him, "Which ones?" And Jesus replied, "You shall not kill; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal; you shall not bear false witness; honor your father and your mother; and you shall love your neighbor as yourself." The young man said to him, "All of these I have observed. What do I still lack?" Jesus said to him, "If you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." When the young man heard this statement, he went away sad, for he had many possessions.

3) Reflection

- The Gospel today speaks to us about a young man who asks Jesus which is the way to eternal life. Jesus indicates to him the way of poverty. The young man does not accept Jesus' proposal because he is very rich. A rich person is protected by the security of the riches which he possesses. He has difficulty opening the hand of his security. Attached to the advantages of his goods, he lives only to defend his own interests. A poor person does not have this concern. But there are some poor people who have the mentality of the rich. Often the desire for riches creates in the poor a great dependence and renders them slaves of consumerism, because they seek riches everywhere. They no longer have time to dedicate themselves to the service of neighbor.
- Matthew 19:16-19: The commandments and eternal life. A person approaches Jesus and asks Him, "Master, what good deed should I do to possess eternal life?" Some manuscripts say that it was a young man. Jesus responds abruptly, "Why do you ask Me about what is good? There is One alone who is good!" Then He responds to the question and says, "If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments." The rich young man reacts and asks, "Which commandments?" Jesus very kindly enumerates the commandments which the young man already knew: "You shall not kill; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal; you shall not bear false witness; honor father and mother; love your neighbor as yourself." Jesus' response is very significant. The young man had asked what to do to obtain eternal life. He wanted to live close to God! But Jesus recalls only the commandments which refer to respect for the life close to others! He does not mention the first three commandments which deal with relationship with God. According to Jesus, we will be well with God only if we are well with our neighbor. It is not worth deceiving oneself. The door to reach God is our neighbor. In Mark, the question of the young man is different: "Good Master what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus answers, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good, but God alone." (Mk 10:17-18). Jesus turns the attention from Himself toward God, because what is important is to do God's will, to reveal the project of the Father.
- Matthew 19:20: What is the use of observing the commandments? The young man responds, "I have always observed all these things. What more do I need to do?" What follows is strange. The young man wanted to know the way which leads to eternal life. Now, the way of eternal life was and continues to be this: to do God's will, expressed in the commandments. In other words, the young man observed the commandments

without knowing for what purpose. If he had known it, he would not have asked the question. It is like for many Catholics who do not know why they are Catholics. "I was born a Catholic, and this is why I am Catholic!" It is as if it was a custom!

- Matthew 19:21-22: Jesus' proposal and the young man's response. Jesus answers, "If you wish to be perfect, go and sell your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have a treasure in heaven; then come follow Me." But on hearing these words the young man went away very sad because he was very rich. The observance of the commandments is only the first degree of a stairway that goes beyond, much farther and much higher. Jesus asks more! The observance of the commandments prepares people to be able to reach the point of giving oneself completely to the neighbor. Mark says that Jesus looked at the young man with love (Mk 10:21). Jesus asks for very much, but He asks for it with much love. The young man did not accept Jesus' proposal and goes away "because he was very rich."

- Jesus and the option for the poor. A two-fold slavery marked the situation of the people at the time of Jesus: the slavery of the politics of Herod, supported by the Roman Empire and maintained by a whole system which was well organized for exploitation and repression, and the slavery of the official religion, maintained by the religious authority of the time. For this reason the clan, the families, the community, were disintegrating and the majority of the people were excluded, marginalized, homeless, without either a religion or a society. So, for this reason, there were various movements which, like Jesus, tried to build up life in communities: Essenes, Pharisees and, later on, the Zealots. But in Jesus' community, there was something new which made it different from the other groups: the attitude concerning the poor and the excluded. The communities of the Pharisees lived separated. The word "Pharisee" meant "separated." This was the attitude concerning the poor and the excluded. The communities of the Pharisees lived separated from the impure people. Some Pharisees considered the people ignorant and damned (Jn 7:49) in sin (Jn 9:34). They could learn nothing from the people (Jn 9:34). On the contrary, Jesus and His community lived in the midst of people who were excluded, considered impure; tax collectors, sinners, prostitutes, lepers (Mk 2:16; 1:41; Lk 7:37). Jesus recognizes the richness and the values which the poor possess (Mt 11:25-26; Lk 21:1-4). He proclaims them blessed, because the Kingdom is theirs, of the poor (Lk 6:20; Mt 5:3). He defines His mission in this way: "To announce the good news to the poor" (Lk 4:18). He Himself lives poorly. He possesses nothing for Himself, not even a stone to lay His head on (Lk 9:58). And to anyone who wants to follow Him, who wants to live like Him, He orders that that person choose either God or money! (Mt 6:24). He orders His followers to choose the poor, as He proposed it to the rich young man! (Mk 10:21). This different way of accepting the poor and of living with them is a sign of the Kingdom of God.

4) Personal questions

- Can a person who lives concerned about his wealth or with acquiring the goods which the propaganda of consumerism offers free himself from all this in order to follow Jesus and live in peace in a Christian community? Is this possible? What do you think?

- What does this mean for us today: "Go, sell all you possess and give it to the poor?" Is it possible to do this concretely? Do you know anybody who has actually done this for the Kingdom?

- Let us say you own a kitchen with pots and pans and stove, and its cost was not small. You use this kitchen to feed your family, or the poor, or some in the community. If you didn't have this kitchen, you couldn't do this. How does Jesus' advice to the young man apply to you to sell your pots, pans and kitchen? Which is the greater good?
- Continuing the kitchen question, if you also purchased the food and gave it away, this is obviously a certain good. What if you only used the kitchen to provide "cooking" for people who brought their own food (offering your time and resource)? Or if you sold your cooked food "at cost"? Or if you charged only enough for a small salary for your "service" to the community? What if you made a profit while doing this? At what point(s) does the picture change? Why?

5) Concluding Prayer

Yahweh is my shepherd, I lack nothing.
 In grassy meadows He lets me lie down.
 By tranquil streams He leads me to restore my spirit.
 He guides me in paths of saving justice
 as befits His name. (Ps 23:1-3)\

Lectio Divina Tuesday, August 20, 2019

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

God our Father,
 may we love You in all things and above all things
 and reach the joy You have prepared for us
 beyond all our imagining.

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

2) Gospel Reading - Matthew 19:23-30

Jesus said to his disciples: "Amen, I say to you, it will be hard for one who is rich to enter the Kingdom of heaven. Again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for one who is rich to enter the Kingdom of God." When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and said, "Who then can be saved?" Jesus looked at them and said, "For men this is impossible, but for God all things are possible." Then Peter said to him in reply, "We have given up everything and followed you. What will there be for us?" Jesus said to them, "Amen, I say to you that you who have followed me, in the new age, when the Son of Man is seated on his throne of glory, will yourselves sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has given up houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands

for the sake of my name will receive a hundred times more, and will inherit eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first."

3) Reflection

- The Gospel today is the immediate continuation of yesterday's Gospel. It gives Jesus' commentary regarding the rich young man's negative reaction.
- Matthew 19:23-24: The camel and the eye of the needle. After the young man leaves, Jesus comments on his decision: "In truth I tell you, it is hard for someone rich to enter the kingdom of Heaven. Yes, I tell you again, it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for someone rich to enter the kingdom of Heaven." Two observations concerning this affirmation of Jesus: a) the proverb of the camel and of the eye of the needle was used to say that something was impossible and unthinkable, humanly speaking. b) The expression "that someone rich enters the kingdom of Heaven" is a question, in the first place, not of entrance into Heaven after death, but of entering into the community around Jesus. And even now this is true. It is very difficult for the rich to enter and to feel at home in the communities which try to live the Gospel according to Jesus' standards and which try to be open to the poor, the migrants and to those excluded by society. However, this does not also mean that riches bring their own temptations which distance the person from God.
- Matthew 19:25-26: The disciples' fear. The young man had observed the commandments, but without understanding the reason for the observance. Something similar was happening with the disciples. When Jesus called them, they did exactly the same thing which Jesus had asked the young man: they left everything and followed Jesus (Mt 4:20,22). But they were astonished at Jesus' remark concerning the impossibility for someone rich to enter the Kingdom of God. This was a sign that they had not understood well the response which Jesus had given to the rich young man: "Go, sell all you possess, give it to the poor and then come and follow Me!" If they had understood, they would not have been so surprised by the requests of Jesus. When wealth or the desire for riches occupies one's heart and one's outlook on life, one does not understand the meaning of life and of the Gospel. God alone can help! "This is impossible for man, but for God all is possible!"
- Matthew 19:27: Peter's question. The background of the disciples' misunderstanding appears in the question asked by Peter: "Look, we have left everything and have followed You. What are we to have then?" In spite of the beautiful generosity of abandoning everything, they still have the old mentality. They have abandoned everything in order to get something in exchange. They still had not grasped the meaning of service and gratuitousness.
- Matthew 19:28-30: Jesus' reply. "In truth I tell you, when everything is made new again and the Son of Man is seated on His throne of glory you yourselves will sit on twelve thrones to judge the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses, brothers, sisters, father, mother, children or land for the sake of My name will receive a hundred times as much and also inherit eternal life. Many, who are first, will be last, and the last, first." In this response, Jesus describes the new world, the foundation of which had been laid by His work and that of the disciples. Jesus stresses three important

