

Lectio Divina August 2020

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Lectio Divina Saturday, August 1, 2020

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 2, 2020

The multiplication of the loaves

Matthew 14:13-21

1. LECTIO

Opening prayer:

Come Holy Spirit

Come Fire of love

Come Father of the poor

Come Unction of my soul.

b) Reading:

13 When Jesus received this news He withdrew by boat to a lonely place where they could be by themselves. But the crowds heard of this and, leaving the towns, went after Him on foot. 14 So as He stepped ashore He saw a large crowd; and He took pity on

them and healed their sick. 15 When evening came, the disciples went to Him and said, 'This is a lonely place, and time has slipped by; so send the people away, and they can go to the villages to buy themselves some food.' 16 Jesus replied, 'There is no need for them to go: give them something to eat yourselves.' 17 But they answered, 'All we have with us is five loaves and two fish.' 18 So He said, 'Bring them here to me.' 19 He gave orders that the people were to sit down on the grass; then He took the five loaves and the two fish, raised His eyes to heaven and said the blessing. And breaking the loaves He handed them to His disciples, who gave them to the crowds. 20 They all ate as much as they wanted, and they collected the scraps left over, twelve baskets full. 21 Now about five thousand men had eaten, to say nothing of women and children.



c) A moment of silence:

so that the Word of God may enter into our hearts and enlighten our lives.

2. MEDITATIO

a) A key to the reading:

All the Evangelists tell the story of the multiplication of the loaves. While Luke and John only tell us of one multiplication of loaves (Lk 9:10-17; Jn 6:1-13), Mark and Matthew refer to two occasions of multiplication (Mk 6:30-44; 8:1-10; Mt 14:13-21; 15:32-39). It seems that both stories in Matthew and Mark came from the one source when loaves were multiplied, but which was passed on in two versions according to different traditions. Besides, the story in Mt 14:13-21 and Mk 6:30-44 seem to be the older versions. Here we focus on the subject of our lectio divina, that is, the text of Mt 14:13-21.

This text presents Jesus at the time when He received the news of the Baptist's beheading by Herod (Mt 14:12). He goes apart «in a lonely place» (Mt 14:13). The Gospels often show us Jesus as someone who goes apart. Generally, but not always, this going apart presents a Jesus who is immersed in prayer. Here are some examples: «After sending the people away, He went up a hill by Himself to pray. When evening came, Jesus was there alone» (Mt 14:23); «Very early in the morning, long before daylight, Jesus got up and left the house. He went out of town to a lonely place, where He prays» (Mk 1:35); «He would go away to lonely places, where He prayed» (Lk 5: 16); «led by the Spirit» after His baptism, Jesus goes away into the desert to be tempted by the devil and He overcomes the devil's seductions by the power of the Word of God (Mt 4:1-11; Mk 1:12-13; Lk 4:1-13). At other times, Jesus calls His disciples to Him: «Let us go off by ourselves to someplace where we will be alone and you can rest a while» (Mk 6:30-44). In our passage, Jesus prays before multiplying the loaves. The Gospels show that Jesus liked to pray before important events throughout His ministry such at His baptism, His transfiguration and His passion.

This time the crowd follows Him into the desert (Mt 14:13) and Jesus feels compassion for them and cures their sick (Mt 14:14). We often see compassion in Jesus towards those who follow Him (Mt 15:32). The master is moved because they «were like sheep without a shepherd» (Mk 6:34). Indeed, Jesus is the good shepherd who nourishes His people like the prophet Elisha (2 Kings 4:1-7, 42-44) and like Moses in the desert (Ex 16; Nm 11). In John's Gospel, Jesus, in His discourse on the bread of life (Jn 6), explains the meaning of the sign of the multiplication of the loaves. This miracle is a preparation for the bread that will be given in the Eucharist. In all the Gospels, Jesus' actions before He multiplies the loaves, recall the rite of breaking the bread, the Eucharist. The actions are: a) taking the bread, b) lifting «His eyes up to heaven», c) pronouncing «the blessing», d) breaking the bread, e) giving it to the disciples (Mt 14:19). These actions are found in the stories of the multiplication of the loaves and, word for word, in the story of the last supper (Mt 26:26).

All eat of the bread and are satisfied. Twelve baskets full of leftovers are taken up. Jesus is the one who satisfies the chosen people of God: Israel, made up of twelve tribes. But He also satisfies the pagans in the second multiplication (Mt 15:32-39), symbolized now by seven baskets, the number of the nations of Canaan (Acts 13:19) and also the number of the Hellenist deacons (Acts 6:5; 21:8) who were given the task of providing for the daily distribution at table. The community gathered around Jesus, a foretaste of the Kingdom of God, welcomed Jews and Gentiles, all called to accept the invitation to share at the table of the Lord. Jesus shows this also by His action of sitting at table with publicans and sinners and, through His teachings in the parables of the banquet where «many will come from the east and the west and sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob at the feast in the Kingdom of heaven» (Mt 8: 11; see also Mt 22:34; Lk 14:16-24).

b) Some questions to guide our meditation and practice:

- What touched you most in this passage?
- Which of Jesus' attitudes touched you most in this text?
- Have you ever thought of Jesus' emotions? This text focuses on compassion. Can you find other emotions in the Gospels?
- What do you think God wishes to tell you through this story of the multiplication of the loaves?
- Jesus provides food in abundance. Do you trust in the providence of the Lord? What does it mean for you to trust in providence?
- Have you ever thought of the Eucharist as sitting down at table with Jesus? Who are those invited to this table?

3. ORATIO

a) Psalm 78:24-25:

He rained down manna to feed them,
He gave them the wheat of heaven;
mere mortals ate the bread of the Mighty,
He sent them as much food as they could want.

b) Closing prayer:

O God, who in the compassion of Your Son towards us, show us Your fatherly goodness, grant that the bread multiplied by Your providence may be broken in love, and the communion in the bread come down from heaven open us to dialogue with and service of our brothers and sisters. Through Christ our Lord.

4. CONTEMPLATIO

There is one other point which I would like to emphasize, since it significantly affects the authenticity of our communal sharing in the Eucharist. It is the impulse which the Eucharist gives to the community for a practical commitment to building a more just and fraternal society. In the Eucharist our God has shown love in the extreme, overturning all those criteria of power which too often govern human relations and radically affirming the criterion of service: "If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all" (Mk 9:35). [...] Can we not make this Year of the Eucharist an occasion for diocesan and parish communities to commit themselves in a particular way to responding with fraternal solicitude to one of the many forms of poverty present in our world? I think for example of the tragedy of hunger which plagues hundreds of millions of human beings, the diseases which afflict developing countries, the loneliness of the elderly, the hardships faced by the unemployed, the struggles of immigrants. These are evils which are present - albeit to a different degree - even in areas of immense wealth. We cannot delude ourselves: by our mutual love and, in particular, by our concern for those in need we will be recognized as true followers of Christ (cf. Jn 13:35; Mt 25:31-46). This will be the criterion by which the authenticity of our Eucharistic celebrations is judged.

John Paul II, Mane Nobiscum Domine, 28.

Lectio Divina Monday, August 3, 2020

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 14:22-36

At once Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side while He sent the crowds away. After sending the crowds away He went up into the

hills by Himself to pray.

When evening came, He was there alone, while the boat, by now some furlongs from land, was hard pressed by rough waves, for there was a head-wind. In the fourth watch of the night He came towards them, walking on the sea, and when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea they were terrified. 'It is a ghost,' they said, and cried out in fear.

But at once Jesus called out to them, saying, 'Courage! It's me! Don't be afraid.'

It was Peter who answered. 'Lord,' he said, 'if it is You, tell me to come to You across the water.' Jesus said, 'Come.' Then Peter got out of the boat and started walking towards Jesus across the water, but then noticing the wind, he took fright and began to sink. 'Lord,' he cried, 'save me!'

Jesus put out His hand at once and held Him. 'You have so little faith,' He said, 'why did you doubt?' 32 And as they got into the boat the wind dropped. 33 The men in the boat bowed down before Him and said, 'Truly, You are the Son of God.'

Having made the crossing, they came to land at Gennesaret. When the local people recognized Him they spread the news through the whole neighborhood and took all that were sick to Him, begging Him just to let them touch the fringe of His cloak. And all those who touched it were saved.

3) Reflection

- The Gospel today describes the difficult and tiresome crossing of the Sea of Galilee in a fragile boat, pushed by a contrary wind. Between the discourse of the Parables (Mt 13) and of the Community (Mt 18), there is once again, the narrative part (Mt 14 to 17). The discourse of the Parables calls our attention again to the presence of the Kingdom. Now, the narrative part shows the reactions in favor of and against Jesus provoked by that presence. In Nazareth, He was not accepted (Mt 13:53-58) and King Herod thought that Jesus was a sort or reincarnation of John the Baptist, whom he had murdered (Mt 14:1-12). The poor people, though, recognized in Jesus the one who had been sent by God and they followed Him to the desert, where the multiplication of the loaves took place (Mt 14:13-21). After the multiplication of the loaves, Jesus took leave of the crowd and ordered the disciples to cross the lake, as it is described in today's Gospel (Mt 14:22-36).

- Matthew 14:22-24: To begin the crossing asked by Jesus. Jesus obliges the Disciples to go into the boat and to go toward the other side of the sea, where the land of the pagans was. He goes up to the mountain to pray. The boat symbolizes the community. It has the mission to direct itself toward the pagans and to announce among them the Good News of the Kingdom also, which was the new way of living in community. But the crossing was very tiring and long. The boat is agitated by the wave, because the wind is contrary. In spite of having rowed the whole night, there is still a great distance left before reaching the land. Much was still lacking in the community in order to be able to cross and go toward the pagans. Jesus did not go with His disciples. They had to learn to face together the difficulties, united and strengthened by faith in Jesus, who had sent them. The contrast is very great: Jesus is in peace together with God, praying on the top of the mountain, and the Disciples are almost lost there below, in the agitated sea.

- The crossing to the other side of the lake symbolizes also the difficult crossing of the community at the end of the first century. They should get out of the closed world of

the ancient observance of the law toward the new manner of observing the Law of love, taught by Jesus; they should abandon the knowledge of belonging to the Chosen People, privileged by God among all other peoples, for the certainty that in Christ all peoples would be united into One People before God; they should get out from isolation and intolerance toward the open world of acceptance and of gratitude. Today also, we are going through a difficult crossing toward a new time and a new way of being Church. A difficult crossing, but which is necessary. There are moments in life in which we are attacked by fear. Good will is not lacking, but this is not sufficient. We are like a boat faced with the contrary wind.

