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Lectio Divina Friday, November 1, 2019

The Beatitudes

Matthew 5:1-12

1. Listening to the text

a) Opening prayer:

Lord, the meaning of our life is to seek your Word, which came to us in the person of Christ. Make me capable of welcoming what is new in the Gospel of the Beatitudes, so that I may change my life. I would know nothing about you were it not for the light of the words spoken by your Son Jesus, who came to tell us of your marvels. When I am weak, if I go to Him, the Word of God, then I become strong. When I act foolishly, the wisdom of His Gospel restores me to relish God and the kindness of His love.

He guides me to the paths of life. When some deformity appears in me, I reflect on His Word and the image of my personality becomes beautiful. When solitude tries to make me dry, my spiritual marriage to Him makes my life fruitful. When I discover some sadness or unhappiness in myself, the thought of Him, my only good, opens the way to joy. Therese of the Child Jesus has a saying that sums up the desire for holiness as an intense search for God and a listening to others: "If you are nothing, remember that Jesus is all. You must therefore lose your little nothing into His infinite all and think of nothing else but this uniquely lovable all..." (Letters, 87, to Marie Guérin).

b) Reading the Gospel:

1 Seeing the crowds, He went onto the mountain. And when He was seated His disciples came to him. 2 Then He began to speak. This is what He taught them:

3 How blessed are the poor in spirit:
the kingdom of Heaven is theirs.

4 Blessed are the gentle:
they shall have the earth as inheritance.

5 Blessed are those who mourn:
they shall be comforted.

6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for uprightness:
they shall have their fill.

7 Blessed are the merciful:
they shall have mercy shown them.

8 Blessed are the pure in heart:
they shall see God.

9 Blessed are the peacemakers:
they shall be recognized as children of God.

10 Blessed are those who are persecuted in the cause of uprightness:
the kingdom of Heaven is theirs.

11 'Blessed are you when people abuse you and persecute you and speak all kinds of calumny against you falsely on my account. 12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven; this is how they persecuted the prophets before you.

c) A moment of prayerful silence:

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

2. Light shed on the Word (lectio)

a) The context:

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

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

Our focus, for liturgical reasons, will be on the first part of the "*sermon on the mount*". That is the part dealing with the proclamation of the beatitudes (Mt 5:1-12).

b) Some details:

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

Another detail that strikes us is the physical posture of Jesus who proclaims His words: "*when He was seated*". This posture confers upon Him a note of authority in the legislative sense. The disciples and the "crowd" gather around him. This detail shows what Jesus had to say was for all to hear. We note that Jesus' words do not present impossible matters, nor are they addressed to a special group of people, nor do they

mean to establish a code of ethics exclusively for His inner circle. Jesus' demands are concrete, binding and decisively radical.

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

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

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

c) The first three beatitudes:

i) The first cry concerns the poor: "*How blessed are the poor in spirit, the kingdom of heaven is theirs*". The reader may be shocked. How can the poor be happy? In the Bible, the poor are those who empty themselves of themselves and, above all, renounce the presumption of building their own present and future alone. They leave room for, and focus on, God's project and His Word. The poor, always in the biblical sense, is not someone closed in on himself, miserable and negative, but someone who nurtures being open to God and to others. God is all his/her treasure. We could say with St. Teresa of Avila that "*God alone suffices!*",.

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

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

ii) "*Blessed are those who mourn; they shall be comforted*". One can mourn because of great pain or suffering. This underlines the fact that we are dealing with a serious situation even though the motives or the cause are not mentioned. If we wish to identify today "those who mourn", we could think of all the Christians who hold dear the demands of the kingdom and suffer because of many negative stories in the Church rather than focus on holiness. For them, the Church seems to present divisions and lacerations. They may also be those who suffer because of their sins and inconsistencies

and who, in some way, slow down their conversion. To these, only God can bring the news of “consolation”.

iii) *“Blessed are the gentle, they shall inherit the earth”*. The third beatitude is about gentleness. This is a quality that is not popular today. For many it has a negative connotation and is taken for weakness or the kind of imperturbability that knows how to calculatingly control one’s emotions. What does the word “gentle” mean in the Bible? The gentle are remembered as those who enjoy great peace (Ps 37:10), are happy, blessed, and loved by God. They are also contrasted with evildoers, the ungodly, and sinners. Thus the OT gives us a wealth of meanings that do not allow for one single definition.

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

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

Finally, an eloquent witness comes from 1 Peter 3:3-4: *“Whose adorning let it not be the outward adorning of braiding the hair, and of wearing jewels of gold, or of putting on apparel; but let it be the hidden man of the heart, in the incorruptible apparel of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price.”*

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

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

3. The word enlightens me (to meditate)

- a) Am I able to accept those little signs of poverty in my regard? For instance, the poverty of poor health and little indispositions? Do I make exorbitant demands?
- b) Am I able to accept my poverty and fragility?
- c) Do I pray like a poor person, as one who asks with humility the grace of God, His pardon and His mercy?

- d) Inspired by Jesus' message concerning gentleness, do I renounce violence, vengeance and a vengeful spirit?
- e) Do I encourage, in families and in my place of work, a spirit of kindness, gentleness and peace?
- f) Do I pay back malice and insults with evil?
- g) Do I look after the weakest who cannot defend themselves? Am I patient with old people? Do I welcome lonely strangers who are often exploited at work?

4. To Pray

a) Psalm 23:

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

Yahweh is my shepherd,
I lack nothing.