points: (a) The disciples will sit on twelve thrones next to Jesus to judge the twelve tribes of Israel (cf. Rev 4:4). (b) In exchange they will receive many things which they had abandoned: houses, brothers, sisters, mother, children and will inherit eternal life. (c) The future world will be the reverse of the present world. There, the last ones will be the first ones and the first ones will be the last ones. The community around Jesus is the seed and the manifestation of this new world. Even today the small community of the poor continues to be the seed and manifestation of the Kingdom.

- Every time that in the history of the people of the Bible a new movement arises to renew the Covenant, it begins by re-establishing the rights of the poor, of the excluded. Without that, the Covenant will not be reconstructed. This is the sense and the reason for the insertion of the community of Jesus into the midst of the poor. It draws from these roots and it inaugurates the New Covenant.

4) Personal questions

- To abandon houses, brothers, sisters, father, mother, children, fields, for the sake of Jesus: how does this take place in your life? What have you already received in exchange? What are you expecting?
- Today, the majority of poor countries are not of the Christian religion, while the majority of the rich countries are. How can the saying that it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle be applied today?

5) Concluding Prayer

Even were I to walk in a ravine as dark as death
I should fear no danger,
for You Lord, are at my side.
Your staff and Your crook are there to soothe me. (Ps 23:4)

Lectio Divina Wednesday, August 21, 2019

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

God our Father,
may we love You in all things and above all things
and reach the joy You have prepared for us
beyond all our imagining.

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

2) Gospel Reading - Matthew 20:1-16

Jesus told his disciples this parable: "The Kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out at dawn to hire laborers for his vineyard. After agreeing with them for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. Going out about nine o'clock, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace, and he said to them, 'You too go into my vineyard, and I will give you what is just.' So they went off. And he went out again around noon, and around three o'clock, and did likewise. Going out about five o'clock, he found others standing around, and said to them, 'Why do you stand here idle all day?' They answered, 'Because no one has hired us.' He said to them, 'You too go into my vineyard.' When it was evening the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, 'Summon the laborers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and ending with the first.' When those who had started about five o'clock came, each received the usual daily wage. So when the first came, they thought that they would receive more, but each of them also got the usual wage. And on receiving it they grumbled against the landowner, saying, 'These last ones worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us, who bore the day's burden and the heat.' He said to one of them in reply, 'My friend, I am not cheating you. Did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? Take what is yours and go. What if I wish to give this last one the same as you? Or am I not free to do as I wish with my own money? Are you envious because I am generous?' Thus, the last will be first, and the first will be last."

3) Reflection

- Today's Gospel presents a parable which is found only in Matthew's Gospel. It is not in the other Gospels. Like in all parables, Jesus tells a story about daily elements, daily things of the life of the people. He presents a picture of the social situation of His time, in which the listeners recognize themselves. At the same time, in the story of this parable, there are things which never take place in the reality of the life of the people, because speaking about the master, Jesus thinks about God, about His Father. This is why in the story of the parable the master does things which are surprising which never take place in the daily life of the listeners. In this strange approach of the master, it is necessary to find the key to understanding the message of the parable.
- Matthew 20:1-7: The five times that the landowner goes out to look for laborers. "The Kingdom of Heaven is like a landowner going out at daybreak to hire workers for his vineyard. He made an agreement with the workers for one denarius a day and sent them to his vineyard". This is how the story begins and it speaks for itself and does not need too many comments. In what follows, the landowner goes out four times to call other workers to go and work in his vineyard. Jesus refers to the terrible lack of work at that time. Now some details of the story: (a) the landowner himself goes out personally five times to contract workers. (b) When he contracts the workers, he fixes the salary only for the first group: one denarius a day. To those of nine o'clock in the morning he says: I will give you what is just, fair. With the others, he does not fix anything. He contracted them only to work in the vineyard. (c) At the end of the day, when it was the time to pay the workers, the landowners orders the administrator to carry out this service.
- Matthew 20:8-10: The strange way of fixing the accounts at the end of the day. When it was evening, the landowner of the vineyard told his administrator: Call the workers

and pay them, beginning from the last ones to the first ones. Here, at the time of drawing the accounts, something strange takes place which does not happen in normal life. It seems that things are inverted. The administrator begins to pay those who were contracted just an hour before. The salary is the same for all: one denarius, as it was agreed with the first ones who were contracted at the beginning of the day. When the first came, they expected to get more but they too received one denarius each. Why does the landowner act like that? Would you do the same? It is precisely in this surprising gesture of the landowner that the key to understanding this parable is hidden.

- Matthew 20:11-12: The normal reaction of the workers before the strange ways of the landowner. The last ones also receive their salary as those who were contracted first. The story says that these began to grumble against the landowner and said, “The men who came last have done only one hour and you have treated them the same as us, though we have done a heavy day’s work in all the heat”. This is the normal reaction of a good sense. I think that all of us would have had the same reaction and would have said the same thing to the landowner. Would we not?

- Matthew 20:13-16: The surprising explanation of the landowner which gives the key to the parable. The response of the landowner is the following: “My friend, I am not being unjust to you. Did we not agree on one denarius? Take your earnings and go. I choose to pay the last comer as much as I pay you; have I no right to do what I like with my own? Why should you be envious because I am generous?” These words give the key which explains the attitude of the landowner and indicates the message which Jesus wants to communicate to us: (a) The landowner was not unjust, because he acts according to what he had agreed with the first group of workers: one denarius a day. (b) It is the sovereign decision of the landowner to give to the last ones the same amount that he had agreed upon with those of the first hour. These do not have the right to complain and claim anything. (c) Acting with justice, the landowner has the right to do the good that he wants with the things that belong to him. The worker, on his part, has this same right. (d) The last question touches on the central point: Why should you be envious because I am generous? God is different and His thoughts are not our thoughts (Isa 55: 8-9).

- The background of the parable is the circumstance of the time, for Jesus as well as for Matthew. The workers of the first hour are the Jewish people, called by God to work in his vineyard. They bear the weight of the day, from Abraham to Moses, for over one thousand years. Now at the eleventh hour, Jesus calls the gentiles to work in his vineyard and they succeed in having the preference in the heart of God. “Thus the first ones will be last and the last will be first”.

4) Personal questions

- Those of the eleventh hour arrive. They have advantages and receive priority in regard to entrance into the Kingdom of God. When you wait in line for two hours, and a person arrives, and without saying anything she places herself before you. Would you accept this? Can these two situations be compared? (hint: she places herself, rather than someone higher choosing to place her - does this change things?)

- God’s action surpasses our calculations and our human way of acting. He surprises us and sometimes it is uncomfortable. Has this happened to you in your life? What lessons have you drawn from this?

- This parable uses "work" and "workers" to convey its message. Why? Is there also the message that to receive "payment" also requires work? To be a Christian demands work - it is not a passive existence, but rather an active participation in the work of God.