- Matthew 14:25-27: Jesus comes close to them but they do not recognize Him. Toward the end of the night, that is, between three and six o'clock in the morning, Jesus goes to meet the Disciples. Walking on the water, He gets close to them, but they do not recognize Him. They cry out in fear, thinking that it is a ghost. Jesus calms them down, saying, "Courage! It is me! Do not be afraid!" The expression "It is me!" is the same one with which God tried to overcome the fear of Moses when He sent him to liberate the people from Egypt (Ex 3:14). For the communities, of today as well as for those of yesterday, it was and it is very important to be always open to novelty: "Courage. It is me! Do not be afraid!"

- Matthew 14:28-31: Enthusiasm and weakness of Peter. Knowing that it is Jesus, Peter asks that he also be able walk on the water. He wants to experience the power which dominates the fury of the sea. This is a power which in the bible belongs only to God (Gen 1:6; Ps 104:6-9). Jesus allows him to participate in this power. But Peter is afraid. He thinks that he will sink and he cries out, "Lord, save me!" Jesus assures him and takes hold of him and reproaches him: "You have so little faith! Why did you doubt?" Peter has more strength than he imagined, but is afraid before the oncoming waves and does not believe in the power of God which dwells within him. The communities do not believe in the force of the Spirit which is within them and which acts through faith. It is the force of the Resurrection (Eph 1:19-20).

- Matthew 14:32-33: Jesus is the Son of God. Before the waves that come toward them, Peter begins to sink in the sea because of lack of faith. After he is saved, he and Jesus, both of them, go into the boat and the wind calms down. The other Disciples, who are in the boat, are astonished and bow before Jesus, recognizing that He is the Son of God: "Truly, You are the Son of God". Later on, Peter also professes the same faith in Jesus: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God!" (Mt 16:16). In this way Matthew suggests that it is not only Peter who sustains the faith of the Disciples, but also that the faith of the Disciples sustains Peter's faith.

- Matthew 14:34-36: They brought all the sick to Him. The episode of the crossing ends with something beautiful: "Having made the crossing they came to Gennesaret. When the local people recognized Him they spread the news through the whole neighborhood and took all who were sick to Him, begging Him just to let them touch the fringe of His cloak. And all those who touched it were saved".

4) Personal questions

- Has there been a contrary wind in your life? What have you done to overcome it? Has this happened sometimes in the community? How was it overcome?
- Which is the crossing which the communities are doing today? From where to where?

How does all this help us to recognize today the presence of Jesus in the contrary waves of life?

5) Concluding Prayer

Keep me far from the way of deceit;
grant me the grace of Your Law.
I have chosen the way of constancy;
I have molded myself to Your judgements. (Ps 119:29-30)

Lectio Divina Tuesday, August 4, 2020

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 15:1-2,10-14

Some Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said, "Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? They do not wash their hands when they eat a meal." He summoned the crowd and said to them, "Hear and understand. It is not what enters one's mouth that defiles the man; but what comes out of the mouth is what defiles one." Then his disciples approached and said to him, "Do you know that the Pharisees took offense when they heard what you said?" He said in reply, "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted. Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. If a blind man leads a blind man, both will fall into a pit."

3) Reflection

- Today's Gospel presents the discussion of Jesus with the Pharisees regarding what is pure and impure. The text speaks about the use and religious customs of that time, it speaks about the Pharisees who taught these uses and customs to the people and it also speaks about the instructions which Jesus gives regarding these uses and customs, many of which had already lost their significance. Here in the 15th chapter, Jesus helps the people and the disciples to better understand this very important theme concerning purity and the law of purity.
- Matthew 15:1-2: The Pharisees criticize the behavior of Jesus' disciples. Some Pharisees and doctors of the Law came to Jesus and asked, "Why do Your disciples break away from the tradition of the elder? They eat without washing their hands!" They pretend to be interested in knowing the reason for the behavior of the disciples. In reality, they criticize Jesus because He allows His disciples to break the norms of purity.

There are three points which merit our attention: (a) The scribes are from Jerusalem, the capital. They have come to observe what Jesus does. (b) The disciples do not wash their hands before eating! Living with Jesus gives them the courage to break the norms which tradition imposed upon people, but which no longer had any sense for life. (c) The washing of hands continues even now to be an important norm of hygiene, but had assumed for them a religious significance which served to control and discriminate against people.

- The Tradition of the Elders (Mt 15:3-9). “The Tradition of the Elders” transmitted the norms which had to be observed by the people in order to attain the purity which the law demanded. The observance of the law was something very serious. An impure or unclean person could not receive the blessing promised by God to Abraham. The norms of the law of purity taught how to recover purity in order to be able to appear once again before God and to feel at ease in His presence. One could not appear before God just in any way, because God is the Holy One and the law said, “Be holy because I am Holy!” (Lev 19: 2). The norms of purity were, in reality, a prison, an enslavement (cf. Mt 23: 4). For the poor, it was practically impossible to observe them: to touch a leper, to eat with a tax collector, to eat without washing one’s hands, and so many other activities. All these things rendered the person impure, and any contact with a person contaminated the others. This is why people lived in fear, always threatened by the many impure things which threatened their life. They were obliged to live, fearing everything and everyone. Insisting on the norms of purity, the Pharisees arrived at emptying the sense of the commandments of the Law of God. Jesus gives a concrete example. They said, “A person who consecrates his goods to the Temple can no longer use those goods to help the needy. Thus, in the name of tradition, they eliminated the significance of the fourth commandment which commands the honor of father and mother (Mt 15:3-6). These people seemed to be very observant, but they were only externally so. Inwardly, the heart was far away from God! Jesus said, quoting Isaiah, “These people honor me with the lips, but their heart is far away from Me (Mt 15:7-9). The wisdom of the people no longer agreed with what was taught, and they were waiting for the Messiah to come to show them another way in which to attain purity. This hope is realized in Jesus. Through His word He purified lepers (Mk 1:40-44), cast out demons (Mk 1: 26, 39; 3:15,22, etc.), and conquered death which was the source of all impurity. Jesus touches the woman who was excluded, and she is cured (Mk 5:25-34). Without fear of being contaminated, Jesus ate with people who were considered impure (Mk 2:15-17).

- Matthew 15:10-11: Jesus opens a new way to get people close to God. He tells the crowds, “Listen and understand! What goes into the mouth does not make anyone unclean: it is what comes out of the mouth that makes someone unclean!” Jesus reverses things: What is impure does not come from outside toward inside, as the doctors of the law taught, but from inside toward outside. In this way, nobody needs to ask himself if this or that food or drink is pure or impure. Jesus places what is clean and unclean on another level, the level of ethical behavior. He opens a new path to reach God, and in this way, He realizes the deepest desire of the people: to be at peace with God. Now all of a sudden everything changes! Through faith in Jesus, it was possible to attain purity and to feel well before God, without the need to observe all those norms of the “Tradition of the Elders.” This was liberation! The Good News announced by Jesus

liberates people from the defensive, from fear, and gives them back the will to live, the joy of being sons and daughters of God.

- Matthew 15:12-14: Jesus affirms again what He had already said. The disciples tell Jesus that His words have scandalized the Pharisees, because they were contrary to what the Pharisees taught the people. Because, if the people had seriously lived the new teaching of Jesus, the whole tradition of the elders would have to be abolished and the Pharisees and the doctors of the law would have lost their leadership and their source of income. Jesus' response is clear and leaves no doubts: "Any plant My Heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled out by the roots. Leave them alone! They are blind leaders of the blind. And if one blind person guides another, both will fall into the pit." Jesus did not diminish the impact of His words and He reaffirmed what He had said before.

4) Personal questions

- Do you know any religious practice today which no longer makes any sense, but which continues to be taught? In your life are there some practices and customs which are considered sacred, and others which are not?
- By what criteria would you judge these practices? Are these criteria consistent with all of Jesus' teaching, or just a limited passage (a single passage is easy to take out of context)?
- The Pharisees were practicing Jews, but their faith was separated from the life of the people. This is why Jesus criticizes them. And today, would Jesus criticize us? For what things?

5) Concluding Prayer

The angel of Yahweh encamps
around those who fear Him and rescues them.
Taste and see that Yahweh is good.
How blessed are those who take refuge in Him. (Ps 34:7-8)

Lectio Divina Wednesday, August 5, 2020

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 6, 2020

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 17:1-9

Jesus took with Him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain by themselves. There in their presence He was transfigured: His face shone like the sun and His clothes became as dazzling as light. And suddenly Moses and Elijah appeared to them; they were talking with Him.

Then Peter spoke to Jesus. 'Lord,' he said, 'it is wonderful for us to be here; if You want me to, I will make three shelters here, one for You, one for Moses and one for Elijah.' He was still speaking when suddenly a bright cloud covered them with shadow, and suddenly from the cloud there came a voice which said, 'This is My Son, the Beloved; He enjoys My favor. Listen to Him.'

When they heard this, the disciples fell on their faces, overcome with fear. But Jesus came up and touched them, saying, 'Stand up, do not be afraid.' And when they raised their eyes they saw no one but Jesus. As they came down from the mountain Jesus gave them this order, 'Tell no one about this vision until the Son of man has risen from the dead.'

3) Reflection

- Today is the Feast of the Transfiguration of Jesus. The Transfiguration takes place after the first announcement of the Death of Jesus (Mt 16:21). This announcement disturbs the head of the Disciples, especially Peter (Mt 16:22-23). They were living among the poor, but the head was lost in the dominating ideology of that time. They were expecting a glorious Messiah. The cross was an impediment to believing in Jesus. The Transfiguration, where Jesus appears glorious on the top of the mountain, was for them a help to overcome the trauma of the Cross and to discover the true Messiah in Jesus. But even with this, many years afterwards, when the Good News was already diffused in Asia Minor and in Greece, the Cross continued to be for the Jews and for the Gentiles a great impediment to accepting Jesus as Messiah. “The Cross is foolishness and scandal!” as it was said (1Cor 1:23). One of the greatest efforts of the first Christians was to help people to become aware that the cross was not a scandal, nor foolishness, but rather the most beautiful and strongest expression of the wisdom of God (1Cor 1:22-31). Today’s Gospel contributes to this effort. It shows that Jesus fulfilled the prophecy and that the Cross was the way to Glory. There is no other way.
- Matthew 17:1-3: *Jesus changes appearance*. Jesus goes up to the top of the mountain. Luke adds that He goes there to pray (Lk 9:28). There, on the top of the mountain, Jesus appears in glory, before Peter, James and John. Together with Jesus Moses and Elijah also appear. The high mountain evokes Mount Sinai, where, in the past, God had manifested His will to the people, giving them the Tablets of the Law. The white clothes recall Moses who was radiant with light when he was speaking with God on the Mountain and received the Law from God, (Ex 34:29-35). Elijah and Moses, the two maximum authorities of the Old Testament, speak with Jesus. Moses represents the Law; Elijah, the prophecy. Luke tells us that the conversation was on the “Exodus” (the death) of Jesus in Jerusalem (Lk 9:31). Thus, it is clear that the Old Testament, that is the Law as well as the Prophets, already taught that for the Messiah, the way to Glory had to go through the Cross. There is no other way.
- Matthew 17: 4: *It pleases Peter, but he does not understand*. It pleases Peter and he wants to freeze that pleasant moment on the Mountain. He offers to build three tents. Mark says that Peter was afraid, and did not know what he was saying (Mk 9:6), and Luke adds that the Disciples were sleepy (Lk 9:32). They were like us: it is difficult for them to understand the Cross!
- Matthew 17:5-8: *The voice from Heaven clarifies the facts*. When Jesus is enveloped by the glory, there was a voice from Heaven which said, “*This is My Son, the Beloved, He enjoys My favor. Listen to Him*”. The expression “Beloved son” evokes the person of the Messiah Servant, announced by the Prophet Isaiah (cf. Isa 42:1). The expression “*Listen to Him*” evokes the prophecy which promised the coming of a new Moses (cf. Deut 18:15). In Jesus the prophecies of the Old Testament are being fulfilled, the disciples can no longer doubt. Jesus is truly the *glorious* Messiah and the way to