In grassy meadows He lets me lie.
By tranquil streams He leads me
to restore my spirit.
He guides me in paths of saving justice as befits His name.

Even were I to walk in a ravine as dark as death
I should fear no danger,
for you are at my side.
Your staff and your crook are there to soothe me.

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

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

(The common translation of psalm 23:

The Lord is my shepherd,
I shall not want;
he makes me lie down in green pastures.
He leads me beside still waters;
he restores my soul.
He leads me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake.
Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I fear no evil;
for thou art with me;
thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.
Thou preparest a table before me

in the presence of my enemies;
thou anointest my head with oil, my cup overflows.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life;
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.)

b) Closing prayer:

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

Lectio Divina Saturday, November 2, 2019

All Souls Day

1. Lectio

a) Opening prayer

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

b) Gospel reading

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

c) Prayerful silent time

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

2. Meditatio

a) A key to the reading

In John's Gospel, the basic perspective concerning Jesus and His mission is that the Word made flesh is sent by the Father into the world to give us life and to save that which was lost. The world, however, rejects the Word incarnate. The prologue of the Gospel presents us with this thought (Jn 1: 1-18), which the Evangelist will gradually elaborate on in the Gospel story. The synoptic Gospels, in their own way, proclaim the

same news. One need only think of the parables of the lost sheep and the lost drachma (Lk 15: 1-10) or the declaration: I did not come to call the just, but sinners (Mk 2: 17).

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

Today's Gospel is taken from the section that speaks of the mystery of Jesus (Jn 1-12). The text takes us, for the second time in John's Gospel, to Galilee at the time of the Passover: After this, Jesus went across the sea of Galilee ... it was near the Passover, the feast of the Jews (Jn 6: 1, 4). A great crowd followed him, (Jn 6: 2) and Jesus, seeing the crowd that followed him, multiplies the loaves. The crowd wants to proclaim Him king, but Jesus disappears and goes up to the mountain alone (Jn 6: 15). After a brief pause that allows us to contemplate the Lord walking on the water (Jn 6: 16-21). the story continues the next day (Jn 6: 22) when the crowd, seeks out Jesus. Then comes the discourse on the bread of life and Jesus' warning to obtain the food that will last forever (Jn 6: 27). Jesus defines Himself as the bread of life. He makes reference to the manna given to the people by Moses as a figure of the true bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world (Jn 6: 30-36). This is the context in which the words of Jesus are pronounced (Jn 6: 37-40). In this context we come across a new kind of opposition and a new rejection of the revelation of the Christ as the bread of life (Jn 6: 41-66).

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

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

b) A few questions

to guide our meditation and practice.

* The Word made flesh is sent into the world by the Father to give us life, but the world rejects the incarnate Word. Do I welcome into my life the Divine Word who gives eternal life? How?

* I came down from heaven not to do my will, but the will of Him who sent Me (Jn 6: 38). In Jesus, we see obedience to the will of the Father. Do I internalise this virtue in my life and live it out daily?

* Anyone who sees the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life (Jn 6: 40). Who is Jesus for me? Do I try to see Him with the eyes of faith, listen to His words and contemplate His way of being? What does eternal life mean for me?

3. Oratio

a) Psalm 23

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

b) Closing prayer

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

4. Contemplatio

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

Lectio Divina Sunday, November 3, 2019

The conversion of Zacchaeus

Luke 19:1-10

1. LECTIO

a) Opening prayer:

O God, creator and Father of all the children of Abraham, grant us the light of Your Spirit that we may serve You well and worthily, grant that we may follow in the footsteps of Your Word and that our actions may reflect that we are disciples of the one Master who became man for love of us and for our salvation.

b) A reading of the Gospel:

At that time, Jesus came to Jericho and intended to pass through the town. Now a man there named Zacchaeus, who was a chief tax collector and also a wealthy man, was seeking to see who Jesus was; but he could not see him because of the crowd, for he was short in stature. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree in order to see Jesus, who was about to pass that way. When he reached the place, Jesus looked up and said, "Zacchaeus, come down quickly, for today I must stay at your house." And he came down quickly and received him with joy. When they all saw this, they began to grumble, saying, "He has gone to stay at the house of a sinner." But Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, "Behold, half of my possessions, Lord, I shall give to the poor, and if I have extorted anything from anyone I shall repay it four times over." And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house because this man too is a descendant of Abraham. For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save what was lost."



c) A moment of silence:

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

2. MEDITATIO

a) A key to the reading:

In the Gospel story, Luke likes to show the mercy of the Master towards sinners, and Lk 19:1-10 is one example. The story of the conversion of Zacchaeus tells us that no human condition is incompatible with salvation: "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man too is a son of Abraham", (Lk 19:9) says Jesus. The opening text of chapter 19 comes after the teachings and attitudes that Jesus presents to us in chapter 18. In that chapter we find the parable of the Pharisee who judges and the publican who humbles himself before God and begs for pardon (Lk 18:9-14). Then there

is the scene where Jesus welcomes the children, warning the disciples that it is to anyone who is a child such as these that the kingdom of God belongs... anyone who does not welcome the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it (Lk 18:16-17). Immediately after this, Jesus tells the rich aristocrat who wishes to obtain eternal life (Lk 18:18) of the need to sell everything and distribute the money to the poor in order to follow Jesus and obtain treasure in heaven (Lk 18:22). Then comes the teaching of Jesus on riches that are an obstacle to salvation and the promise of a reward for those who renounce all for the sake of the Kingdom of God (Lk 18:24-30). These parts of chapter 18 seem to lead us to the story of the conversion of Zacchaeus. Before the story of Zacchaeus we have two texts which contain important details:

1. The third prophecy of the passion where Jesus reminds us that now we are going up to Jerusalem (Lk 18:31). It would seem that Luke wishes to place everything within the context of following Christ;
2. The healing of the blind man of Jericho, who called Jesus, even though the crowd stopped him from going to the Master (Lk 18:35-39). Once more, Jesus gives light to darkened eyes and says that faith has saved this blind man (Lk 18:42). After regaining his sight, the blind man was able to follow Jesus whilst praising God (Lk 18:43).