5) Concluding Prayer

Kindness and faithful love pursue me every day of my life.
I make my home in the house of Yahweh
for all time to come. (Ps 23:6)

Lectio Divina Thursday, August 22, 2019

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

God our Father,
may we love You in all things and above all things
and reach the joy You have prepared for us
beyond all our imagining.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, Your Son,
who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

2) Gospel Reading - Matthew 22:1-14

Jesus again in reply spoke to the chief priests and the elders of the people in parables saying, "The Kingdom of heaven may be likened to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son. He dispatched his servants to summon the invited guests to the feast, but they refused to come. A second time he sent other servants, saying, 'Tell those invited: "Behold, I have prepared my banquet, my calves and fattened cattle are killed, and everything is ready; come to the feast."' Some ignored the invitation and went away, one to his farm, another to his business. The rest laid hold of his servants, mistreated them, and killed them. The king was enraged and sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. Then the king said to his servants, 'The feast is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy to come. Go out, therefore, into the main roads and invite to the feast whomever you find.' The servants went out into the streets and gathered all they found, bad and good alike, and the hall was filled with guests. But when the king came in to meet the guests he saw a man there not dressed in a wedding garment. He said to him, 'My friend, how is it that you came in here without a wedding garment?' But he was reduced to silence. Then the king said to his attendants, 'Bind his hands and feet, and cast him into the darkness outside, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth.' Many are invited, but few are chosen."

3) Reflection

- Today's Gospel presents the parable of the banquet which we also find in the Gospel of Matthew and of Luke, but with significant differences which stem from each evangelist's point of view. The background which leads both evangelists to repeat this parable is the same. In the communities of the first Christians, both those of Matthew and those of Luke, the problem of living together between the converted Jews and the converted pagans continued in full force. The Jews had ancient norms which prevented them from eating together with pagans. Even entering into the Christian communities, many Jews kept the ancient custom of not sitting at the same table with pagans. Thus, Peter had conflicts in the communities of Jerusalem because he had entered the house of Cornelius, a pagan, and had eaten with him (Acts 11:3). This same problem existed, though in a different way, in Matthew's and Luke's communities. In Luke's community, in spite of the differences in race, class and gender, they had a great ideal of sharing and of communion (Acts 2:42; 4:32; 5:12). For this reason, in Luke's Gospel (Lk 14:15-24), the parable insists on the invitation addressed to all. The master of the feast, angry and upset because the first guests, who were invited, did not arrive, sends his servants to call the poor, the crippled, the blind, and invites them to participate in the banquet. But there is still place. Then, the master of the feast orders that all be invited, until his house is full. In Matthew's Gospel, the first part of the parable, (Mt 22:1-10) has the same objective as that of Luke's Gospel. It says that the master of the feast orders the servants to let the "good and the bad" enter (Mt 22:10). But in the end, he adds another parable (Mt 22:11-14) concerning the wedding garment, which focuses on something specific to the Jews, the need of purity in order to be able to present oneself before God.
- Matthew 22:1-2: The invitation addressed to all. Some manuscripts say that the parable was told for the chief priests and for the elders of the People. This hypothesis can serve as a key for the reading, because it helps one to understand some strange points which appear in the story. The parable begins like this: "The Kingdom of Heaven may be compared to a king who gave a feast for his son's wedding." This initial statement recalls the most profound hope: the desire of the people to be with God always. Several times the Gospel refers to this hope, suggesting that Jesus, the Son of the King, is the bridegroom who comes to prepare the wedding (Mk 2:19; Rev 21:2, 19:9).
- Matthew 22:3-6: The invited guests do not want to come. The king invites in a more insistent way, but the guests do not want to come. "But they were not interested: one went off to his farm, another to his business; and the rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them." In Luke, what prevents them from accepting the invitation are the duties of daily life. The first one says, "I have bought a piece of land and must go to see it;" the second one, "I have bought five yoke of oxen and am on my way to try them out;" the third one, "I have just got married and so am unable to come!" (cf. Lk 14:18-20). According to the norms and customs of the time, those people had the right and even the duty not to accept the invitation they had received (cf. Deut 20:5-7).
- Matthew 22:7: An incomprehensible war! The reaction of the king in the face of the refusal is surprising. "Then the king was furious and he dispatched his troops, destroyed those murderers and burnt their town." How is such a violent reaction to be interpreted? The parable was told for the chief priests and for the elders of the people (Mt 22:1), for those responsible for the nations. Jesus had often spoken to them about the need for

conversion. He even shed tears over the city of Jerusalem and said, “If you too had only recognized on that day the way to peace! But in fact it is hidden from your eyes. Yes, a time is coming when your enemies will raise fortifications all around you, when they will encircle you and hem you in on every side; they will dash you and the children inside your walls to the ground; they will leave not one stone standing on another within you, because you did not recognize the moment of your visitation.” (Lk 19:41-44). The violent reaction of the king in the parable probably refers to the fact of Jesus’ foresight. Forty years later, Jerusalem was destroyed (Lk 19:41-44; 21: 6).

- Matthew 22:8-10: The banquet is not canceled. For the third time, the king invites the people. He tells his servants, “The wedding banquet is ready, but those invited were unworthy; go to the main crossroads and invite everyone you can find to come to the wedding.”

Going out on the streets, those servants gathered together everyone they could find, bad and good alike; and the wedding hall was filled with guests. The bad, who were excluded from participation in worship with the Jews because they were deemed impure, are now invited specifically by the king to participate in the feast. In the context of that time, the bad were the pagans. They also are invited to participate in the wedding feast.

- Matthew 22:11-14: The wedding garment. These verses tell us that the king went into the wedding hall and saw someone who was not wearing a wedding garment. And the king asked, “How did you get in here, my friend, without a wedding garment?” And he was silent. The story says that the man was bound hands and feet and thrown into the darkness outside. Then the story concludes: “Many are invited but not all are chosen.” Some scholars think that it is a second parable which was added to lessen the impression which one has after the first parable, which speaks about “the good and the bad” who enter into the feast (Mt 22:10). Even if one admits that it is not the observance of the Law which gives us salvation, but rather faith in the gratuitous love of God, that in no way diminishes the need for purity of heart as a prerequisite to be able to appear before God.

4) Personal questions

- Who are the persons who are normally invited to our feasts? Why? Who are the people who are not invited to our feasts? Why?
- What are the reasons which today prevent many people from participation in society and in the Church? What are some of the excuses that people offer to exclude themselves from the duty to participate in the community? Are those excuses valid?

5) Concluding Prayer

Do not thrust me away from Your presence,
do not take away from me Your spirit of holiness.
Give me back the joy of Your salvation,
sustain in me a generous spirit. (Ps 51:11-12)

Lectio Divina Friday, August 23, 2019

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

God our Father,
may we love You in all things and above all things
and reach the joy You have prepared for us
beyond all our imagining.

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

2) Gospel Reading - Matthew 22:34-40

When the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, and one of them, a scholar of the law, tested him by asking, "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" He said to him, "You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments."

3) Reflection

- The text is enlightened. Jesus is in Jerusalem and precisely in the Temple where a process between Him and His adversaries is taking place, the chief priests and the scribes (20:18; 21:15), between the chief priests and the elders of the people (21:23) and between the chief priests and the Pharisees (21:45). The point of controversy of the debate is: the identity of Jesus or of the Son of David, the origin of His identity, and, therefore, the question regarding the nature of the Kingdom of God. The evangelist presents this plot of debates with a sequence of controversies that present a growing rhythm: the tribute to be paid to Caesar (22:15-22), the resurrection of the dead (22:23-33), the greatest commandment (22:34-40), the Messiah, son and Lord of David (22:41-46). The protagonists of the first three discussions are representatives of the official Judaism who try to place Jesus in difficulty on some crucial questions. These disputes are addressed to Jesus in so far as He is "Master" (Rabbi). This title tells the reader of the understanding that the interlocutors have of Jesus, but Jesus takes this occasion to lead them to ask themselves a more crucial question: the last time they took position concerning His identity (22:41-46).
- The greatest commandment. On the trail of the Sadducees who have preceded, the Pharisees ask Jesus a burning question: which is the greatest commandment? The Rabbis first make evident the multiplicity of the prescriptions (248 commandments), then the question is asked of Jesus regarding which is the most important. Just the same,

the Rabbis themselves had created a true survey to reduce them as far as possible: David lists eleven (Ps 15:2-5), Isaiah six (Isa 33:15), Micah three (Mic 6:8), Amos two (Am 5:4) and Habakkuk only one (Hab 2:4). But the intention of the Pharisees regarding their question goes beyond every type of survey; it is a question of the essence itself of the prescriptions. Jesus, in answering, binds together love of God and love of neighbor, so much so as to unite them in only one, but without refusing to give priority to the first one, which subordinates, in a close way, the second one. Thus, all the prescriptions of the Law, all 613, are placed in relationship with this unique commandment: the whole Law finds its significance and foundation in the one of love. Jesus carries out a process of simplification of all the precepts of the law: anyone who puts into practice the only commandment of love does not only observe the law, but also the prophets (v. 40). Just the same, the novelty of the response is not so much the material content as in its realization: in Jesus, the love of God and love of neighbor have their own context, their last solidity. That is to say, that God's love and love of neighbor, shown and realized in some way in his person, guides man to place himself before God and before others through love. The only commandment in two, God's love and love for neighbor, become the supporting column, not only of the scriptures, but also of the life of the Christian.