arrive at the glory passes through the cross, according to everything announced in the prophecy of the Messiah Servant (Isa 53:3-9). The glory of the Transfiguration proves this. Moses and Elijah confirm it. The Father guarantees it. Jesus accepts it. Before everything which was taking place the Disciples were afraid and fell on their faces. Jesus gets close to them, touches them and says: “*Stand up, do not be afraid*”. The Disciples raised their eyes and saw only Jesus and nobody else. From now on, Jesus is the only revelation of God for us! Jesus, and He alone, is the key to understanding Scripture and Life.

- Matthew 17:9: *To know how to keep silence*. Jesus asks the disciples to tell no one about the vision until the Son of Man has risen from the dead. Mark says that they did not know what it meant to rise from the dead (Mk 9:10). In fact, the one who does not join suffering to the resurrection will not understand the significance of the Cross. The Cross of Jesus is the proof that life is stronger than death. The full understanding of the following of Jesus is not attained by theoretical instruction, but by practical commitment, *walking with Him along the road of service, from Galilee until Jerusalem*.

4) Personal questions

- Has your faith in Jesus given you some moment of transfiguration and of profound joy? How have these moments of joy given you strength in difficult moments?
- Today, how can you transfigure both your personal and your family life, and the community life of your neighborhood?

5) Concluding Prayer

The mountains melt like wax,
before the Lord of all the earth.
The heavens proclaim His saving justice,
all nations see His glory. (Ps 97:5-6)

Lectio Divina Friday, August 7, 2020

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 8, 2020

Ordinary Time

1) Prayer

Show us Your continued kindness, Father,
and watch Your people,
as we acknowledge Your guidance and Your leadership.

Renew the work of Your creation
and guard what You have renewed.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

2) Reading

From the Gospel according to Matthew 17:14-20

A man came up to Jesus, knelt down before him, and said, "Lord, have pity on my son, who is a lunatic and suffers severely; often he falls into fire, and often into water. I brought him to your disciples, but they could not cure him." Jesus said in reply, "O faithless and perverse generation, how long will I be with you? How long will I endure you? Bring the boy here to me." Jesus rebuked him and the demon came out of him, and from that hour the boy was cured. Then the disciples approached Jesus in private and said, "Why could we not drive it out?" He said to them, "Because of your little faith. Amen, I say to you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you."

3) Reflection

- Context. Our passage has Jesus in his work of healing. After having stayed with the disciples alone in the region of Caesarea Philippi (16:13 to 28) Jesus climbs a high mountain and is transfigured before three disciples (17:1-10) and then reaches the crowd (17:14 - 21) and attempts a new approach to Galilee (17:22). What to think of these geographical shifts of Jesus? It is not to be discounted that they could have geographical value, but Matthew presents them as part of a spiritual journey. In his journey of faith, the community is increasingly called upon to retrace that spiritual journey which marked the life of Jesus from Galilee to His passion, death and resurrection: a spiritual journey in which the power of faith plays a crucial role.
- The power of faith. Jesus, after His transfiguration, with His small community of disciples, returned from the crowd before returning to Galilee (v. 22) and arriving in Capernaum (v. 24). In the crowd a man approached Him and begged Him to intervene in the evil that keeps his son imprisoned. The description preceding the intervention of Jesus is really clear: this is a case of epilepsy with all its pathological consequences on the psychic level. At the time of Jesus, this type of illness was traced to evil forces and specifically the action of Satan, enemy of God and man, and therefore the origin of evil and all evil. Faced with such a situation in which evil forces far beyond human capabilities are at work, the disciples find themselves powerless to heal the child (vv. 16-19) and because of their lack of faith (v. 20). For the evangelist, this young epileptic is a symbol of those who devalue the power of faith (v. 20), not mindful of the presence of God in their midst (v. 17). The presence of God in Jesus, Emmanuel, is not recognized. Understand something of Jesus is not enough. We need true faith. After Jesus rebuked the crowd, they bring the boy: "Bring him here" (v. 17). Jesus heals and frees him and rebukes the devil. This is not simply the miracle of healing a single person, but also the healing of the weak and uncertain faith of the disciples. Jesus approaches them, who are confused or dazed by their impotence: "Why could we not cast it out?" (v. 20). Jesus' answer is clear: "because of your wavering faith." Jesus calls

for faith that can move mountains to identify with His person, His mission, His divine power. It is true that the disciples have left everything to follow Jesus but have failed to heal the epileptic boy because of "little faith." It is not lack of faith, only that it is weak, vacillating for sure, with a predominance of mistrust and doubt. It is a faith that is not rooted entirely in relationship with Christ. Jesus goes beyond the language when He says, "If you have faith like a mustard seed" it can move mountains, it is an exhortation to be guided by the power of faith in action, which becomes especially strong in times of trial and suffering and attains maturity in the scandal of the cross. True faith can do anything, can even move mountains. The disciples, the early community, experienced that you must join in the death and resurrection of Jesus.

4) Personal questions

- Through meditation we observed that the disciples are placed in relation to the epileptic and to Jesus Himself. Do you find that your faith helps you to relate to Jesus as well as to others?
- Do you feel committed every day to move the mountains that stand between your self-interest and the will of God?

5) Final Prayer

The LORD is a stronghold for the oppressed, stronghold in times of trouble. Those who honor Your name trust in You; You never forsake those who seek You, LORD. (Psalm 9)

Lectio Divina Sunday, August 9, 2020

Jesus walks on the sea
Matthew 14:22-33

1. Opening prayer

Come Holy Spirit, my life is going through a storm, the egoistic winds impel me where I do not wish to go. I cannot resist their force. I am weak and deprived of strength. You are the energy which gives life. You are my comfort, my force and my cry of prayer. Come, Holy Spirit, reveal to me the meaning of the Scriptures, give me peace anew, serenity and the joy of living.

2. Lectio

a) Key to the reading:

Jesus and His Disciples are on the shore of the lake, at nightfall, after the multiplication of the loaves. Part of the passage is also found in Mark (6:45-52) and in John (6:16-21). The episode of Peter (vv. 28-32) is found only in Matthew. Some commentators hold that it is a question of an appearance of Jesus after the Resurrection (Lk 24:37). The difficulties of the Church and the need for a greater faith in the Risen Jesus are thus foreshadowed.

b) A possible division of the Text:

Matthew 14:22-23: related to the multiplication of the loaves

Matthew 14:24-27: Jesus walks on the sea

Matthew 14:28-32: the episode of Peter

Matthew 14:33: the profession of faith.

c) Text:

22 And at once He made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side while He sent the crowds away. 23 After sending the crowds away He went up into the hills by Himself to pray. When evening came, He was there alone, 24 while the boat, by now some furlongs from land, was hard pressed by rough waves, for there was a head-wind. 25 In the fourth watch of the night he came towards them, walking on the sea, 26 and when the disciples saw him walking on the sea they were terrified. 'It is a ghost,' they said, and cried out in fear. 27 But at once Jesus called out to them, saying, 'Courage! It's me! Don't be afraid.' 28 It was Peter who answered. 'Lord,' he said, 'if it is you, tell me to come to you across the water.' 29 Jesus said, 'Come.' Then Peter got out of the boat and started walking towards Jesus across the water, 30 but then noticing the wind, he took fright and began to sink. 'Lord,' he cried, 'save me!' 31 Jesus put out His hand at once and held him. 'You have so little faith,' He said, 'why did you doubt?' 32 And as they got into the boat the wind dropped. 33 The men in the boat bowed down before Him and said, 'Truly, You are the Son of God.'



3. A Moment of prayerful silence

A desire to keep silence and to listen to God's voice

Some questions:

In moments of darkness and interior storms, how do I react? How are the presence and absence of the Lord integrated in me? What place does personal prayer and dialogue with God have in me?

What do we ask the Lord in a dark night? A miracle, that He free us from this? A greater faith? In which attitudes am I similar to Peter?

4. Meditatio

Brief commentary

22. And at once He made the disciples get into the boat and go ahead to the other side while He sent the crowds away.

The multiplication of the loaves (14:13-21) could have generated in the disciples triumphant expectations concerning the Kingdom of God. Therefore, Jesus orders them at once to get away. He 'obliged', usually a verb of strong significance. The people acclaim Jesus as a Prophet (Jn 6:14-15) and wish to make Him a political ruler. The

disciples are easily drawn by this (Mk 6:52; Mt 16:5-12), there is the risk of allowing themselves to be drawn by the enthusiasm of the people. The disciples have to abandon this situation.

23. After sending the crowds away He went up into the hills by Himself to pray. When evening came He was there alone.

Jesus finds Himself facing a situation in which the Galilean crowd becomes enthusiastic because of the miracle and runs the risk of not understanding His mission. In this very important moment, Jesus withdraws alone in prayer, as in Gethsemane (Mt 26:36-46).

24. While the boat, by now some furlongs from land, was hard pressed by rough waves, for there was a head-wind.

This verse where the boat is noticed, without Jesus, in danger, can be close to verse 32 where the danger ceases when Jesus and Peter get into the boat.

25. In the fourth watch of the night He came towards them, walking on the sea.

Jesus appears to His disciples in an extraordinary way. He transcends the human limitations, He has authority over creation. He acts as God alone can (Job 9:8; 38:16).

26. And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea they were terrified. 'It is a ghost', they said, and cried out in fear.

The disciples were struggling with the contrary wind, they had spent a very stressful day and now a sleepless night. At night (between three and six), in the middle of the sea, they were really terrified in seeing one coming towards them. They did not think of the possibility that it could be Jesus. Their vision is too human, and they believe in ghosts (Lk 24:37). The Risen Lord though, has overcome the force of chaos represented by the waves of the sea.