These two texts together with the previous ones shed light on the story of the conversion of Zacchaeus. In this story we find surprising details that are already present in the aforementioned texts:

1. Zacchaeus is a rich man and chief of the Publicans – Lk 19:2.
2. He sought to see Jesus, but was not able because of the crowd – Lk 19:3.
3. He was short – Lk 19:3.
4. The crowd's judgment that stamps Zacchaeus: a sinner - Lk 19:7.
5. The distribution of goods to the poor – Lk 19:8.
6. Jesus' proclamation that salvation has come to the house of Zacchaeus – Lk 19:9.

Zacchaeus, a short man, one who is rich and chief of the tax collectors, welcomes the Kingdom of God like a child. He humbles himself and repents of his past and thus finds the salvation that comes from God in Jesus Christ, who comes to us to seek out and save what was lost (Lk 19:10). This is a theme that is dear to Luke and we find it in other parts of his Gospel as well (e.g., Lk 15:11-31).

b) A time for personal reflection:

Place yourself silently before the word of God and reflect on the texts presented in this key to the reading. Ask yourself:

1. What is the connection between these texts?
2. What does salvation mean to you?
3. Zacchaeus, a short man, shows his availability to welcome the Lord by climbing a sycamore tree. His curiosity was rewarded with Jesus' visit. What do you do to show your availability to welcome the salvation of God?
4. Zacchaeus' action reminds us of the curiosity of Moses that urges him towards the burning bush. There, too, Moses found salvation. Do you approach the Lord? Do you feel attracted to Him?
5. Jesus goes to Zacchaeus in his sinfulness and in the house He brings him salvation.

How attached are you to sin? Do you allow the Master to come to you, in that dark house?

3. ORATIO

a) The prayer of the community:

O God, who in Your Son have come to seek and save the lost, make us worthy of Your call. Bring to fulfillment our every wish for good, so that we may know how to welcome You joyfully into our house to share the goods of the earth and of heaven. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

b) A moment of silence:

for personal prayer.

4. CONTEMPLATIO

You will reveal the path of life to me,
and at Your right hand everlasting pleasures.
(Psalm 16:11)

Lectio Divina Monday, November 4, 2019

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

God of power and mercy,
only with Your help
can we offer You fitting service and praise.
May we live the faith we profess
and trust Your promise of eternal life.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, Your Son,
who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

2) Gospel reading - Luke 14:12-14

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

3) Reflection

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

table or banquet, helps one to understand the method used by the first Christians to keep the words of Jesus in their memory.

- Luke 14:12: Interested invitation. Jesus is eating in the house of a Pharisee who has invited Him (Lk 14:1). The invitation to share at table is the theme of the teaching of today's Gospel. There are different types of invitations: the interested invitations for the benefit of oneself and disinterested invitations for the benefit of others. Jesus says, "When you give a lunch or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relations or rich neighbors, in case they invite you back and so repay you". That was the normal custom of the people: to invite friends, brothers and relatives to eat. Nobody would sit at table with unknown people. They would sit around the table only with people who were their friends. That was the custom of the Jews. Even now we also act in the same way. Jesus thinks differently and orders us to invite unknown people. These were invitations which nobody made.

- Luke 14:13-14: Disinterested invitation. Jesus says "On the contrary, when you have a party, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind; then you will be blessed, for they have no means to repay you. So you will be repaid when the upright rise again." Jesus orders them and us to break the closed circle and asks us to invite the excluded, the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. This was not the custom then and it is not today either. But Jesus insists, "Invite these people". Why? Because in the disinterested invitation, addressed to excluded and marginalized persons, there is a source of happiness: "And then you will be blessed for they have no means to repay you". This is a strange type of happiness, a different happiness! You will be blessed for they have no means to repay you. It is the happiness that comes from doing a totally gratuitous gesture, without asking for anything. Jesus says that this is the happiness which God will give us in the Resurrection; the happiness of the Resurrection which He will give us not only at the end of history, but even now. To act in this way is to catch a glimpse of the happiness in the Resurrection!

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

4) Personal questions

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

5) Concluding prayer

Yahweh, my heart is not haughty,
I do not set my sights too high.
I have taken no part in great affairs,
in wonders beyond my scope.

No, I hold myself in quiet and silence,
like a little child in its mother's arms,
like a little child, so I keep myself. (Ps 131:1-2)

Lectio Divina Tuesday, November 5, 2019

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

God of power and mercy,
only with Your help
can we offer You fitting service and praise.
May we live the faith we profess
and trust Your promise of eternal life.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, Your Son,
who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

2) Gospel reading - Luke 14:15-24

One of those gathered round the table said to Jesus, "Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God." But He said to him, "There was a man who gave a great banquet, and he invited a large number of people. When the time for the banquet came, he sent his servant to say to those who had been invited, 'Come along: everything is ready now.' But all alike started to make excuses.