4) Personal questions

- Is love for God and for neighbor only a vague sentiment, an emotion, a passing motion or a reality that affirms your whole person: heart, will, intelligence and human relationships?
- You were created out of love. Are you aware that your fulfillment takes place in God's love, to love Him with the whole heart, with the whole soul, with the whole mind? Such a love demands a confirmation of charity toward the brothers and sisters and their situation of life. Do you practice this in daily life?

5) Concluding Prayer

Let them thank Yahweh for His faithful love,
for His wonders for the children of Adam!
He has fed the hungry to their hearts' content,
filled the starving with good things. (Ps 107:8-9)

Lectio Divina Saturday, August 24, 2019

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Father,
help us to seek the values
that will bring us enduring joy in this changing world.
In our desire for what You promise
make us one in mind and heart.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, Your Son,
who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

2) Gospel Reading - John 1:45-51

Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one about whom Moses wrote in the law, and also the prophets, Jesus son of Joseph, from Nazareth." But Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, "Here is a true child of Israel. There is no duplicity in him." Nathanael said to him, "How do you know me?" Jesus answered and said to him, "Before Philip called you, I saw you under the fig tree." Nathanael answered him, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel." Jesus answered and said to him, "Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than this." And he said to him, "Amen, amen, I say to you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

3) Reflection

- Jesus returned to Galilee. He met Philip and called him telling him, "Follow Me!" The purpose of the call is always the same: to follow Jesus. The first Christians sought to preserve the names of the first disciples, and some they even kept their family names and the name of their place of origin. Philip, Andrew and Peter were from Bethsaida (Jn 1:44). Nathanael was from Cana. Today many forget the names of the people who were at the origin of their communities. To remember the names is a way of preserving the identity.
- Philip meets Nathanael and speaks to him about Jesus: "We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and the Prophets wrote, Jesus, son of Joseph from Nazareth." Jesus is the one to whom all the history of the Old Testament refers.
- Nathanael asks, "From Nazareth? Can anything good come from that place?" His question probably shows that there was some of the rivalry which existed among the small villages of the same region: Cana and Nazareth. Besides that, according to the official teaching of the scribes, the Messiah would come from Bethlehem, in Judah. He could not come from Nazareth in Galilee (Jn 7:41-42). Philip gives the same answer which Jesus had given to the other two disciples: "Come and see for yourself!" It is not

by imposing, but rather by seeing, that people are convinced. Once again the same way: to meet, to experience, to share, to witness, to lead toward Jesus!

- Jesus sees Nathanael and says, “Truly, here is an Israelite in whom there is no deception.” Then He declares that He already knew him when he was under the fig tree. How could Nathanael be an “authentic or true Israelite” if he did not accept Jesus as the Messiah? Nathanael “was under the fig tree.” The fig tree was the symbol of Israel (cf. Mic 4:4; Zech 3:10; 1 Kg 5:5). An authentic Israelite is the one who knows how to detach himself from his own ideas when he perceives that they are not in agreement with God’s plan. The Israelite who is not ready to bring about this conversion is neither authentic nor honest. Nathanael is authentic. He was waiting for the Messiah according to the official teaching of the time (Jn 7:41-42,52). This is why at first, he did not accept a Messiah coming from Nazareth. But the encounter with Jesus helped him to understand that God’s plan is not always as people imagine or desire it to be. He recognizes and acknowledges his deception or mistake. He changes his idea, accepts Jesus as Messiah and confesses, “Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel !” Nathanael’s confession is only the beginning: The one who will be faithful will see heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man. He will experience that Jesus is the new bond of union between God and us, human beings. It is Jacob’s dream which has become a reality (Gen 28:10-22).

4) Personal questions

- Which title of Jesus that pleases you the most? Why?
- Have you had an intermediary between you and Jesus?

5) Concluding prayer

Upright in all that He does,
Yahweh acts only in faithful love. (Ps 145:17)

Lectio Divina Sunday, August 25, 2019

The narrow door and the call of the gentiles

Luke 13:22-30

1. LECTIO

a) Opening prayer:

We come before You, Father, and because we do not know how to talk to You, to help us we use the words Your Son Jesus pronounced on our behalf. Help us to listen to the upsetting message of this word: “Try your best to enter by the narrow door, because, I tell you, many will try to enter and will not succeed”. This is a word You repeat to everyone who listens to Your Son’s Gospel. Help us to understand it, so that we may be able to read Your scripture and savor it, feel it burn like a fire in us. We implore You, Father, send us Your Spirit. And you Mary, mother of contemplation, who have kept

the words and events of Jesus in your heart for a long time, grant us to contemplate the Word, to listen to it and allow it to penetrate our hearts.

b) Reading of the Gospel:

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



c) A few moments of prayerful silence:

To listen devoutly to the voice of God, we need silence and interior calm. We need to create in our hearts “a quiet corner where we can make contact with God” (Edith Stein) and be able to establish deep communication between ourselves and the Word. If we do not stand before God in silence, in silence and gazing on His face, we will form words but we will be saying nothing.

2. MEDITATIO

a) A key to the reading:

This Sunday’s passage is found in the second part of Luke’s Gospel where Jerusalem, the object of Jesus’ existential and theological journey, is mentioned several times, of which three are part of the post-Paschal liturgical way: Lk 9:51 (13th Sunday of ordinary time “C”), Lk 13:22-30 (21st Sunday of ordinary time “C”) and Lk 17:11 (28th Sunday of ordinary time “C”). The proclamation of a journey, placed at the beginning of the Gospel text, helps the readers to remember that they are also journeying towards Jerusalem with Jesus. The journey towards the holy city is the thread that runs through the whole of the second part of the Gospel (Lk 9:51-19:46) and most of what is said is introduced by verbs of movement presenting Jesus and his disciples as pilgrims or itinerants. Jesus’ journey towards the holy city is not strictly speaking, a geographical journey, but corresponds to a theological and spiritual journey. This kind of journey

also involves the disciple and the reader of the Gospel: going on “the journey” of Jesus makes us like itinerants whose mandate is to preach the Gospel.

On this journey Jesus faces conflicts with the Jewish world, and in Lk 13:10-30 includes three episodes: 13:10-17 (the healing of the crippled woman), 18-21 (the parables of the mustard seed and the yeast) and in 22-30 (the discourse on the narrow door). This last is the text the liturgy of the Word presents to us this Sunday. It begins with the journey as a background to Jesus’ words as He went “through towns and villages...teaching” (v.22). It is characteristic of Luke to note Jesus’ ministry as a journey.

Now, at one stage on this journey towards Jerusalem, someone puts a question to Jesus: how many will be saved? Jesus’ reply does not mention any number of those who will be saved, but contains an exhortation and a warning, a “try”, which points to an attitude to be assumed: “to enter by the narrow door”. This image recalls in the mind of the disciples, and in Luke’s community, for the need to address their preoccupation with the burdensome commitment that the journey of faith demands. Immediately after this, Jesus introduces the true and proper teaching with a parable that is associated with the image of the narrow door, the parable of the master of the house who, after having closed the door of the house, will not allow anyone in (v.25). This detail brings to mind the end of the parable of the ten virgins in Mt 25:10-12. These examples tell us that there is an intermediate time when we must commit ourselves to receive salvation before the door is closed definitively and irreversibly.