27. But at once Jesus called out to them, saying. 'Courage! It is Me! Do not be afraid!'

The presence of Jesus drives away all fear (9:2, 22). In saying "It is Me" He evokes His identity (Ex 3:14) and manifests the power of God (Mk 14:62; Lk 24:39; Jn 8:58; 18:5-6). Fear is overcome by faith.

28. It was Peter who answered: 'Lord, he said, 'If it is You, tell me to come to You across the water'.

Peter seems to want still another confirmation of the presence of Jesus. He asks for a sign.

29. Jesus said, 'Come'. Then Peter got out of the boat and started walking towards Jesus across the water.

Nevertheless, Peter is ready to run the risk, getting out of the boat and trying to walk on the agitated waves, in the midst of a strong wind (v. 24). He faces the risk of believing in the Word: 'Come'.

30. But then noticing the wind, he took fright and began to sink: 'Lord', he cried, 'save me!'

Perseverance is also necessary in the choice of faith. The contrary forces (the wind) are so many, that there is the risk of sinking. The prayer of petition saves him..

31. Jesus put out His hand at once and held him. 'You have so little faith, He said, 'why did you doubt?'

Peter is not left alone in his weakness. In the storms of Christian life we are not alone. God does not abandon us even if He apparently is absent and does nothing.

32. And as they got into the boat the wind dropped.

As soon as Jesus got in the boat the forces of evil cease. The force of hell shall not prevail over it.

33. The men in the boat bowed down before Him and said: 'Truly, You are the Son of God.'

Now comes that profession of faith which had been prepared in the preceding episode of the multiplication of the loaves, purified by the experience of getting away from the Bread of eternal life (Jn 6:1-14). Now Peter can also confirm his brothers in faith, after the trial.

5. For those who wish to go deeper into the text

Jesus, man of prayer

Jesus prays in solitude and at night (Mt 14:23; Mk 1:35; Lk 5:16), during the time of meals (Mt 14:19; 15:36; 26:26-27). On the occasion of important events: for Baptism (Lk 3:21), before choosing the twelve (Lk 6:12), before teaching how to pray (Lk 11:1; Mt 6:5); before the confession at Caesarea (Lk 9:18); in the Transfiguration (Lk 9:28-29), in Gethsemane (Mt 26:36-44); on the Cross (Mt 27:46; Lk 23:46). He prays for His executioners (Lk 23:34); for Peter (Lk 22:32), for His disciples and for those who will follow Him (Jn 17:9-24). He also prays for Himself (Mt 26:39; Jn 17:1-5; Heb 5:7). He teaches to pray (Mt 6:5), He manifests a permanent relationship with the Father (Mt 11:25-27), sure that He never leaves Him alone (Jn 8:29), and always hears Him (Jn 11:22, 42; Mt 26:53). He has promised (Jn 14:16) to continue to intercede in heaven (Rom 8: 34; Heb 7:25; I Jn 2:1).

6. Oratio: Psalm 33

I will praise Yahweh from my heart;
let the humble hear and rejoice.

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

I seek Yahweh and He answers me,
frees me from all my fears.

Fix your gaze on Yahweh and your face will grow bright,
you will never hang your head in shame.

A pauper calls out and Yahweh hears,
saves him from all his troubles.

The angel of Yahweh encamps around those who fear Him,
and rescues them.

Taste and see that Yahweh is good.
How blessed are those who take refuge in Him.

Fear Yahweh, you His holy ones;
those who fear Him lack for nothing.

7. Contemplatio

Lord Jesus, sometimes we are full of enthusiasm and forget that You are the source of our joy. In the moments of sadness we do not seek You or we want Your miraculous intervention. Now we know that You never abandon us, that we should not fear. Prayer is also our force. Increase our faith. We are ready to risk our life for Your Kingdom.

Lectio Divina Monday, August 10, 2020

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 Tuesday, August 11, 2020

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 12, 2020

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 13, 2020

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 18:21-19:1

Peter approached Jesus and asked him, "Lord, if my brother sins against me, how often must I forgive him? As many as seven times?" Jesus answered, "I say to you, not seven times but seventy-seven times. That is why the Kingdom of heaven may be likened to a king who decided to settle accounts with his servants. When he began the accounting, a debtor was brought before him who owed him a huge amount. Since he had no way of paying it back, his master ordered him to be sold, along with his wife, his children, and all his property, in payment of the debt. At that, the servant fell down, did him homage, and said, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back in full.' Moved with compassion the master of that servant let him go and forgave him the loan. When that servant had left, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a much smaller amount. He seized him and started to choke him, demanding, 'Pay back what you owe.' Falling to his knees, his fellow servant begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.' But he refused. Instead, he had the fellow servant put in prison until he paid back the debt. Now when his fellow servants saw what had happened, they were deeply disturbed, and went to their master and reported the whole affair. His master summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you your entire debt because you begged me to. Should you not have had pity on your fellow servant, as I had pity on you?' Then in anger his master handed him over to the torturers until he should pay back the whole debt. So will my heavenly Father do to you, unless each of you forgives his brother from his heart." When Jesus finished these words, he left Galilee and went to the district of Judea across the Jordan.

3) Reflection

- In yesterday's Gospel we have heard the words of Jesus concerning fraternal correction (Mt 18:15-20). In the Gospel today (Mt 19:21-39) the central theme is pardon and reconciliation.
- Matthew 18:21-22: Forgive seventy times seven! Before the words of Jesus on fraternal correction and reconciliation, Peter asks, "How often must I forgive? Seven times?" Seven is a number which indicates perfection and, in the case of Peter's proposal, seven is synonymous with always. But Jesus goes beyond. He eliminates whatever possible limitation there may be to pardon: "Not seven, I tell you, but seventy-seven times". It is as if He would say "Always, Peter! Even seventy seven times! Always!" This is because there is no proportion between God's love for us and our love for our brother. Here we recall the episode of the Old Testament of Lamech: "Lamech says to his wives, Adah and Zillah, hear my voice; listen to what I say: I killed a man for wounding me, a boy for striking me. Sevenfold vengeance for Cain, but seventy-sevenfold for Lamech" (Gen 4:23-24). The task of the communities is to reverse the process of the spiral of violence. In order to clarify His response to Peter, Jesus tells them the parable of pardon without limits.
- Matthew 18:23-27: The attitude of the master. This parable is an allegory, that is, Jesus speaks about a master, but thinks of God. This explains the enormous contrasts in the

parable. As we will see, although it is a question of daily ordinary things, there is something in this story which does not take place in daily life. In the story which Jesus tells, the master follows the norms of the law or rights of that time. It was his right to take a laborer with all his family and to keep him in prison until he had paid his debt carrying out his work as a slave. But in response to the request of the debtor servant, the master forgives the debt. What strikes us is the amount: ten thousand talents! One talent was equal to 35 kg, and so according to the estimate made, ten thousand talents were equal to 350 tons of gold. Even if the debtor and his family had worked their whole life, they would never have been able to earn 350 tons of gold. The extreme estimate is made on purpose. Our debt before God is countless and unpayable!

- Matthew 18:28-31: The attitude of the laborer. As soon as he went out, that servant found a fellow servant who owed him one hundred denarii, and he seized him by the throat and began to throttle him, saying, “Pay what you owe!” This servant owed him one hundred denarii; that is the salary of one hundred days of work. Some have estimated that it was a question of 30 grams of gold. There was no comparison between the two! But this makes us understand the attitude of the laborer: God forgives him 350 tons of gold and he is not able to forgive 30 grams of gold. Instead of forgiving, he does to the companion what the master could have done to him, but did not do it. He puts his companion in prison according to the norms of the law until he has paid his debt. This is an inhuman attitude, which also strikes the other companions. Seeing what had happened, the other servants were sad and went to report to their master everything which had happened. We also would have done the same; we would also have had the same attitude of disapproval.

- Matthew 18:32-35: The attitude of God “Then the master called that man and said to him: “You wicked servant! I have forgiven you all your debt because you appealed to me. Were you not bound then to have pity on your fellow-servant just as I had pity on you? And, angry, the master handed him over to the torturers till he should pay all his debt.” Before God’s love who pardons gratuitously our debt of 350 tons of gold, it is more than fair that we should forgive our brother who has a small debt of 30 grams of gold. God’s forgiveness is without limit. The only limit for the gratuity of God’s mercy comes from us, from our incapacity to forgive our brothers! (Mt 18:34). This is what we say and ask for in the Our Father: “Forgive us our offenses as we forgive those who offend us” (Mt 6:12-15).

The community: an alternative place of solidarity and fraternity. The society of the Roman Empire was hard and heartless, without any space for the little ones. They sought some refuge for the heart and did not find it. The synagogues were very demanding and did not offer a place for them. In the Christian communities, the rigor of some concerning the observance of the Law in daily life followed the same criteria as society and as the synagogue. Thus, in the communities, the same divisions which existed in society and in the synagogue, between rich and poor, dominion and submission, man and woman, race and religion, began to appear. The community, instead of being a place of acceptance, became a place of condemnation. By uniting the words of Jesus, Matthew wants to enlighten the followers of Jesus, in order that the communities may be an alternative place of solidarity and of fraternity. They should be Good News for the poor.

4) Personal questions

- To forgive. There are people who say, "I forgive, but I do not forget!" And I? Am I able to imitate God?
- Jesus gives us the example. At the time of death He asks pardon for His murderers (Lk 13:34). Am I capable of imitating Jesus?
- The laborer acted out of fear in the moment rather than generosity and forgiveness. How often, perhaps in "office politics", do we do the same thing? What is the better way?

5) Concluding Prayer

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

Lectio Divina Friday, August 14, 2020

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 15, 2020

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*). Definitely, 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 Sunday, August 16, 2020

*Welcoming the excluded
The Canaanite woman helps Jesus
discover the will of the Father
Matthew 15:21-28*

1. Opening prayer

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

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

2. Reading

a) A key to guide the reading:

In today's text, Jesus meets a foreign woman, something forbidden by the religion of that time. At first Jesus would not pay attention to her, but the woman insisted and got what she wanted. This text helps us to understand how Jesus went about knowing and putting into practice the will of God.

b) A division of the text to help with the reading:

Mt 15:21-22: The pained cry of the woman

Mt 15:23-24: The strange silence of Jesus and the reaction of the disciples

Mt 15:25-26: The repeated request of the woman and Jesus' renewed refusal

Mt 15:27-28: The third try of the woman who obtains the healing of her daughter.

c) The text:

21-22: Jesus left that place and withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. And suddenly out came a Canaanite woman from that district and started shouting, 'Lord, Son of David, take pity on me. My daughter is tormented by a devil.'

23-24: But He said not a word in answer to her. And His disciples went and pleaded with Him, saying, 'Give her what she wants, because she keeps shouting after us.' He said in reply, 'I was sent only to the lost sheep of the House of Israel.'