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

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

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

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

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

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

3) Reflection

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

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

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

- Luke 14:16-20: The great banquet is ready. Jesus responds with a parable. There was a man who gave a great banquet and he invited a great number of people”. But the duty of each one prevents the guest from accepting the invitation. The first one says, “I have bought a piece of land and must go and see it!” The second, “I have bought five yoke of oxen and am on my way to try them out!” The third one, “I have just got married and so am unable to come!” Under the limits of the law those people had the right not to accept the invitation (cf. Deut 20:5-7).

- Luke 14:21-22: The invitation remains, it is not cancelled. The master of the banquet was indignant in seeing that his invitation had not been accepted. In the last instance, the one who is indignant is precisely Jesus because the norms of the strict observance of the law reduced the space for people to be able to live the gratuity of an invitation to the house of friends, an invitation characterized by fraternal spirit and by sharing. Thus the master of the feast orders the servants to invite the poor, the blind, the crippled, and the lame. Those who were normally excluded because they were considered unclean are now invited to sit around the banquet table.

- Luke 14:23-24: There is still room. The banquet room is not full. Then the master of the house ordered the servants to invite those passing on the street. Those are the pagans. They are also invited to sit around the table. Thus, in the banquet of the parable of Jesus, everybody sits around the same table, Jews and pagans. At the time of Luke, there were many problems which prevented the realization of this ideal of the common banquet. By means of the parable Luke shows that the practice of the banquet came precisely from Jesus.

After the destruction of Jerusalem, in the year 70, the Pharisees took over the government in the synagogues demanding the rigid fulfillment of the norms which identified them as the Jewish people. The Jews who converted to Christianity were

considered a threat because they destroyed the walls which separated Israel from other people. The Pharisees tried to force them to abandon their faith in Jesus. Because they did not succeed, they drove them away from the synagogues. All this brought about a slow and progressive separation between the Jews and the Christians which was a source of great suffering especially for the converted Jews (Rom 9:1-5). In the parable, Luke indicates very clearly that these converted Jews were not unfaithful to their people. On the contrary, they are the ones who are invited and accept the invitation. They are the true continuation of Israel. Those who were unfaithful were those who did not accept the invitation and did not want to recognize Jesus the Messiah (Lk 22:66; Acts 13: 27).

4) Personal questions

- In general, who are the people who are invited and who are the people who in general are not invited to our feasts?
- What are the reasons which today limit the participation of people in society and in the Church? And what are the reasons that some give to exclude themselves from the community? Are they just reasons?

5) Concluding prayer

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

Lectio Divina Wednesday, November 6, 2019

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

God of power and mercy,
only with Your help
can we offer you fitting service and praise.
May we live the faith we profess
and trust Your promise of eternal life.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, Your Son,
who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

2) Gospel reading - Luke 14:25-33

Great crowds accompanied Jesus on His way and He turned and spoke to them. "Anyone who comes to Me without hating father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters, and yes, his own life, too, cannot be My disciple. No one who does not carry his cross and come after Me can be My disciple. And indeed, which of you here, intending to build a tower, would not first sit down and

work out the cost to see if he had enough to complete it? Otherwise, if he laid the foundation and then found himself unable to finish the work, anyone who saw it would start making fun of him, saying, 'Here is someone who started to build and was unable to finish.'

Or again, what king marching to war against another king would not first sit down and consider whether with ten thousand men he could stand up to the other who was advancing against him with twenty thousand? If not, then while the other king was still a long way off, he would send envoys to sue for peace.

So in the same way, none of you can be my disciple without giving up all that he owns.”

3) Reflection

- The Gospel today speaks about discipleship and presents the conditions for being a disciple of Jesus. Jesus is on the way to Jerusalem where He will soon die on the Cross. This is the context in which Jesus speaks about discipleship.
- Luke 14:25: An example of catechesis. The Gospel today is a beautiful example of how Luke transforms the words of Jesus into catechesis for the people in the communities. He says, “Great crowds accompanied Him. He turned and spoke to them”. Jesus speaks to the great crowd, that is, He speaks to all, to the persons of the communities at the time of Luke, and today He speaks to us. In the teaching which follows, Jesus gives the conditions for those who want to be His disciples.
- Luke 14:25-26: First condition: to hate father and mother. Some reduce the force of the word to hate and translate it as “to prefer Jesus to one’s own parents”. The original text uses the expression “to hate one’s parents”. In another place, Jesus says one must love and respect one’s parents (Lk 18:20). How can this contradiction be explained? Is it a contradiction? The force of the word is typically Semitic. Matthew uses the terms “loves father or mother more”, which shows the meaning of hate is rather to *love less*. At the time of Jesus, social and economic conditions led families to become self-contained. This prevented them from fulfilling the law of ransom or liberation (goel) which calls one to help one’s brothers and sisters in community (clan) who were in danger of losing their land or becoming slaves (cf. Deut 15:1-18; Lev 25:23-43). Closed in upon themselves, the families weakened life in the community. Jesus wants to reconstruct life in community. This is why He asks to put an end to the restricted vision of the small family. He asks the family to open itself and be united to the larger family of community. This is the sense of hating father and mother, and wife, sons, sisters and brothers. When His family wants to take Him back to Nazareth, Jesus does not sympathize with their request. He ignores or hates their petition and extends His family, saying, “Behold, my mother and my brothers! Anyone who does the will of God, is my brother, sister and mother” (Mk 3:20-21, 31-35). The familial bonds of union cannot stand in the way of the formation of the Community. This is the first condition.
- Luke 14:27: Second condition: to carry the cross. “No one who does not carry his cross and come after me can be My disciple”. In order to understand the importance of this second requirement we have to look at the context in which Luke places this saying of Jesus. Jesus is going toward Jerusalem to be crucified and to die. To follow Jesus and to carry the cross means to go with Him up to Jerusalem to be crucified with Him. This recalls the attitude of the women who “followed and served Him when He was still in Galilee and many others who went up to Jerusalem with Him” (Mk 15: 41). This also