Partaking in the founding moments in the life of the community, like at the supper of the Lord (“we have eaten and drunk in Your presence”) and the proclamation of the Word (“You have taught in our squares”), if not backed up by a life commitment, cannot avoid the danger of condemnation. Luke’s Gospel likes to present Jesus as taking part at the table of those who invite Him, but not all who sit at the table with Him have an automatic right to the definitive salvation that He proclaimed through the image of a banquet. Thus, also, having heard His teaching does not automatically guarantee salvation. In fact, in Luke, listening to Jesus’ word is an indispensable condition for discipleship, but it is not enough. Disciples need to make the commitment to follow the master, keeping His teaching and bearing fruit through perseverance (Lk 8:15).

Those who have not been able to enter by the narrow door before it is closed are called “doers of iniquity”: they are those who did not commit themselves to putting God’s plan into practice. Their future situation is presented figuratively with an expression that tells of the irreversibility of their not being saved: “Then there will be weeping and grinding of teeth” (v.28).

Interesting is the reference to the great biblical patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob) and to all the prophets: they will enter and be part of the kingdom of God. If to Jesus’ contemporaries this affirmation could seem to indicate that salvation was the privilege of the Jews, for Christians of Luke’s community it constituted a warning not to think of salvation as an automatic consequence. The kingdom that Jesus proclaims becomes the place where the disciples meet and come from the “east and west, from north and south” (v.29). Jesus’ discourse introduces a dynamic of salvation that involves the whole of humanity and is addressed especially to the poor and sick (Lk 14:15-24). Luke, more than the other Evangelists, is sensitive to the proclamation of a universal salvation and

presents Jesus as offering the promise of salvation no longer just to Israel, but to all peoples. The final affirmation comes as a sign of this changed condition of salvation: “there are those who now are last who will be first, and those now first who will be last” (v.30). This affirmation shows how God upsets and turns upside down the mechanisms of human logic: no one must trust in a position attained, but everyone is invited to constantly tune into the Gospel’s wavelength.

b) Some questions:

i) The narrow door of salvation reminds us of the necessity of all to be committed to receiving this gift. The image does not say that God wishes to make it difficult to obtain salvation, but it emphasizes the co-responsibility of men and women, the reality of the effort involved in this commitment to obtain salvation. According to Cyprian, going through the narrow door means a transformation: “*Who does not wish to be transformed as soon as possible into the image of Christ?*”. The image of the narrow door is a symbol of the work of transformation to which the believer is committed through a slow and progressive effort on him/herself in order to refine him/herself and be molded by the Gospel. More correctly, the one who does not commit him/herself to any kind of reciprocal relationship with God, with others and with the world, risks perdition. Often the temptation is to propose other doors, seemingly easier and more useful, like those of selfishness, avoiding God’s friendship and relationships with others. Are you committed to build relationships or are you intent on being selfish? Are you convinced that salvation is offered you through the relational dimension of communion with God and others?

ii) Salvation is possible for all. Everyone may attain it, but such a gift from Jesus requires an effective and personal response from us. In Jesus’ teaching we do not find the use of any threat to render people aware regarding salvation, but only an invitation to be fully aware of the extraordinary and irreversible opportunity of the gift of mercy and life before God and in dialogue with Him. Towards what and towards whom is your life pointing? How do you use your freedom? Are you able to welcome God’s invitation to be co-responsible for your salvation or have you surrendered to waste and perdition?

iii) If we consider the question of that person who asked Jesus, “Sir, will there be only few saved?”, no one can consider him/herself privileged. Salvation belongs to all and all are called. The door to salvation may be closed for those who expect to enter with the unwieldy baggage of personal inconsistencies. Do you feel the desire to enter and be part of that “infinite throng from east and west who will sit at the table of the kingdom of God”? And if you see yourself as last (small, simple, sinner, bent by suffering...) if you live with love and hope, do not despair. Jesus said that the last will be first.

3. ORATIO

a) Psalm 117, 1-2

Praise the Lord, all nations!

Extol Him, all peoples!

For great is His steadfast love toward us;

and the faithfulness of the Lord endures for ever.

Praise the Lord!

b) Closing prayer:

Lord, grant that we may feel the life of Your Word we have heard; break, we beseech You, the knots of our uncertainty, our quibbles, our “ifs” and “buts” that hold us back from entering into salvation through the narrow door. Grant that we may welcome without fear, without too many doubts, the Word of God that invites us to commit ourselves and work hard at our life of faith. Lord, grant that through the Word we have heard this Sunday, the day of the Lord, we may be freed from false security concerning our salvation and may Your Word bring us joy, strengthen, purify and save us. And you, Mary, model of those who listen and of silence, help to be alive and authentic, to understand that, in virtue of the Word, whatever is difficult becomes easy, whatever is obscure becomes light.

4. CONTEMPLATIO

Contemplation is the peak of any biblical reading after we have meditated and prayed. To contemplate is to enter, through listening to the Word, into a faith and love relationship with God who is life and truth and who in Christ has revealed His face to us. The Word of God unveils that hidden face in every page of sacred scripture. Suffice it to look in admiration, be open to the light, allow it to penetrate us. It is the ecstasy experienced before the beautiful and the good. Extend into your daily life this climate of great communication experienced with God in listening to His Word, and preserve the taste of the beauty in your dialogue with others in whatever work you do.

Lectio Divina Monday, August 26, 2019

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Father,
help us to seek the values
that will bring us enduring joy in this changing world.
In our desire for what You promise
make us one in mind and heart.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, Your Son,
who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

2) Gospel Reading - Matthew 23:13-22

Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples: "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You lock the Kingdom of heaven before men. You do not enter yourselves, nor do you allow entrance to those trying to enter. "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees,

you hypocrites. You traverse sea and land to make one convert, and when that happens you make him a child of Gehenna twice as much as yourselves. "Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'If one swears by the temple, it means nothing, but if one swears by the gold of the temple, one is obligated.' Blind fools, which is greater, the gold, or the temple that made the gold sacred? And you say, 'If one swears by the altar, it means nothing, but if one swears by the gift on the altar, one is obligated.' You blind ones, which is greater, the gift, or the altar that makes the gift sacred? One who swears by the altar swears by it and all that is upon it; one who swears by the temple swears by it and by him who dwells in it; one who swears by heaven swears by the throne of God and by him who is seated on it."

3) Reflection

- During the next three days, we will meditate on the discourse in which Jesus criticizes the doctors of the law and the Pharisees, calling them hypocrites. In today's Gospel (Mt 23:13-22), Jesus uses the expression "Alas for you..." (Mt 23:23-26) four times, and in the Gospel of the day after tomorrow, He uses this same expression twice more (Mt 23:27-32). These are condemnatory words, very hard words, against the religious leaders of the times. In pondering them, I should not only think of the doctors and the Pharisees of the time of Jesus, but also, and above all, of the hypocrisy found in me, in us, in our family, in the community, in our Church, in today's society. Let us look into the mirror of the text to discover the errors in ourselves.
- Matthew 23:13: The first "Alas for you..." against those who close the door of the Kingdom because in this way you will not enter and, you do not even let those who want to enter. How do they lock people out of the Kingdom? They do it by presenting God as a severe judge, leaving very little space for the mercy of God; by imposing, in the name of God, laws and norms which have nothing to do with the commandments of God, by presenting a false image of the Kingdom and by killing the desire to serve God and the Kingdom. A community which organizes itself around this false god "does not enter into the Kingdom," and it is not even an expression of the Kingdom and prevents its members from entering into the Kingdom.
- Matthew 23:14: The second "Alas for you..." is against those who use religion to enrich themselves. You devour the property of widows, though you make a show of lengthy prayers. The more severe will be the sentence you receive because of this." Jesus allows the disciples to live the Gospel, because He says that the laborer has the right to his salary (Lk 10:7; cf. 1 Cor 9:13-14), but to use prayer and religion as a means to enrich themselves, that is hypocrisy and does not reveal the Good News of God. It transforms religion into a market. Jesus drives out the merchants from the Temple (Mk 11:15-19) quoting the prophet Jeremiah: "My house will be called a House of Prayer for all people; but you have turned it into a bandits' den!" (Mk 11: 17; cf. Isa 56:7; Jer 7:11). When Simon the magician wanted to buy the gift of the Holy Spirit, Peter curses him (Acts 8:18-24). Simon received the "most severe condemnation" which Jesus speaks about in the Gospel today.
- Matthew 23:15: The third expression of "Alas for you..." is against those who proselytize. "You travel over sea and land to make a single convert, and anyone who

becomes one you make twice as fit for hell as you are.” There are people who become missionaries and proclaim the Gospel not to radiate the Good News, but to attract people for their group and their church. John once prohibited a person from using the name of Jesus because he was not part of His group. Jesus answered, “Do not stop him, because anyone who is not against us is for us (Mk 9:39). The document of the Plenary Assembly of the Bishops of Latin America, which was held in March 2008 in Aparecida, Brazil, bears the title: “Disciples and Missionaries of Jesus Christ, so that our people may have life in Him”. That is to say,, the purpose of the mission is not to work in such a way that people become Catholic, but rather that people may have life, and life in abundance.