25-26: But the woman had come up and was bowing low before Him. 'Lord,' she said, 'help me.' He replied, 'It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to little dogs.'

27-28: She retorted, 'Ah yes, Lord; but even little dogs eat the scraps that fall from their masters' table.' Then Jesus answered her, 'Woman, you have great faith. Let your desire be granted.' And from that moment her daughter was well again.

3. A moment of prayerful silence

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

4. Some questions

to help us in our personal reflection.

- a) What caught my attention most and what did I like most in this episode?
- b) Four characters appear in the text: the woman, the daughter, the disciples and Jesus. What does the text say about each one's attitude? With which of the four do you identify yourself most? Why?
- c) Jesus says that His mission does not permit Him to listen to the woman's request. However, soon after, He grants her request. How do you explain this sudden change in Jesus' attitude?
- d) How did the woman's reply concerning the dogs and the scraps influence Jesus?
- e) Why do those words reveal the woman's great faith?
- f) How can Jesus' words help our community to grow in faith?

5. A key to the reading

for those who wish to go deeper into the text.

a) The context within which Matthew preserves the words of Jesus:

* Matthew's Gospel, written about 85 AD, is addressed to a community of pious and observant Jews, converted to faith in Jesus. After Jesus' example, they continued to live according to the traditions of the Jewish people, observing the Law of Moses in its fullness. But now in the 80s they find themselves in an ambivalent situation. After the destruction of Jerusalem (70 AD), the Pharisees, their racial brothers, had started to reorganize Judaism, and, in the name of fidelity to that same Law of Moses, sought to block the ever increasing spread of Christianity. They came to the point of expelling them from the synagogues. This unforeseen hostility brought the community of Christian Jews into deep crisis. Both the Pharisees and the Christians claimed to be faithful to the law of God. Who was right? On whose side was God? To whom did the inheritance of the Jewish people belong, to the *synagogue* or to the *ecclesia*?

* It is precisely to encourage and support this group of Jewish-Christians that Matthew writes his Gospel. He writes to *confirm* them in the faith by showing that Jesus is indeed the Messiah, the culmination of the whole history of the Old Testament. He writes to *strengthen* them in the midst of hostility, helping them to overcome the trauma of the break with the brothers. He writes to *call* them to a new practice of life, showing them the way to a new form of justice, better than that of the Pharisees.

* In this context, the episode of the Canaanite woman served to show the community how this same Jesus took concrete steps to go beyond the limitations of a religion turned in on itself and how He went about discerning the will of God beyond the traditional scheme.

b) A commentary on the words of Jesus as preserved in Matthew:

Matthew 15: 21: *Jesus moves away from the Jewish territory.*

In the discussion concerning what is pure and what is not, Jesus had taught that which was contrary to the tradition of the ancients, declaring all foods to be clean, and helped the people and the disciples free themselves of the chains of the laws on purity (Mt 15:1-20). Now, in this episode of the Canaanite woman, He moves away from Galilee, goes beyond the frontiers of the national territory and welcomes a foreign woman who did not belong to the people and with whom it was forbidden to talk. The Gospel of Mark informs us that Jesus did not want to be known. He wanted to remain anonymous. But it is evident that His fame had already preceded Him (Mk 7:24). The people knew Him and a woman begins to present Him with a request.

Matthew 15:22: *The anguished cry of the woman.*

The woman was from another race and religion. She begins to beg for the healing of her daughter who was possessed by an unclean spirit. The pagans had no problem having recourse to Jesus. The Jews, however, had problems co-existing with the pagans! The Law forbade them to make contact with a person of another religion or race.

Matthew 15:23-24: *The strange silence of Jesus and the reaction of the disciples.*

The woman shouts, but Jesus does not respond. A strange attitude! Because, if there is one sure thing throughout the Bible, from beginning to end, it is that God always listens to the cry of the oppressed. But here Jesus does not listen. He does not want to listen. Why? Even the disciples are surprised by Jesus' attitude and ask Him to say something to the woman. They want to get rid of that shouting: "Give her what she wants, they said, because she is shouting after us". Jesus explains His silence, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the House of Israel". His silence is connected to an awareness of His mission and His fidelity to the law of God. The passive form shows that the subject of the verb's action is the Father. It is as though He had said, "The Father does not want Me to listen to this woman, because He has sent Me only to the lost sheep of Israel!" For the same reason, at the time of Matthew's writing of the Gospel, the Pharisees were saying, "We cannot have contact with pagans!"

Matthew 15:25-26: *The woman repeats her request and Jesus again refuses her.*

The woman is not worried by Jesus' refusal. The love of a mother for her sick daughter does not take notice of religious rules or other people's reactions, but seeks healing wherever her intuition leads her to a solution, namely, in Jesus! She draws closer. She throws herself at Jesus' feet and goes on begging, "Lord, help me". Faithful to the rules of His religion, Jesus answers with a parable and says that it is not right to take the bread of one's children and give it to dogs. The parallel is taken from everyday life. Even today, we find many children and dogs in the houses of the poor. Jesus says that no mother will take bread from the mouths of her children and give it to dogs. Concretely, the children are the Jewish people and the dogs are the pagans. End of story! Obedient to the Father and faithful to His mission, Jesus goes on His way and takes no notice of the woman's pleading!

Matthew 15:27-28: *At the third attempt, the woman obtains the healing of her daughter.*

The woman will not yield. She agrees with Jesus, but she amplifies the parallel and applies it to her case, "Ah, yes, sir; but even house-dogs can eat the scraps that fall from their master's table". She simply draws the conclusion from that image, showing that in

the houses of the poor (and so also in the house of Jesus) the dogs eat the scraps that fall from the table of the children. Most probably, Jesus Himself as a young boy would have given bits of bread to dogs that roamed under the table where He ate with His parents. And in "Jesus' house", that is, in the Christian community of Matthew's time, at the end of the first century, there were "twelve baskets full" left over (Mt 14:20) for the "dogs", that is, for the pagans!

Jesus' reaction is immediate, "Woman, you have great faith!" The woman got what she asked for. From that moment her daughter was healed. The reason Jesus responded was that He understood that the Father wanted Him to grant the woman's request. The meeting with the Canaanite woman freed Him from the racial prison and opened Him to the whole of humanity. This means that Jesus discovered the will of the Father by listening to the reactions of people. This pagan woman's attitude opened new horizons for Jesus and helped Him take an important step in the fulfillment of the Father's plan. The gift of life and salvation is for all who seek life and who try to free themselves from the chains that bind vital energy. This episode helps us to perceive a little of the mystery that surrounded the person of Jesus, the manner in which He was in communion with the Father and how He discovered the will of the Father in the events of life.

6. Psalm 6

Let us unite ourselves to the shouts of all mothers for their sons and daughters

O Lord, rebuke me not in Thy anger,
nor chasten me in Thy wrath.
Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am languishing;
O Lord, heal me, for my bones are troubled.
My soul also is sorely troubled.
But Thou, O Lord, how long?
Turn, O Lord, save my life;
deliver me for the sake of Thy steadfast love.
For in death there is no remembrance of Thee;
in Sheol who can give Thee praise?
I am weary with my moaning;
every night I flood my bed with tears;
I drench my couch with my weeping.
My eye wastes away because of grief,
it grows weak because of all my foes,
from me, all you workers of evil;
for the Lord has heard the sound of my weeping.
The Lord has heard my supplication;
the Lord accepts my prayer.
All my enemies shall be ashamed and sorely troubled;
they shall turn back, and be put to shame in a moment.

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 Monday, August 17, 2020

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 18, 2020

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 land 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 19, 2020

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 landowner 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 20, 2020

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 21, 2020

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 22, 2020

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 - Luke 1:26-38

In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary. And coming to her, he said, "Hail, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, 11 and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." But Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?" And the angel said to her in reply, "The holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. And behold, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren; for nothing will be impossible for God." Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

3) Reflection

- Today is the Feast of the Queenship of Mary. The text of the Gospel on which we meditate describes the visit of the angel to Mary (Lk 1:26-38). The word of God comes to Mary not through a biblical text, but rather through a profound experience of God, manifested in the visit of the angel. In the New Testament, often the Angel of God is God Himself. It was thanks to the meditation on the written Word of God in the bible that Mary was able to recognize the living Word of God in the visit of the angel. The same thing happens today with God's visits in our life. The visits of God are frequent, but due to a lack of assimilation and meditation of the written Word of God in the bible, we are not aware of God's visit in our life. God's visit is so present and so continuous

that, many times, we do not perceive it and, because of this, we lose a great opportunity to live in peace and with joy.

- Luke 1:26-27: The word enters into our life. Luke presents the people and the places: a virgin called Mary, betrothed to a man called Joseph, of the House of David.

Nazareth was a small city in Galilee. Galilee was on the periphery. The center was Judah and Jerusalem. The angel Gabriel was sent by God to this young virgin who lived on the periphery. The name Gabriel means God is strong. The name Mary means loved by Yahweh or Yahweh is my Lord.

The story of God's visit to Mary begins with the expression "In the sixth month." It refers to the "sixth month" of the pregnancy of Elizabeth, a relative of Mary: a woman of a certain age, who needs help. Elizabeth's concrete need serves as a background to the whole episode. It is found at the beginning (Lk 1:26) and at the end (Lk 1:36, 39).

- Luke 1:28-29: Mary's reaction. The angel had appeared to Zechariah in the temple. The angel appears to Mary in her house. The Word of God reaches Mary in the environment of her daily life. The angel says, "Rejoice, you who enjoy God's favor! The Lord is with you!" These are words similar to those which were said to Moses (Ex 3:12), to Jeremiah (Jer 1:8), to Gideon (Judg 6:12), to Ruth (Ruth 2:4) and to many others. These words open the horizon for the mission which these people of the Old Testament had to carry out in the service of the people of God. Deeply disturbed by this greeting, Mary tries to understand what it means. She is realistic; she uses her head. She wants to understand. She does not simply accept any apparition or inspiration.

- Luke 1:30-33: The angel's explanation. "Do not be afraid, Mary!" This is always the first greeting of God to human beings: do not be afraid! Immediately after that, the angel recalls the great promises of the past which will be realized through the son who will be born from Mary. This son must receive the name of Jesus. He will be called the son of the Most High and in Him, finally, the Kingdom of God promised to David, which all were anxiously awaiting, will be realized. This is the explanation which the angel gave to Mary so that she would not be afraid.

- Luke 1:34: New question asked by Mary. Mary becomes aware of the important mission which she is about to receive, but she continues to be realistic. She does not allow herself to be transported by the greatness of the offer and looks at her condition. "But how can this come about? I have no knowledge of man." She analyses the offer according to criteria that we, human beings, have available. Because, humanly speaking, it was not possible that this offer of the Word of God would be realized at that moment.