reminds us of Paul's statement in the Letter to the Galatians: "But as for me, it is out of the question that I should boast at all, except of the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (Gal 6:14)

- Luke 14:28-32: Two parables. Both of these parables have the same objective: that people may think hard before making a decision. In the first parable, He says, "which of you here, intending to build a tower, would not first sit down and work out the cost to see if he had enough to complete it? Otherwise, if he laid the foundation and then found himself unable to finish the work, anyone who saw it would start making fun of him, saying, 'Here is someone who started to build and was unable to finish!'" This parable needs no explanation. It speaks for itself. Let each one reflect well on his/her way of following Jesus and ask him/herself if he/she values the conditions before making the decision to become a disciple of Jesus.

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

- Luke 14:33: Conclusion for discipleship. The conclusion is only one: to be Christian, to follow Jesus, is something serious. For many people today, to be Christian is not a personal choice, and neither is it a decision for life, but a simple cultural phenomenon. They do not even think of making a choice. Anyone who is born a Brazilian is a Brazilian. He who is born Japanese is Japanese. He does not have to choose. He is born like that and will die like that. Many people are Christians because they were born so, without ever choosing their faith.

4) Personal questions

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

5) Concluding prayer

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

Lectio Divina Thursday, November 7, 2019

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

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

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

2) Gospel reading - Luke 15:1-10

The tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to listen to Jesus, but the Pharisees and scribes began to complain, saying, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." So Jesus addressed this parable to them. "What man among you having a hundred sheep and losing one of them would not leave the ninety-nine in the desert and go after the lost one until he finds it? And when he does find it, he sets it on his shoulders with great joy and, upon his arrival home, he calls together his friends and neighbors and says to them, 'Rejoice with me because I have found my lost sheep.' I tell you, in just the same way there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who have no need of repentance. "Or what woman having ten coins and losing one would not light a lamp and sweep the house, searching carefully until she finds it? And when she does find it, she calls together her friends and neighbors and says to them, 'Rejoice with me because I have found the coin that I lost.' In just the same way, I tell you, there will be rejoicing among the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

3) Reflection

- The Gospel today presents the first one of three parables united by the same word. It is a question of three things which were lost: the lost sheep (Lk 15:3-7), the lost drachma (Lk 15:8-10), and the lost son (Lk 15:11-32). The three parables are addressed to the Pharisees and to the doctors of the law who criticized Jesus (Lk 15:1-3). That is, they are addressed to the Pharisee and to the scribe or doctor of the law which is in each one of us.
- Luke 15:1-3: Those to whom the parables are addressed. The first three verses describe the context in which the three parables were pronounced: "At that time, the tax collectors and sinners were all crowding round to listen to Him. The Pharisees and scribes complained". On one side there were the tax collectors and the sinners; on the other the Pharisees and the doctors of the law. Luke speaks, exaggerating somewhat: "The tax collectors and the sinners were all crowding round to listen to Jesus". There was something in Jesus which attracted them. It is the word of Jesus which attracts them (cf. Isa 50:4). They want to listen to Him. This is a sign that they do not feel condemned,

but rather they feel accepted by Him. The criticism of the Pharisees and the scribes is the following: "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them!" When sending out the seventy-two disciples (Lk 10:1-9), Jesus had ordered them to accept the excluded, the sick, the possessed (Mt 10:8; Lk 10:9) and to gather them for the banquet (Lk 10:8).

- Luke 15:4: The Parable of the lost sheep. The parable of the lost sheep begins with a question: "Which one of you, with a hundred sheep, if he lost one, would fail to leave the ninety-nine and go after the missing one until he found it?" Before giving a response, Jesus must have looked around to see who was listening to Him to see how they would have answered. The question is formulated in such a way that the response can only be a positive one: "Yes, he will go after the lost sheep!" And you, how would you answer? Would you leave the ninety-nine in the field to go and look for the only one which got lost? Who would do this? Probably, the majority would have answered, "Jesus, who among us? Nobody would do such an absurd thing. The proverb says: "Better one bird in the hand than one hundred flying around!"

- Luke 15:5-7: Jesus interprets the parable of the lost sheep. Now, in the parable, the shepherd does what nobody would do: to leave everything and to go and look for the lost sheep. God alone can assume such an attitude! Jesus wants us to become aware, conscious of the Pharisee or the scribe which is in each one of us. The Pharisees and the scribes abandoned the sinners and excluded them. They would have never gone to look for the lost sheep. They would have allowed it to get lost in the desert. They preferred the ninety-nine. But Jesus places Himself in the place of the sheep which got lost, which in the context of the official religion, would fall into despair without the hope of being accepted. Jesus makes them and us know: "If you feel that you are a lost sinner, remember that for God you are worth more than the other ninety-nine sheep. And in the case that you are converted, know that there will be "greater joy in heaven for a sinner who is converted, than for ninety-nine just who do not need conversion."