- Matthew 23:16-22: The fourth “Alas for you...” is aimed at those who swear. “You say, ‘if anyone swears by the Temple, it has no force, but anyone who swears by the gold of the Temple is bound’. Jesus makes a long disquisition to show the flaws in so many oaths that people made or that the official religion ordered people to take: to swear by the gold of the Temple or by the offering which was on the altar. The teaching of Jesus given in the Sermon on the Mount is the best commentary on today’s Gospel: “But I tell you do not swear at all, either by heaven since that is God’s throne, or by earth, since that is His footstool, or by Jerusalem, since that is the city of the great King. Do not swear by your own head either, since you cannot turn a single hair white or black. All you need say is ‘Yes’ if you mean ‘yes’, ‘No’ if you mean ‘No’; anything more than this comes from the Evil One” (Mt 5:34-37).

4) Personal questions

- “Alas for you...” is said four times: four reasons to receive severe criticism from Jesus. Which of these four criticisms refers to me?
- Does our Church today deserve these “Alas for you...” from Jesus?

5) Concluding Prayer

Sing a new song to Yahweh!
Sing to Yahweh, all the earth!
Sing to Yahweh, bless His name!
Proclaim His salvation day after day. (Ps 96:1-2)

Lectio Divina Tuesday, August 27, 2019

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Father,
help us to seek the values
that will bring us enduring joy in this changing world.
In our desire for what You promise
make us one in mind and heart.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, Your Son,

who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

2) Gospel Reading - Matthew 23:23-26

Jesus said: "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You pay tithes of mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier things of the law: judgment and mercy and fidelity. But these you should have done, without neglecting the others. Blind guides, who strain out the gnat and swallow the camel! "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You cleanse the outside of cup and dish, but inside they are full of plunder and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee, cleanse first the inside of the cup, so that the outside also may be clean."

3) Reflection

- The Gospel today presents two other times when this expression is used: "Alas for you..." Jesus speaks against the religious leaders of His time. The two uses today denounce the lack of coherence between word and attitude, between exterior and interior. Today we continue our reflection which we began yesterday.
- Matthew 23:23-24: The fifth "Alas for you..." is against those who insist on observance and forget mercy. "You pay your tithe of mint and dill and cumin and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice, mercy and fidelity." This fifth "Alas for you..." of Jesus is against the religious leaders of that time and can be repeated against many religious of the following century even up to our time. Many times, in the name of Jesus, we insist on details and forget mercy. For example, Jansenism reduces lived faith to something arid, insisting on the observance and penance which led people away from the way of love. The Carmelite Saint Therese of Lisieux grew in the Jansenist environment which marked France at the end of the XIX century. Beginning from a personal painful experience, she learned how to reclaim the gratuitous of love of God, a force which should animate the observance of the norms from within, because, without love, the observance makes an idol of God.
- Matthew 23:25-26: The sixth "Alas for you..." is against those who clean things on the outside and are dirty inside. "You clean the outside of the cup and dish and leave the inside full of extortion and intemperance." In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus criticizes those who observe the letter of the law and transgress the spirit of the law. He says, "You have heard how it was said to our ancestors, 'You shall not kill, and if anyone does kill he must answer for it before the court.' But I say to you anyone who is angry with his brother will answer for it before the court. Anyone who calls his brother 'fool' will answer for it before the Sanhedrin; and anyone who calls him 'traitor' will answer for it in hell fire. You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery,' but I say this to you, if a man looks at a woman lustfully, he has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Mt 5:21-22, 27-28). It is not enough to observe the letter of the Law. It is not sufficient not to kill, not to rob, not to commit adultery, not to swear in order to be faithful to what God asks of us. The one who observes fully the law of God is the one who, besides observing the letter, goes deeply to the root and pulls out from within "the desires of extortion and intemperance" which may lead to murder, theft, and adultery. The fullness of the law is realized in the practice of love.

4) Personal questions

- There are two declarations of “Alas for you...”, two reasons to receive criticism from Jesus. Which of these two applies to me?
- Observance and gratuity: Which of these applies to me?
- Do these admonitions paint for me a bigger picture of not only avoiding sin, but of internal purification and a life of virtue?

5) Concluding Prayer

Proclaim God’s salvation day after day,
declare His glory among the nations,
His marvels to every people! (Ps 96:2-3)

Lectio Divina Wednesday, August 28, 2019

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Father,
help us to seek the values
that will bring us enduring joy in this changing world.
In our desire for what You promise
make us one in mind and heart.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, Your Son,
who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

2) Gospel Reading - Matthew 23:27-32

Jesus said, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You are like whitewashed tombs, which appear beautiful on the outside, but inside are full of dead men's bones and every kind of filth. Even so, on the outside you appear righteous, but inside you are filled with hypocrisy and evildoing. "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the memorials of the righteous, and you say, 'If we had lived in the days of our ancestors, we would not have joined them in shedding the prophets' blood.' Thus you bear witness against yourselves that you are the children of those who murdered the prophets; now fill up what your ancestors measured out!"

3) Reflection

- These two last "Alas for you..." which Jesus pronounced against the doctors of the law and the Pharisees of His time, take again and strengthen, the same theme of the two "Alas for you..." of the Gospel of yesterday. Jesus criticizes the lack of coherence between word and practice, between what is interior and what is exterior.
- Matthew 23:27-28: The seventh, "Alas for you..." against those who are like

whitewashed tombs. "You appear upright on the outside, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness". The image of "whitewashed sepulchers" speaks for itself and needs no commentaries. Jesus condemns those who have the fictitious appearance of upright persons, but who interiorly are the total negation of what they want to appear to be.

- Matthew 23:29-32: The eighth "Alas for you..." against those who build the sepulchers of the prophets and decorate the tombs of the upright, but do not imitate them. The doctors and the Pharisees said: "We would never have joined in shedding the blood of the prophets, had we lived in our ancestors' day". Jesus concludes saying: The people who speak like this "confess that they are children of those who killed the prophets", then they say "our fathers". Jesus ends by saying, "Very well then, finish off the work that your ancestors began!" In fact, at that moment they had already decided to kill Jesus. In this way they were finishing off the work of their ancestors.

4) Personal questions

- These two other expressions of "Alas for you..." are but two reasons for being criticized severely by Jesus. Which of these is in me?
- Which image of myself do I try to present to others? Does it correspond, in fact, to what I am before God?

5) Concluding Prayer

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

Lectio Divina Thursday, August 29, 2019

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Father,
help us to seek the values
that will bring us enduring joy in this changing world.
In our desire for what You promise
make us one in mind and heart.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, Your Son,
who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

2) Gospel Reading - Mark 6:17-29

Herod was the one who had John the Baptist arrested and bound in prison on account of Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip, whom he had married. John had said to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." Herodias harbored a grudge

against him and wanted to kill him but was unable to do so. Herod feared John, knowing him to be a righteous and holy man, and kept him in custody. When he heard him speak he was very much perplexed, yet he liked to listen to him. She had an opportunity one day when Herod, on his birthday, gave a banquet for his courtiers, his military officers, and the leading men of Galilee. Herodias' own daughter came in and performed a dance that delighted Herod and his guests. The king said to the girl, "Ask of me whatever you wish and I will grant it to you." He even swore many things to her, "I will grant you whatever you ask of me, even to half of my kingdom." She went out and said to her mother, "What shall I ask for?" She replied, "The head of John the Baptist." The girl hurried back to the king's presence and made her request, "I want you to give me at once on a platter the head of John the Baptist." The king was deeply distressed, but because of his oaths and the guests he did not wish to break his word to her. So he promptly dispatched an executioner with orders to bring back his head. He went off and beheaded him in the prison. He brought in the head on a platter and gave it to the girl. The girl in turn gave it to her mother. When his disciples heard about it, they came and took his body and laid it in a tomb.