- Luke 1:35-37: New explanation by the angel. "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will cover you with its shadow. And so the child will be holy and will be called Son of God." The Holy Spirit, present in God's Word since Creation (Gen 1:2), can realize things which seem impossible. This is why the holy One who will be born of Mary will be called Son of God. When today God's Word is received, accepted by the poor who have no education, something new takes place thanks to the power of the Holy Spirit! Something new and surprising like the son who is born to a virgin or like the son born from Elizabeth, a woman who was already old,

of whom everyone said that she could have no children! The angel adds, “And I tell you this too, your cousin Elizabeth is now in her sixth month!”

- Luke 1:38: Mary gives herself. The angel’s response clarifies everything for Mary. She gives herself to what the angel was asking: “Behold, the handmaid of the Lord! May it be done to me according to your word.” Mary calls herself servant, handmaid of the Lord. This title comes from Isaiah, who presents the mission of the people not as a privilege, but rather as a service to others (Isa 42:1-9; 49:3-6). Later, the son who was about to be generated at that moment, will define His mission saying, “I have not come to be served, but to serve!” (Mt 20:28). He learns from His mother!

- Luke 1:39: The way that Mary finds to render service. The Word of God reaches Mary and makes her come out of herself in order to serve others. She leaves the place where she was and goes to Judah, at a distance of more than four days journey, in order to help her cousin Elizabeth. Mary begins serving and fulfills her mission on behalf of the People of God.

4) Personal questions

- How do you perceive God’s visit in your life? Have you been visited already? Have you been a visit from God in the life of others, especially for the poor? How does this text help us to recognize God’s visits in our lives?

- The word of God became incarnate in Mary. How is the Word of God taking flesh in my personal life and in the life of the community?

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 Sunday, August 23, 2020

Peter, you are the rock!
Rock of support, Rock of obstacle
Matthew 16:13-20

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 division of the text to help in the reading:

Matthew 16:13-14: Jesus wants to know the opinion of the people

Matthew 16:15-16: Jesus challenges the disciples, and Peter responds in the name of all

Matthew 16:17-20: Solemn response of Jesus to Peter

b) Key for the reading:

In the Gospel of this Sunday, Jesus questions concerning who people think He is: “Who do people say that I am?” After learning the opinion of the people, He wants to know the opinion of His disciples. Peter, in the name of all, makes his profession of faith. Jesus confirms Peter’s faith. In the course of the reading, let us pay attention to what follows: “Which type of confirmation does Jesus confer on Peter?”



c) The Text:

13 When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi He put this question to His disciples, 'Who do people say the Son of man is?' 14 And they said, 'Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.' 15 'But you,' He said, 'who do you say I am?' 16 Then Simon Peter spoke up and said, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' 17 Jesus replied, 'Simon son of Jonah, you are a blessed man! It was no human agency that revealed this to you but my Father in heaven. 18 So I now say to you: You are Peter and on this rock I will build my community. And the gates of the underworld can never overpower it. 19 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of Heaven: whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven; whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.' 20 Then He gave the disciples strict orders not to tell anyone that He was the Christ.

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.

- Which is the point which struck you the most? Why?
- What are the opinions of people concerning Jesus? What is the opinion of the disciples and of Peter concerning Jesus?
- What is my opinion concerning Jesus? Who am I for Jesus?
- Peter is **rock** in two ways. Which? (Mt 16:21-23)
- What type of **rock** am I for others? What type of rock is our community?

f) In the text there are many opinions concerning Jesus and several ways of expressing faith. Today, also there are many diverse opinions concerning Jesus. Which are the opinions of our community concerning Jesus? What mission results for us from this?

5. For those who wish to deepen more into the theme

a) Context in which our text appears in the Gospel of Matthew:

* The conversation between Jesus and Peter receives diverse interpretations and even opposite ones in the several Christian Churches. In the Catholic Church, this is the foundation for the primacy of Peter. This is why, without, in fact, diminishing the significance of the text, it is convenient to place it in the context of the Gospel of Matthew, in which, in other texts, the same qualities conferred on Peter are almost all, attributed to other persons. They do not belong exclusively to Peter.

* It is always well to keep in mind that the Gospel of Matthew was written at the end of the first century for the community of the converted Jews who lived in the region of Galilee and Syria. They were communities which suffered and were victims of many doubts concerning their faith in Jesus. The Gospel of Matthew tries to help them to overcome the crisis and to confirm them in faith in Jesus, the Messiah, who came to fulfill the promises of the Old Testament.

b) Commentary on the text:

Matthew 15:13-16: *The opinions of the people and of the disciples concerning Jesus.*
Jesus asks the opinion of the people and of His disciples concerning Himself. The answers are quite varied: John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or one of the Prophets. When Jesus questions about the opinion of His own disciples, Peter becomes the spokesman and says, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God!” Peter’s answer signifies that he recognizes in Jesus the fulfillment of the prophecy of the Old Testament and that in Jesus we have the definitive revelation of the Father for us. This confession of Peter is not new. First, after having walked on the water, the other disciples had already made the same profession of faith: “Truly You are the Son of God!” (Mt 14:33). In the Gospel of John, Martha makes this same profession of Peter: “You are the Christ, the Son of God who has come into the world” (Jn 11:27).

Matthew 16: 17: *Jesus’ reply to Peter: “Blessed are you, Peter!”*

Jesus proclaims Peter as “Blessed!” because he has received a revelation from the Father. In this case also, Jesus’ response is not new. First Jesus had made an identical proclamation of joy to the disciples for having seen and heard things which before nobody knew (Mt 13:16), and had praised the Father for having revealed the Son to little ones and not to the wise (Mt 11:25). Peter is one of these little ones to whom the Father reveals Himself. The perception of the presence of God in Jesus does not come “from the flesh nor from the blood”, that is, it is not the fruit of the merit of a human effort, but rather it is a gift which God grants to whom He wants.

Matthew 16:18-20: *the attributions of Peter*

Peter receives three attributions from Jesus: (i) *To be a rock of support*, (ii) *to receive the keys of the Kingdom*, and (iii) *to be foundation of the Church*.

i) To be Rock: Simon, the son of Jonah, receives from Jesus a new name which is Cephas, and that means Rock. This is why he is called Peter. Peter has to be **Rock**, that is, he has to be a sure foundation for the Church so that the gates of the underworld can never overpower it. With these words from Jesus to Peter, Matthew encourages the communities of Syria and Palestine, which are suffering and are the victims of persecutions, to see in Peter a leader on whom to find support, to base themselves concerning their origin. In spite of being weak and persecuted communities, they had a secure basis, guaranteed by the word of Jesus. At that time, the communities had very strong affective bonds with the persons who had begun, who were at the origin of the community. Thus, the community of Syria and Palestine fostered their bond of union with the person of Peter, the community of Greece with the person of Paul, some communities of Asia with the person of the Beloved disciple and others with the person of John of the Apocalypse. Identifying themselves with these leaders of their origin helped the communities to foster their identity and spirituality better. But this could also be a cause of dispute, as in the case of the community of Corinth (1 Cor 1:11-12).

To be *rock* as the basis of faith evokes the Word of God to the people who are in exile in Babylonia: “Listen to Me you who pursue saying injustice, you who seek Yahweh. Consider the rock from which you were hewn, the quarry from which you were dug. Consider Abraham your father, and Sarah who gave you birth; when I called him, he was the only one, but I blessed him and made him numerous” (Isa 51:1-2). Applied to Peter, this quality of *peter-foundation* indicates a new beginning of the people of God.

ii) The keys of the Kingdom: Peter receives the keys of the Kingdom to bind and to loosen, that is, to reconcile the persons among themselves and with God. Behold, that here again the same power to bind and to loosen, is given not only to Peter, but also to the other disciples (Jn 20:23) and to their own communities (Mt 18:18). One of the points on which the Gospel of Matthew insists more is reconciliation and forgiveness (Mt 5:7, 23-24, 38, 42-48; 6:14-15:35). In the years 80’s and 90’s, in Syria, because of faith in Jesus, there were many tensions in the communities and there were divisions in the families. Some accepted Him as Messiah and others did not, and this was the cause for many tensions and conflicts. Matthew insists on reconciliation. Reconciliation was and continues to be one of the most important tasks of the coordinators of the communities at present. Imitating Peter, they have to bind and loosen, that is, do everything possible so that there be reconciliation, mutual acceptance, building up of the true fraternity “Seventy times seven!” (Mt 18:22).

iii) The Church: The word **Church**, in Greek *eklésia*, appears 105 times in the New Testament, almost exclusively in the Acts of the Apostles and in the Letters, only three times in the Gospels, and once only in the Gospel of Matthew. The word literally means “convoked” or “chosen”. It indicates the people who get together convoked by the Word of God, and who seek to live the message of the Kingdom which Jesus came to bring to us. The Church or the community is not the Kingdom, but an instrument or an indication of the Kingdom. The Kingdom is much greater. In the Church, in the community, what happens when a human group allows God *to reign* and allows God to be ‘Lord’ in one’s life, should be rendered present to the eyes of all.

c) Deepening:

i) A picture of Saint Peter:

Peter, who was a fisherman of fish, became fisherman of men (Mk 1:17). He was married (Mk 1:30). He was a good man, very human. He was a natural leader among the twelve first disciples of Jesus. Jesus respects this leadership and makes Peter the animator of His first community (Jn 21:17). Before entering into the community of Jesus, Peter was called *Simão Bar Jona* (Mt 16:17), that is, Simon, son of Jonah. Jesus calls him *Cefas or Rock* (Jn 1:42), who later becomes *Peter* (Lk 6:14).

By his nature and character, Peter could be everything, except *pietra – rock*. He was courageous in speaking, but in the moment of danger he allows himself to be dominated by fear and flees. For example, the time in which Jesus walked on the sea, Peter asks, “Jesus, allow me also to walk on the sea”. Jesus says: “You may come, Peter!” Peter got off from the boat and walked on the sea. But as soon as he saw a high wave, he was taken with panic, lost trust, and began to sink and cry out, “Lord, save me!” Jesus assured him and saved him (Mt 14: 28-31).

In the Last Supper, Peter tells Jesus, “I will never deny You, Lord!” (Mk 14:31), but a few hours later, in the Palace of the High Priest, in front of a servant, when Jesus had already been arrested, Peter denied, swearing that he had nothing to do with Jesus (Mk 14:66-72).

When Jesus is in the Garden of Olives, Peter takes out the sword (Jn 18:10), but ends fleeing, leaving Jesus alone. (Mk 14:50). By nature, Peter was not rock!