- Luke 15:8-10: Parable of the lost drachma. The second Parable: "Or again, what woman with ten drachmas would not, if she lost one, light a lamp and sweep out the house and search thoroughly until she found it? Then, when she had found it, call together her friends and neighbors saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, I have found the drachma I lost. In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing among the angels of God over one repentant sinner'". God rejoices with us. The angels rejoice with us. The parable serves to communicate hope to those who were threatened with despair because of the official religion. This message recalls what God tells us in the book of the prophet Isaiah: "Look, I have engraved you on the palms of My hands!" (Isa 49: 16). "Since, I regard you as precious, since you are honored and I love you!" (Isa 43: 4).

4) Personal questions

- Would you go out to look for the lost sheep?
- Do you think that today the Church is faithful to this parable of Jesus?
- Who are the lost sheep today? Are they sinners? Are they non-believers? Are they those who are misled in their beliefs?
- Is there a person responsibility in looking for and finding lost sheep, or is it just an institutional one – just for the Church and bishops and pastors?

5) Concluding prayer

Seek Yahweh and His strength,
tirelessly seek His presence!
Remember the marvels He has done,
His wonders, the judgments He has spoken. (Ps 105:4-5)

Lectio Divina Friday, November 8, 2019

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

God of power and mercy,
only with your help
can we offer you fitting service and praise.
May we live the faith we profess
and trust your promise of eternal life.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

2) Gospel reading - Luke 16:1-8

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

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

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

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

3) Reflection

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

that Jesus praises a corrupt employee?

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

- Luke 16: 3-4: What to do? Which is the way out? “Then the steward said to himself, Now that my master is taking the stewardship from me what am I to do? Dig? I am not strong enough. Go begging? I should be too ashamed”. He begins to reflect to find a way out. He analyzes, one by one, the possible alternatives: to dig or work the land in order to survive, he feels that he does not have the strength to do this, and to beg, he would feel ashamed. Calculating the possible alternativeshe says, “Ah, I know what I will do to make sure that when I am dismissed from office there will be some to welcome me into their homes”. It is a question of trying to guarantee his future. The steward acts consistently with his way of thinking and living.

- Luke 16: 5-7: Execution of the solution he found. “Then he called his master’s debtors, one by one, and said to the first one: How much do you owe my master? One hundred measures of oil, he said. The steward said, ‘Here, take your bond, sit down and quickly write fifty. Then he said to another one, and you, sir, how much do you owe? ‘One hundred measures of wheat’, he answered. The steward said, ‘Here take your bond and write eighty’”. In his total lack of ethics the steward was consistent. The criteria of his actions are not honesty and justice, nor the good of the master on whom he depends to live and to survive, but his own interest. He wants to have the guarantee that there will be someone who will receive him in his house.

- Luke 16: 8: The Master praises the dishonest steward. This is the disconcerting conclusion. “The Master praises the dishonest steward for his astuteness: For the children of this world are more astute in dealing with their own kind than are the children of light”. The word Master or Lord indicates Jesus and not the rich man. The latter would never praise a dishonest employee working for Him in service, and now he robs even more, with 50 measures of oil and 20 sacks of wheat! In the parable, the one who extends the praise is Jesus. He certainly does not praise the theft but the spirit of the steward. He knew how to calculate things well and finds a way out when he unexpectedly finds himself without a job. In this way the children of this world know how to be experts in their own things. In the same way, the children of light should learn from them to be experts in the solution to their problems using the criteria of the Kingdom and not the criteria of this world. “Be cunning as serpents and innocent as doves” (Mt 10: 16).

4) Personal questions

- Am I consistent in thought and action?
- Which criteria do I use in the solution of my problems?

5) Concluding prayer

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

Lectio Divina Saturday, November 9, 2019

John 2:13-22 - Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

God of power and mercy,
protect us from all harm.
Give us freedom of spirit
and health in mind and body
to do Your work on earth.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, Your Son,
who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

2) Gospel Reading - John 2:13-22

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

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

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

The Jews intervened and said, "What sign can you show us that you should act like this?"

Jesus answered, "Destroy this Temple, and in three days I will raise it up."

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

3) Reflection

- Context. Our passage contains a clear and unmistakable teaching of Jesus in the temple. Previously John the Baptist had given witness of Jesus saying that He was the

Messiah (Jn 1:29). The first disciples, on the indication of the Baptist, have recognized Him as the Lamb of God. A quality of the Messiah: to inaugurate a new Passover and covenant and bring about the definitive liberation of mankind (Jn 1:35-51) In Cana, Jesus works a first sign to show His glory (Jn 2:1-12). The glory becomes visible. It can be contemplated, and, therefore it manifests itself. It is the glory of the Father present in the person of Jesus which manifests itself at the beginning of His activity in this way, anticipating His “hour” (Jn 17: 1). In what way is His glory manifested? God gratuitously restores a new relationship with mankind. He unites mankind intimately to Him giving mankind the capacity to love as He loves, through the Spirit who purifies the human heart and makes him son of God. But, it is necessary to recognize the immutable love of God, manifested in Jesus, responding with faith, with a personal adherence.