3) Reflection

- Today we commemorate the martyrdom of Saint John the Baptist. The Gospel gives a description of how John the Baptist was killed, without due process, during a banquet, a victim of the corruption and arrogance of Herod and his court.
- Mark 6:17-20. The cause of the imprisonment and the beheading of John. Herod was an employee of the Roman Empire, who ruled in Palestine beginning in the year 63 BC. Caesar was the Emperor of Rome. He insisted above all in an efficient administration which would provide revenue for the Empire and for him. Herod's concern was his own advancement and his security. This is why he suppressed any type of corruption. He liked to be called the benefactor of the people, but in reality he was a tyrant (cf. Lk 22:25). Flavius Josephus, a writer of that time, claims that the reason for the imprisonment of John the Baptist was the fear that Herod had of a popular uprising or revolt. John the Baptist's denunciation of the depraved morality of Herod (Mk 6:18) was "the straw that broke the camel's back," and John was imprisoned.
- Mark 6:21-29: The plot of the murderer. The anniversary and banquet of the feast, with dancing and orgy, were the occasion for the beheading of John. It was an environment in which the powerful of the kingdom met together and in which alliances were formed. "The great of the court," two officials and two important people from Galilee, participated in the feast. This was the environment in which the beheading of John the Baptist was decided. John, the prophet, was a living denunciation of that corrupt system, and this is why he was eliminated under the pretext of a personal obligation. All this reveals the moral weakness of Herod. So much power had accumulated in the hands of one man who had no self-control. In the enthusiasm of the feast, of the celebration and of wine, Herod makes a promise by oath to a young girl, a dancer. Superstitious as he was, he thought that he had to keep the promise. For Herod, the lives of his subjects were worthless. Mark gives an account of how the beheading happened and leaves the communities the task of drawing the conclusion.
- Between the lines, the Gospel today gives much information on the time in which Jesus lived and on the way in which power was exercised by the powerful of that time.

Galilee, the land of Jesus, was governed by Herod Antipas, the son of King Herod, the Great, from the year 4 BC until the year 39 AD - 43 years! During the whole time of Jesus' life on earth there was no change of government in Galilee! Herod was absolute lord of everything and did not render an account to anyone. He did as he pleased. In him there was arrogance, lack of ethics, absolute power, without any control on the part of the people!

- Herod constructed a new capital, called Tiberiades. Seffori, the ancient capital, was destroyed by the Romans in retaliation for a popular revolt. This happened when Jesus was about seven years old. Tiberiades, the new capital, was inaugurated thirteen years later, when Jesus was approximately 20 years old. The capital was given that name in order to please Tiberius, the Emperor of Rome. Tiberiades was a strange place in Galilee. That was the place where the king, “the great of the court”, the officials, the important people of Galilee lived (Mk 6:21). The landowners, the soldiers, the policemen lived there and also the judges, who were often insensitive and indifferent (Lk 18:1-4). The taxes and tributes and the products of the people were channeled there. It was there that Herod held his orgies of death (Mk 6:21-29). The Gospel does not say that Jesus entered the city.

During the 43 years of the government of Herod, a class of officials, faithful to the plans of the king, was created: the scribes, the merchants, the landowners, the tax collectors on the market, the tax collectors or publicans, the militia, policemen, judges, promoters, local heads. The majority of these people lived in the capital and enjoyed the privileges which Herod offered, for example, exemption from taxes. Others lived in the villages. In every village or city there was a group of people who supported the government. Several scribes and Pharisees were bound to the system and to the politics of the government. In the Gospels, the Pharisees appear together with the Herodians (Mk 3:6; 8:15; 12:13), and this shows the existing alliance between the religious and the civil powers. The life of the people in the villages of Galilee was very controlled, both by the government and by religion. It took much courage to begin something new, as John and Jesus did! It was the same thing as attracting to oneself the anger of the privileged ones, both those of the religious power as those of the civil power, both at local and state levels.

4) Personal questions

- Do you know any people who died as victims of corruption and the dominion of the powerful? And here, among us, in our community and in the Church, are there some victims of authoritarianism or of the excess of power? Give an example.
- Superstition, corruption, cowardice marked the exercise of Herod's power. Compare this with the exercise of religious and civil power today, in the various levels both of society and of the Church.

5) Concluding Prayer

In You, Yahweh, I take refuge,
I shall never be put to shame.
In Your saving justice rescue me,
deliver me, listen to me and save me. (Ps 71:1-2)

Lectio Divina Friday, August 30, 2019

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Father of everlasting goodness,
our origin and guide,
be close to us
and hear the prayers of all who praise You.
Forgive our sins and restore us to life.
Keep us safe 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.

2) Gospel Reading – Matthew 25:1-13

Jesus told his disciples this parable: "The Kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were wise. The foolish ones, when taking their lamps, brought no oil with them, but the wise brought flasks of oil with their lamps. Since the bridegroom was long delayed, they all became drowsy and fell asleep. At midnight, there was a cry, 'Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!' Then all those virgins got up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish ones said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' But the wise ones replied, 'No, for there may not be enough for us and you. Go instead to the merchants and buy some for yourselves.' While they went off to buy it, the bridegroom came and those who were ready went into the wedding feast with him. Then the door was locked. Afterwards the other virgins came and said, 'Lord, Lord, open the door for us!' But he said in reply, 'Amen, I say to you, I do not know you.' Therefore, stay awake, for you know neither the day nor the hour."

3) Reflection

- Matthew 25:1^a: The beginning: "At that time". The parable begins with these words: "At that time". It is a question of the coming of the Son of Man (cf. Mt 24:37). Nobody knows when this day, this time will come, "not even the angels in Heaven nor the Son himself, but only the Father" (Mt 24:36). The fortune tellers will not succeed in giving an estimate. The Son of Man will come as a surprise, when people least expect Him (Mt 24:44). It can be today, or it can be tomorrow. That is why the last warning of the parable of the ten Virgins is: "Keep watch!" The ten bridesmaids should be prepared for anything that might happen. When the Nazi policemen knocked at the door of the Monastery of the Carmelite Sisters of Echt in the Province of Limburgia, in the Netherlands, Edith Stein, Sister Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, was prepared. She took on the Cross and followed the way to martyrdom in the extermination camp out of love for God and for her people. She was one of the prudent virgins of the parable.

- Matthew 25:1b-4: The ten virgins ready to wait for the bridegroom. The parable begins like this: “The Kingdom of Heaven is like this: ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom.” It is an issue of the bridesmaids who have to accompany the bridegroom to the wedding feast. Because of this, they have to take the lamps with them, to light the way, as well as render the feast more joyful with more light. Five of them were prudent, and five were foolish. This difference is seen in the way in which they prepare themselves for the role that they have to carry out. Together with the lighted lamps, the prudent ones had taken some oil in reserve, preparing themselves in this way for anything which could happen. The foolish ones took only the lamps and they did not think to take some oil in reserve with them.
- Matthew 25:5-7: The unforeseen delay of the arrival of the bridegroom. The bridegroom was late. He had not indicated precisely the hour of his arrival. While waiting, the bridesmaids went to sleep. But the lamps continue to burn and use oil until gradually they burn out. Suddenly, in the middle of the night, there was a cry: “Look! The bridegroom! Go out and meet him!” All the bridesmaids woke up and began to prepare their lamps, which were burning out. They had to put in some of the oil they had brought in reserve so that the lamps would not burn out.
- Matthew 25:8-9: The different reactions to the delay of the bridegroom. It is only now that the foolish bridesmaids become aware that they should have brought some oil in reserve with them. They go to ask the prudent ones, “Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.” The prudent ones are unable to respond to this request, because at that moment what was important was not for the prudent ones to share their oil with the foolish ones, but that they be ready to accompany the bridegroom to the place of the feast. For this reason they advised them, “You had better go to those who sell it and buy some for yourselves.”
- Matthew 25:10-12: The fate of the prudent bridesmaids and that of the foolish ones. The foolish ones followed the advice of the prudent ones and went to buy some oil. During their brief absence the bridegroom arrived. The prudent ones were able to accompany him and to enter the wedding feast with him. But the door was closed behind them. When the others arrived, they knocked at the door and said, “Lord, Lord, open the door for us!” and they received the reply, “In truth I tell you, I do not know you.”
- Matthew 25:13: Jesus final recommendation to all of us. The story of this parable is very simple, and the lesson is obvious: “So stay awake and watch, because you do not know either the day or the hour.” The moral of the story: do not be superficial. Look beyond the present moment, and try to discover the call of God even in the smallest things of life, even the oil which may be lacking in the small light or lamp.