But this Peter, so weak and human, so similar to us, becomes rock, because Jesus prays for him and says, “Peter, I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail, and once you have recovered, you in your turn must strengthen your brothers!” (Lk 22: 31-32). This is why Jesus could say, “You are Peter and on this rock I will build My Church” (Mt 16:18). Jesus helps him to be *rock*. After the Resurrection, in Galilee, Jesus appears to Peter and asks him two times, “Peter, do you love Me?” And Peter responds twice, “Lord, you know that I love you!” (Jn 21:15, 16). When Jesus repeats the same question a third time, Peter becomes sad. Perhaps he remembered that he had denied Jesus three times. To this third question he answers: “Lord, you know all things! You know that I love You very much!” And it is then that Jesus entrusted to him the care of His sheep, saying, “Peter, feed My lambs!” (Jn 21:17). With the help of Jesus, the firmness of the rock grows in Peter and is revealed on the day of Pentecost.

On the day of Pentecost, after the descent of the Holy Spirit, Peter opens the door of the room where all were meeting together, locked with a key because of fear of the Jews (Jn 20:19), he takes courage and begins to announce to the people the Good News of Jesus (Acts 2:14-40). And he did not stop doing it! Thanks to this courageous announcement of the Resurrection, he was imprisoned (Acts 4:3). During the trial, he was forbidden to announce the Good News (Acts 4:18), but Peter does not obey this prohibition. He says, “We know that we have to obey God more than men!” (Acts 4: 19; 5:29). He was arrested again (Acts 5:18-26). He was tortured (Acts 5:40). But he says, “Thank you. But we shall continue!” (cf. Acts 5:42).

Tradition says that, towards the end of his life, in Rome, Peter was arrested and condemned to death, and death on the cross. He asked to be crucified with his head

down. He believed he was not worthy to die like Jesus. Peter was faithful to himself up to the end!

ii) Completing the context: Matthew 16:21-23

Peter had confessed, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God!” He had imagined a glorious Messiah, and Jesus corrects him: “It is necessary for the Messiah to suffer and to die in Jerusalem”. By saying that “it is necessary”, He indicates that suffering has already been foreseen in the prophecies (Isa 53:2-8). If Peter accepts Jesus as Messiah and Son of God, he has to accept Him also as the servant Messiah who will be put to death: not only the triumph of the glory, but **also** the journey to the cross! But Peter does not accept the correction and seeks to dissuade Him.

Jesus’ response is surprising: “Get behind Me, Satan! You are an obstacle in my path because you are thinking not as God thinks but as human beings do”. Satan is the one who separates us from the path which God has traced for us. Literally, Jesus says, “Get behind Me” (Get away!). Peter wanted to place himself in front and indicate the direction. Jesus says, “Get behind Me!” He who indicates the course and direction is not Peter, but Jesus. *The disciple* has **to follow** the Master. He has to live in continuous conversion.

The Word of Jesus is also a reminder for all those who guide or direct a community. They have “to follow” Jesus and not place themselves in front of Him as Peter wanted to do. No, only they can indicate the direction or the route. Otherwise, like Peter, they are not **rock of support**, but they become a **rock of obstacle**. Thus were some of the leaders of the communities at the time of Matthew, full of ambiguity. Thus, it also happens among us even today!

6. Psalm 121

The Lord is my support

I lift up my eyes to the mountains;
where is my help to come from?
My help comes from Yahweh
who made heaven and earth.

May He save your foot from stumbling;
may He, your guardian, not fall asleep!
You see -- He neither sleeps nor slumbers,
the guardian of Israel.

Yahweh is your guardian, your shade,
Yahweh, at your right hand.
By day the sun will not strike you,
nor the moon by night.
Yahweh guards you from all harm.
Yahweh guards your life.
Yahweh guards your comings and goings,
henceforth and for ever.

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 Monday, August 24, 2020

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 Tuesday, August 25, 2020

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 26, 2020

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 27, 2020

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 24:42-51

Jesus said to his disciples: "Stay awake! For you do not know on which day your Lord will come. Be sure of this: if the master of the house had known the hour of night when the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and not let his house be broken into. So too, you also must be prepared, for at an hour you do not expect, the Son of Man will come. "Who, then, is the faithful and prudent servant, whom the master has put in charge of his household to distribute to them their food at the proper time? Blessed is that servant whom his master on his arrival finds doing so. Amen, I say to you, he will put him in charge of all his property. But if that wicked servant says to himself, 'My master is long delayed,' and begins to beat his fellow servants, and eat and drink with drunkards, the servant's master will come on an unexpected day and at an unknown hour and will punish him severely and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth."

3) Reflection

- The Gospel today speaks about the coming of the Lord at the end of time and exhorts us to be watchful. At the time of the first Christians, many people thought that the end of this world was close at hand and that Jesus would return afterwards. Today many think that the end of the world is close at hand. Therefore, it is well to reflect on the meaning of vigilance, of watchfulness.
- Matthew 24:42: Watch. "So stay awake! Watch, because you do not know the day when your master is coming." Concerning the day and the hour of the end of the world, Jesus had said, "But as for that day or hour, nobody knows it, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, no one but the Father!" (Mk 13:32). Today, many people are concerned about the end of the world. Have you seen, when walking through the streets of the city, that it is written on walls: "Jesus will return!" And how will this coming be? After the year 1000, basing themselves on the Gospel of John, people began to say (Rev 20:7): "1000 years have gone by, but 2000 will not pass by!" This is why, as the year 2000 approached, many were worried. There were even some people who were anguished because of the proximity of the end of the world, so much so that they committed suicide. Others, reading the Apocalypse of John, were even able to foretell the exact hour of the end. But the year 2000 came and nothing happened. The end of the world did not arrive! The declaration "Jesus will return" is often used to frighten people and oblige them to belong to a given church! Others, because they have waited so long and have speculated so much concerning the coming of Jesus, are not aware of His presence among us, in the most common things of life, in the facts of every day.
- The same problems existed in the Christian communities of the first centuries. Many people of the communities said that the end of this world was close at hand and that Jesus would return. Some of the community of Thessalonica in Greece, basing themselves on the preaching of Paul, said: "Jesus will return!" (1 Thess 4:13-18; 2

Thess 2:2). And this is why there were even people who no longer worked because they thought that the coming of the end was so close at hand, within a few days or a few weeks, so, “Why work, if Jesus will return soon?” (cf. 2 Thess 3:11). Paul responded that it was not as simple as they imagined. And to those who had stopped working he said, “Anyone who does not want to work, has no right to eat!” Others remained looking up at the sky, waiting for the return of Jesus in the clouds (cf. Acts 1:11). Others rebelled because He delayed coming back (2 Pet 3:4-9). In general the Christians lived in the expectation of the imminent coming of Jesus. Jesus was coming to carry out the Final Judgment to end the history of this world and to inaugurate a new phase of history, the new Heaven and the new Earth. They believed that this would take place within one or two generations. Many people would still be alive when Jesus appeared again, glorious in Heaven (1Thess 4:16-17; Mk 9:1). Others, tired of waiting, would say: “He will never come back!” (2 Pet 3).

- Up until now the coming of Jesus has not happened! How can this delay be understood? It is because they are not aware that Jesus has already returned and lives in our midst: “I am with you always, till the end of time.” (Mt 28:20). He is already at our side, in the struggle for justice, for peace, for life. The fullness has not as yet been attained, but a guarantee of the Kingdom is already in our midst. This is why we expect with a firm hope the full liberation of humanity and of nature (Rm 8:22-25). While we wait and struggle, we say with certainty, “He is already in our midst” (Mt 25:40).

- Matthew 24:43-51: The example of the householder and his servants. “Consider this: if the householder had known at what time of the night the burglar would come, he would have stayed awake and would not have allowed anyone to break through the wall of his house.” Jesus says this very clearly. Nobody knows anything regarding the hour: “Concerning this day and this hour, nobody knows anything, neither the angels, or the Son, but only the Father.”

What is important is not to know the hour of the end of this world, but rather to be able to perceive the coming of Jesus, who is already present in our midst in the person of the poor (cf. Mt 25:40) and in so many other ways and events of our daily life. What is important is to open our eyes and to keep in mind the commitment of the good servant of whom Jesus speaks in the parable.

4) Personal questions

- On which signs do people base their belief that the end of the world is close at hand? Do you believe that the end of the world is close at hand?

- How should we respond to those who say that the end of the world is close at hand? What is the force which impels you to resist and to have hope?

- Our Creed says “He will come again to judge...” yet Jesus says He “is in our midst”. How do you reconcile these two statements?

- In English, and perhaps in many languages, the phrase “my world” means my life and what is in it. By using this more personal interpretation of the word “world”, can greater meaning be found in the use of the idea of “end of the world” than just thinking about the entire planet?

5) Concluding Prayer

Day after day I shall bless You, Lord,
I shall praise Your name for ever and ever.
Great is Yahweh and worthy of all praise,
His greatness beyond all reckoning. (Ps 145:2-3)

Lectio Divina Friday, August 28, 2020

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 29, 2020

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 Sunday, August 30, 2020

First prophecy of the passion

The scandal of the cross

Matthew 16:21-27

1. Opening prayer

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

2. Reading

a) The context:

Mt 16:21-27 is after Peter's profession of faith (16:13-20) and before the Transfiguration (17:1-8) and is strongly connected with these two events. Jesus asks the twelve to tell Him who people say He is and then wants to know who the twelve say He is. Peter replies, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (16:16). Jesus not only accepts this profession of faith, but also explicitly says that it is God who has revealed His true identity to Peter. Yet He insists that the disciples must not tell anyone that He is the messiah. Jesus knows well that this title can be misunderstood and He does not want to run the risk. "From that time" (16:21) He gradually begins to explain to the twelve what it means to be the messiah. He is the suffering messiah who will enter into His glory through the cross.

The text we are considering is divided into two parts. In the first part (vv. 21-23), Jesus foretells His death and resurrection and shows that He is completely determined to follow God's plan for Him in spite of Peter's protestations. In the second part (vv. 24-27), Jesus shows the consequences of recognizing Him as the suffering messiah for His disciples. No one can be His disciple unless he/she walks the same road.

But Jesus knows well that it is difficult for the twelve to accept His and their cross, and, to reassure them, He gives them a foretaste of His resurrection in His transfiguration (17:1-8).

b) The text:

21-23: From then onwards Jesus began to make it clear to His disciples that He was destined to go to Jerusalem and suffer grievously at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes and to be put to death and to be raised up on the third day. Then, taking Him aside, Peter started to rebuke Him. 'Heaven preserve You, Lord,' he said, 'this must not happen to You.' But He turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind Me, Satan! You are an obstacle in My path, because you are thinking not as God thinks but as human beings do.'

24-27: Then Jesus said to His disciples, 'If anyone wants to be a follower of Mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross and follow Me. Anyone who wants to save his life will lose it; but anyone who loses his life for My sake will find it. What, then, will anyone gain by winning the whole world and forfeiting his life? Or what can anyone offer in exchange for his life? For the Son of man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each one according to his behavior.'