- Jesus and the Temple. Now Jesus is in the temple in Jerusalem fulfilling the prophecy of Malachi (Mal 3:1-3). He proclaims Himself Messiah. His teaching produces tension. Now the reader understands why the great disputes with the Jews always take place in the temple, where Jesus pronounces His substantial denunciations. His task is to lead the people outside the temple (2:15; 10:4). In the last instance Jesus was condemned because He represented a danger to the temple and for the people. Jesus goes to Jerusalem on the occasion of the Passover of the Jews to manifest Himself in public and to reveal to all that He is the Messiah. During that feast Jerusalem is full of pilgrims who have come from all parts, and therefore His actions would have had a great effect on the whole of Palestine. When He arrives in Jerusalem He immediately is seen in the temple where there are a number of people selling cattle, sheep and doves, and the money changers sitting there. The encounter in the temple is not with people who seek God but dealers of the sacred. The amount paid to be able to open a stand in order to be able to sell was given to the high priest. Jesus chooses this occasion (the Passover) this place (the temple) to give a sign. He takes a whip, an instrument which was a symbol of the Messiah who punishes vices and evil practices, and He drives out these people from the temple, together with the cattle and sheep. It is worthy to note His act against those selling the doves (v. 15). The dove was an animal used for the propitiatory holocausts (Lev 9:14-17), in the sacrifices of expiation and of purification (Lev 12:8; 15:14,29), and especially if those who offered it were poor (Lev 5:7; 14:22, 30 ff). The sellers, those who sold the doves, sold reconciliation with God for money.

- The house of my Father. The expression wants to indicate that Jesus in His actions behaves as a Son. He represents the Father in the world. They have transformed the worship of God into a market, a place for trading. The temple is no longer the place of encounter with God, but a market where the presence of money is in force. Worship has become the pretext to gain more. Jesus attacks the central institution of Israel, the temple, the symbol of the people and of the election. He denounces that the temple has been deprived of its historical function, to be the sign of the dwelling of God in the midst of His people. The first reaction to Jesus’ action comes from the disciples who associate this with Psalm 69:10: “I am eaten up with zeal for your house”. The second reaction comes from the high priests who respond in the name of those selling in the temple: “What sign can you show us that you should act like this?” (v.18). They have asked Him for a sign and He gives them that of His death. “Destroy this Temple and in three days I will raise it up” (v. 19). Jesus is the Temple that is an assurance of the

presence of God in the world. The presence of His love and the death on the cross will make of Him the only and definitive Temple of God. The temple constructed by human hands has fallen into decay. Jesus will be the one to replace it, because He is now the presence of God in the world as the Father is present in Him.

4) Personal questions

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

5) Concluding Prayer

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

Lectio Divina Sunday, November 10, 2019

*Jesus answers to the Sadducees
who ridicule faith in the Resurrection
Luke 20:27-40*

Initial prayer

Oh infinite Mystery of Life,
We are nothing,
And still we can praise You
With the voice itself of Your Word
Who became the voice of our whole humanity.
Oh, my Trinity, I am nothing in You,

But You are all in me
And then my nothingness is life... it is eternal life.

Maria Evangelista of the Holy Trinity, O.Carm.

1. Lectio

Some Sadducees, those who deny that there is a resurrection, came forward and put this question to Jesus, saying, "Teacher, Moses wrote for us, If someone's brother dies leaving a wife but no child, his brother must take the wife and raise up descendants for his brother. Now there were seven brothers; the first married a woman but died childless. Then the second and the third married her, and likewise all the seven died childless. Finally the woman also died. Now at the resurrection whose wife will that woman be?"

For all seven had been married to her." Jesus said to them, "The children of this age marry and remarry; but those who are deemed worthy to attain to the coming age and to the resurrection of the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage. They can no longer die, for they are like angels; and they are the children of God because they are the ones who will rise. That the dead will rise even Moses made known in the passage about the bush, when he called out 'Lord, ' the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob; and he is not God of the dead, but of the living, for to him all are alive." Some of the scribes said in reply, "Teacher, you have answered well." And they no longer dared to ask him anything.



2. Meditatio

a) Key for the Reading:

- Context

We can say that the passage proposed to us for our reflection forms a central part of the text which goes from Luke 20:20 to 22:4, and deals with the discussions with the chief priests of the people. Already in the beginning of chapter 20, Luke presents us with some conflicts which arose between Jesus, the priests, and the scribes (vv. 1-19). Here Jesus finds Himself facing some conflict with the philosophical school of the Sadducees, who have taken their name from Zadok, the priest of David (2 Sam 8: 17). They accepted as revelation only the writings of Moses (v. 28), denying the gradual development of biblical revelation. In this sense one can better understand the expression “Moses prescribed for us” repeated by the Sadducees in this malicious debate which they use it as a trap to get Jesus and “to catch Him in a fault” (see: 20:2; 20:20). This philosophical school disappeared with the destruction of the temple.

- The law of the levirate

The Sadducees precisely deny the resurrection from the dead because, according to them, this object of faith did not form part of the revelation handed down to them from Moses. The same thing can be said concerning faith in the existence of angels. In Israel, faith in the resurrection of the dead appears in the book of Daniel written in the year 605 – 530 B.C. (Dan 12:2-3). We also find it in 2 Macc 7:9,11,14,23. In order to ridicule the faith in the resurrection of the dead, the Sadducees quote the legal prescription of Moses on the levirate (Deut 25:5) concerning the ancient traditions of the Semitic peoples (including the Hebrews), according to which, the brother or a close relative of a married man who died without sons, had to marry the widow, in order: a) to assure to the deceased descendants (the sons would have been legally considered sons of the deceased man), and b) a husband to the woman, because women depended on the man

for their livelihood. Cases of this type are recalled in the Old Testament in the Books of Genesis and Ruth.