4) Personal questions

- Have you had to think about having oil in reserve for your lamp in your life?
- What does it mean to be prepared? Is it acceptance of God’s will, or interiority, or sacramental, or in/through virtue, or something else, or all of that?
- It is easy with lamps – you either have extra oil or not. How do you evaluate whether you are prepared, or what else there is to do?
- Do you know the life of Saint Edith Stein, Teresa Benedicta of the Cross?

5) Concluding Prayer

I will bless Yahweh at all times,
His praise continually on my lips.
I will praise Yahweh from my heart.
Let the humble hear and rejoice. (Ps 34:1-2)

Lectio Divina Saturday, August 31, 2019

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Father,
help us to seek the values
that will bring us enduring joy in this changing world.
In our desire for what You promise
make us one in mind and heart.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, Your Son,
who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

2) Gospel Reading - Matthew 25:14-30

Jesus told his disciples this parable: "A man going on a journey called in his servants and entrusted his possessions to them. To one he gave five talents; to another, two; to a third, one— to each according to his ability. Then he went away. Immediately the one who received five talents went and traded with them, and made another five. Likewise, the one who received two made another two. But the man who received one went off and dug a hole in the ground and buried his master's money. After a long time the master of those servants came back and settled accounts with them. The one who had received five talents came forward bringing the additional five. He said, 'Master, you gave me five talents. See, I have made five more.' His master said to him, 'Well done, my good and faithful servant. Since you were faithful in small matters, I will give you great responsibilities. Come, share your master's joy.' Then the one who had received two talents also came forward and said, 'Master, you gave me two talents. See, I have made two more.' His master said to him, 'Well done, my good and faithful servant. Since you were faithful in small matters, I will give you great responsibilities. Come, share your master's joy.' Then the one who had received the one talent came forward and said, 'Master, I knew you were a demanding person, harvesting where you did not plant and gathering where you did not scatter; so out of fear I went off and buried your talent in the ground. Here it is back.' His master said to him in reply, 'You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I did not plant and gather where I did not scatter? Should you not then have put my money in the bank so that I could have got it back with interest on my return? Now then! Take the talent from him and give it to the one with ten. For to everyone who has, more will be given and he will grow rich; but from

the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. And throw this useless servant into the darkness outside, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth."

3) Reflection

• Today's Gospel presents to us the parable of the talents. This parable was between two other parables: the parable of the ten virgins (Mt 25:1-13) and the parable of the final judgment (Mt 25:31-46). These three parables clarify and orientate people concerning the coming of the Kingdom. The parable of the ten virgins insists on vigilance: the Kingdom may arrive at any moment. The parable of the final judgment says that in order to possess the Kingdom it is necessary to accept the little ones. The parable of the talents directs us on what to do to make the Kingdom grow. It speaks of the gifts and the charisms which people receive from God. Every person has qualities, knows something that he/she can teach others. Nobody is just a pupil; nobody is just a teacher. We all learn from one another.

A key to understanding the parable: one of the things which has greater influence on the life of the people is the idea which we have of God. Among the Jews who followed the Pharisees, some imagined that God was a severe judge, who treated people according to the merit they had gained through the observance of the Law. That produced fear in the people and prevented them from growing. It especially prevented them from opening a space within them, to receive and accept the new experience of God which Jesus communicated. In order to help these people, Matthew tells the story of the talents.

• Matthew 25:14-15: The door of entrance in the parable. Jesus tells the story of a man who, before going abroad, entrusted his goods to his servants, giving them five, two and one talent, according to the capacity of each one. One talent was equal to 34 kg. of gold, which is not something small! Basically, each one receives the same amount, because he receives "according to his capacity." Anyone who has a big cup, receives a full cup. The man went on his journey abroad, where he remained for a long time. The story produces a certain moment of suspense. One does not know for what purpose the man entrusts his money to the servants; neither does one know the end.

• Matthew 25:16-18: The way of acting of each one of the servants. The first two servants worked and made the money produce a double amount. But the one who received one talent buried it so as not to lose it. It is a question of the goods of the Kingdom, which are given to people and to the communities according to their capacity. Everyone receives some good of the Kingdom, but not all respond in the same way!

• Matthew 25:19-23: Rendering an account of the first and the second servants, and response of the master. After a long time, the man returned. The first two servants say the same thing: "Sir, you entrusted me with five/two talents, here are five/two more that I have made." And the master gives the same response: "Well done, good and trustworthy servant, you have shown you are trustworthy in small things, I will trust you with greater; come and join in your master's happiness."

• Matthew 25:24-25: Rendering of account of the third servant. The third servant comes and says, "Sir, I had heard you were a hard man, reaping where you had not sown and gathering where you had not scattered, so I was afraid and I went off and hid your talent in the ground. Here it is!" In this phrase we have a mistaken idea of God, which is

criticized by Jesus. The servant considers God as a severe master. Before such a God, the human being is afraid and hides behind the exact and narrow-minded observance of the Law. The person thinks that acting in this way, the severity of the legislator will not punish him. In reality, such a person has a flawed view of God, and believes only in self and in the observance of the Law. This person closes up in self, separates herself from God and cannot be concerned about others. This person becomes incapable of growing and developing as a free person. This false image of God isolates the human being, kills the community, puts an end to joy and impoverishes life.

- Matthew 25:26-27: The response of the Master to the third servant. The response of the master is ironic. He says, “Wicked and lazy servant! So you knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered; you should have deposited my money with the bankers and on my return I would have got my money back with interest!” The third servant was not consistent with the severe image which he had of God. If he imagined that God was severe, he should have, at least, placed the money in the bank. Then, he is condemned not by God but by the mistaken idea that he had of God and which makes him more immature and fearful than what he should have been. It was not possible for him to be consistent with the erroneous image which he had of God, because fear dehumanized and paralyzed life.

- Matthew 25:28-30: The last word of the Lord, which clarifies the parable. The master orders that the talent be taken from him and given to the man who has the ten talents. For to everyone who has will be given more, and he will have more than enough; but anyone who has not, will be deprived even of what he has.” This is the key which clarifies everything. In reality, the talents, the “money of the master,” the goods of the Kingdom, are love, service, sharing. It is everything which helps the community to grow and reveals the presence of God. Anyone who closes himself in self out of fear of losing the little that he has, at the end will lose even the little that he has. But the person who does not think of self, and gives herself to others, grows and receives in turn, in an unexpected way, everything which she has given and even more. Anyone who loses his life will find it, and anyone who has the courage to lose his life will find it.”

- The different money of the Kingdom. There is no difference between those who have received more and those who have received less. All have their gift according to their capacity. What is important is that this gift be placed at the service of the Kingdom and make the goods of the Kingdom grow. These gifts are love, fraternal spirit, sharing. The principal key of the parable does not consist in making the talents render something, but rather in relating to God in a correct way. The two first servants ask for nothing; they do not seek their own good; they do not want things for themselves; they do not close up in self; they do not calculate. In the most natural way, almost without being aware and without seeking their own merit, they begin to work, in such a way that the gift received from God may produce for God and for the Kingdom. The third servant is afraid, and because of this does nothing. According to the norms of the ancient law, he acts correctly. He fulfills the requirements. He loses nothing and gains nothing. And because of this he loses even what he had. The Kingdom is a risk. Anyone who does not want to run risks will lose the Kingdom!

4) Personal questions

- In our community, do we try to know and value the gifts of each person? Is our community a place where people are able to make known their talents and make them available to others? Sometimes, the gifts of some generate envy and competitiveness in others. How do we react?
- How is the following statement to be understood: “For anyone who has will be given more; but anyone who does not have will be taken away even what he has”?

5) Concluding Prayer

We are waiting for Yahweh;
He is our help and our shield,
for in Him our heart rejoices,
in His holy name we trust. (Ps 33:20-21)