3. A moment of prayerful silence

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

4. Some questions

to help us in our personal reflection.

- a) Why does Peter try to deter Jesus from facing the Passion?
- b) Why does Jesus call Peter Satan?
- c) How do you confront life, with the logic of God and of Jesus or with human logic and that of Peter?
- d) In your concrete everyday life, what does it mean to lose one's life for the sake of Jesus?
- e) What are your crosses and who are your Peters?

5. A key to the reading

for those who wish to go deeper into the text.

"Destined to go to Jerusalem..."

The four verbs "go", "suffer", "be put to death" and "be raised" (v. 21) are governed by the word "destined" or "had to". This is a verb which, in the New Testament, has a precise theological meaning. It denotes that it is the will of God that something happens because it is part of God's plan of salvation.

The death of Jesus may be seen as the consequence of the "logic" of the attitude He took towards the institutions of His people. Like every uncomfortable prophet He was removed. But the New Testament insists that His death (and resurrection) are part of God's plan, which Jesus accepted freely.

"You are an obstacle in my path"

Obstacle means hold-up or trap. To be an obstacle means to confront someone with impediments that would divert that person from the way to follow. Peter is an obstacle for Jesus because he tries to swerve Him from the way of obedience to the will of the Father in order to go an easier way. That is why Jesus compares him to Satan, who at the beginning of His ministry had sought to divert Jesus from the path of His mission, proposing an easy messianic mission (see Mt 4:1-11).

"Anyone who loses his life... will find it"

Anyone who understands well the mystery of Jesus and the nature of His mission also understands what it means to be His disciple. The two things are intimately linked. Jesus Himself lays down three conditions for those who wish to be His disciples: renunciation of self, the taking up of one's cross and following Him (v.24). To renounce oneself means not to focus one's life on one's self but on God and on the plan of His Reign. This implies an acceptance of adversity and putting up with difficulties. Jesus Himself left us His example of how to deal with such circumstances. It suffices to imitate Him. He does not compromise His fidelity to the Father and to His Reign, and He remains faithful even to the point of giving His life. It was precisely thus that He came to the fullness of life in the resurrection.

6. Psalm 40

The invocation for help of one who has remained faithful to God

I waited patiently for the Lord;
 He inclined to me and heard my cry.
 He drew me up from the desolate pit,
 out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock,

making my steps secure.
He put a new song in my mouth,
a song of praise to our God.

Many will see and fear,
and put their trust in the Lord.
Blessed is the man who makes the Lord his trust,
who does not turn to the proud,
to those who go astray after false gods!
Thou hast multiplied, O Lord my God,
Thy wondrous deeds and Thy thoughts toward us;
none can compare with Thee!
Were I to proclaim and tell of them,
they would be more than can be numbered.

Sacrifice and offering Thou dost not desire;
but Thou hast given me an open ear.
Burnt offering and sin offering Thou hast not required.
Then I said, "Lo, I come;
in the roll of the book it is written of me;
I delight to do Thy will,
O my God; Thy law is within my heart."

I have told the glad news of deliverance in the great congregation;
lo, I have not restrained my lips,
as Thou knowest, O Lord.
I have not hid Thy saving help within my heart,
I have spoken of Thy faithfulness and Thy salvation;
I have not concealed Thy steadfast love
and Thy faithfulness from the great congregation.

Do not Thou, O Lord,
withhold Thy mercy from me;
let Thy steadfast love
and Thy faithfulness ever preserve me!
For evils have encompassed me without number;
my iniquities have overtaken me,
till I cannot see;
they are more than the hairs of my head;
my heart fails me.

Be pleased, O Lord, to deliver me!
O Lord, make haste to help me!
Let them be put to shame and confusion altogether
who seek to snatch away my life;
let them be turned back and brought to dishonor
who desire my hurt!
Let them be appalled because of their shame
who say to me, "Aha, Aha!"

But may all who seek Thee rejoice and be glad in Thee;
may those who love Thy salvation say continually,
"Great is the Lord!"
As for me, I am poor and needy;
but the Lord takes thought for me.
Thou art my help and my deliverer;
do not tarry, O my God!

7. Closing prayer

O God, your ways are not our ways and your thoughts are not our thoughts. In your plan of salvation there is also room for the cross. Your Son, Jesus, did not retreat before the cross, but "endured the cross and disregarded the shameful of it" (Heb 12:2). The hostility of His enemies could not distract Him from His firm intent to fulfill Your will and proclaim the Reign, cost what it may.

Strengthen us, Father, with the gift of Your Spirit. May the Spirit enable us to follow Jesus resolutely and faithfully. May He make us His imitators in deed and make Your Reign the center of our lives. May He give us strength to bear adversity and difficulties so that true life may blossom in us and in all humankind.

We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Lectio Divina Monday, August 31, 2020

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Almighty God,
every good thing comes from You.
Fill our hearts with love for You,
increase our faith,
and by Your constant care
protect the good you have given us.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, Your Son,
who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

2) Gospel Reading - Luke 4:16-30

Jesus came to Nazareth, where he had grown up, and went according to his custom into the synagogue on the sabbath day. He stood up to read and was handed a scroll of the prophet Isaiah. He unrolled the scroll and found the passage where it was written: The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord. Rolling up the scroll, he handed it back to the attendant and sat down, and the eyes of all in the synagogue looked intently at him. He said to them, "Today this Scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing." And all spoke highly of him and were amazed at the gracious

words that came from his mouth. They also asked, "Is this not the son of Joseph?" He said to them, "Surely you will quote me this proverb, 'Physician, cure yourself,' and say, 'Do here in your native place the things that we heard were done in Capernaum.'" And he said, "Amen, I say to you, no prophet is accepted in his own native place. Indeed, I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah when the sky was closed for three and a half years and a severe famine spread over the entire land. It was to none of these that Elijah was sent, but only to a widow in Zarephath in the land of Sidon. Again, there were many lepers in Israel during the time of Elisha the prophet; yet not one of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian." When the people in the synagogue heard this, they were all filled with fury. They rose up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town had been built, to hurl him down headlong. But he passed through the midst of them and went away.

3) Reflection

- Today we begin the meditation on the Gospel of Luke, which will extend three months until the end of the liturgical year. Today's Gospel speaks about Jesus' visit to Nazareth and the presentation of His program to the people of the synagogue. At first the people were amazed. But immediately, when they became aware that Jesus wanted to accept all, without excluding anyone, people rebelled and wanted to kill Him.
- Luke 4:16-19: The proposal of Jesus. Urged by the Holy Spirit, Jesus returns to Galilee (Lk 4:14) and begins to announce the Good News of the Kingdom of God. He goes to the community, teaches in the Synagogue and arrives in Nazareth, where He had grown up. He was returning to the community in which He had participated since He was small and for thirty years. The following Saturday, as was the custom, Jesus went to the synagogue to participate in the celebration, and He stands up to read. He chooses the text of Isaiah which speaks about the poor, of prisoners, of the blind and the oppressed (Is 61:1-2). This text is an image of the situation of the people of Galilee at the time of Jesus. The experience which Jesus had of God, the Father of Love, gave Him a new perspective to evaluate the reality. In the name of God, Jesus takes a stand to defend the life of His people and, with the words of Isaiah, He defines His mission: (1) to announce the Good News to the poor, (2) to proclaim liberty to captives, (3) to give sight to the blind; (4) to release the oppressed, and taking the ancient tradition of the prophets, (5) to proclaim "a year of grace from the Lord." He proclaims the Jubilee Year!
- In the Bible, the "Jubilee Year" was an important law. Every seven years, at the beginning (Dt 15:1; Lev 25:3) it was necessary to restore the land to the clan of origin. All had to be able to return to their own property; and this way they prevented the formation of large estates, and families were guaranteed their livelihood. It was also necessary to forgive their debts and to redeem the people who were slaves. (Dt 15:1-18). It was not easy to have the Jubilee Year every seven years (cf. Jer 34:8-16). After the exile, it was decided to have it every fifty years (Lev 25:8-12). The objective of the Jubilee was and continues to be to re-establish the rights of the poor, to accept the excluded and to re-integrate them into the society to live together with others. The Jubilee was a legal instrument to return to the original sense of the Law of God. This was an occasion offered by God to make a revision of the path being followed, to discover and to correct the errors and to start again from the beginning. Jesus begins His preaching proclaiming a Jubilee: "A year of grace from the Lord."

- Luke 4:20-22: To unite the Bible and Life. Having finished the reading, Jesus comments on the text of Isaiah and says, “This text is being fulfilled today even while you are listening!” Taking the words of Isaiah as His own, Jesus gives them a full and definitive sense and He declares Himself Messiah who comes to fulfill the prophecy. This way of interpreting the text provokes a reaction of disbelief on the part of those who were in the synagogue. They were scandalized and did not want to know anything about Him. They did not accept that Jesus was the Messiah announced by Isaiah. They said, “Is He not the son of Joseph?” They were scandalized because Jesus spoke about accepting the poor, the blind and the oppressed. The people do not accept Jesus’ proposal. And, thus when He presents the idea of accepting the excluded, He Himself is excluded.
- Luke 4:23-30: To overcome the limits of race. In order to help the community to overcome the scandal and to help them understand that His proposal formed part of tradition. Jesus tells two stories known in the Bible, the story of Elijah and the one of Elisha. Both stories criticize the narrow-mindedness of the people of Nazareth. Elijah was sent to the widow of Zarephath (1 Kgs 17:7-16). Elisha was sent to take care of the Syrian (2 Kgs 5:14). Here arises Luke’s concern, who wants to show that openness stems from Jesus. Jesus had the same difficulty which the communities at the time of Luke were having. But the call of Jesus did not calm people down. Quite the contrary! The stories of Elijah and Elisha produced even greater anger. The community of Nazareth reaches the point of wanting to kill Jesus. But He remains calm. The anger of others does not succeed in drawing Him away from His own path. Luke tells us that it is difficult to overcome the mentality of privilege and of narrow-mindedness.
- It is important to notice the details used in the Old Testament. Jesus quotes the text of Isaiah up to the point where it says, “to proclaim a year of grace from the Lord.” He does not quote the rest of the sentence which says, “and a day of vengeance from our God.” The people of Nazareth throw stones at Jesus because He pretends to be the Messiah, because He wants to accept the excluded and because He has omitted the sentence about vengeance. They wanted the day of Yahweh to be a day of vengeance against the oppressors of the people. In this case, the coming of the Kingdom would not have been a true change or conversion of the system. Jesus does not accept this way of thinking; He does not accept vengeance (cf. Mt 5:44-48) His new experience of God the Father helped Him to understand better the meaning of the prophecies.

4) Personal questions

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

5) Concluding Prayer

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