In the Book of Genesis (38:6-26) it is said how “Judah took a wife, whose name was Tamar, for his first born son Er. But, Er, the first born of Judah, offended the Lord and the Lord killed him. Then Judah tells Onan, “Take your brother’s wife, and do your duty as her brother-in-law to maintain your brother’s line” (Gen 38:6-8). But Onan was also punished by God and he died (Gen 38:10), because Onan, knowing that the line would not count as his, spilt his seed on the ground every time he slept with his brother’s wife, to avoid providing offspring for his brother” (Gen 38:9). Judah, seeing this, sent Tamar to her father’s house so as not to give her his third son, Shelah, as a husband (Gen 38:10-11). Tamar then, disguising herself as a prostitute or a harlot, slept with Judah himself and conceived twins. Judah, on discovering the truth, defended Tamar, recognizing “She was right and I was wrong” (Gen 38:26).

In the book of Ruth the same story is told about Ruth herself, Ruth the Moabitess, who remained a widow after having married one of the sons of Elimelech. Together with her mother-in-law Naomi, Ruth was obliged to beg for survival and to gather in the fields the ears of corn which fell from the sheaves behind the reapers, up to the time when she married Boaz, a relative of her deceased husband.

The case proposed to Jesus by the Sadducees reminds us the story of Tobias the son of Tobit who married Sarah the daughter of Raguel, the widow of seven husbands, all killed by Asmodeus, the demon of lust, at the moment that they slept together. Tobias has the right to marry her because she belonged to his tribe. (Tobit 7:9).

Jesus makes the Sadducees notice that the purpose of marriage is procreation, and therefore it is necessary for the future of the human species, since none of the “sons of this world” (v. 34) is eternal. But “those who are judged worthy of a place in the other world” (v. 35) neither take husband nor wife in so far as they can no longer die” (v. 35-36). They live in God: “they are the same as the angels and, being children of the resurrection, are sons of God” (v. 36). Both in the Old and in the New Testament, the angels are called sons of God (see for example, Gen 6:2; Ps 29:1; Lk 10:6; 16:8). These words of Jesus remind us also of St. Paul’s letter to the Romans, where it is written that Jesus is the Son because of His Resurrection, He is the first risen from the dead and, par excellence, is Son of the Resurrection (Rom 1:4). Here we can also quote the texts of St. Paul on the resurrection of the dead as an event of salvation of a spiritual nature (1 Cor 15:35-50).

- I am: The God of the Living

Jesus goes on to confirm the reality of the resurrection by quoting another passage taken from Exodus, this time from the account of the revelation of God to Moses in the burning bush. The Sadducees make evident their point of view by quoting Moses. Jesus, at the same time, refutes their argument by quoting Moses as well: “That the dead resurrect has also been shown by Moses regarding the bush, when he calls the Lord: the God of Abraham, God of Isaac and God of Jacob” (v. 37). In Exodus we find that the Lord reveals Himself to Moses with these words: “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” (Ex 3:6). The Lord then continues

to reveal to Moses the divine name: “I AM” (Ex 3:14). The Hebrew word ehjei (also transliterated as *ehyeh*), from the root Hei-Yod-Hei, used for the divine name in Exodus 3:14, means I am he who is; I am the existing One. The root may also mean life, existence. And this is why Jesus can conclude, “God is not the God of the dead, but of the living” (v. 38). In the same verse Jesus specifies that “all live for Him [God]”. This can also mean “all live in Him”. Reflecting on Jesus’ death, in the letter to the Romans, Paul writes, “For by dying, He is dead to sin once and for all, and now the life that He lives is life with God. In the same way, you must see yourselves as being dead to sin but alive for God in Jesus Christ” (Rom 6:10).

We can say that Jesus, once more, makes the Sadducees see that God’s fidelity, whether for His people, or for the individual, is not based on the existence of a political kingdom (in the case of God’s fidelity to His people), nor on having prosperity and descendants in this life. The hope of the true believer does not reside in the things of this world, but in the Living God. This is why the disciples of Jesus are called to live as children of the resurrection, that is, sons of life in God, as their Master and Lord, “having been regenerated not from any perishable seed but from imperishable seed, that is, of the living and enduring Word of God” (1 Pet 1:23).

b) Questions to help in the reflection

- * What has struck you most in this Gospel? Some word? Which particular attitude?
- * Try to reread the Gospel text in the context of the other biblical texts quoted in the key to the reading.
- * How do you interpret the conflict which arose between the chief priests of the people and the Sadducees with Jesus?
- * Stop and think on how Jesus confronted the conflict. What do you learn from His behavior?
- * What do you think is the central point in the discussion?
- * What does the resurrection from the dead mean for you?
- * Do you feel like a son or daughter of the resurrection?
- * What does it mean for you to live the resurrection beginning now at the present moment?

3. Oratio

Inspired by Psalm 17

We will be filled, Lord, by contemplating Your Face

Listen, Yahweh, to an upright cause,
pay attention to my cry,
lend an ear to my prayer,
my lips free from deceit.

My steps never stray from the paths You lay down,
from Your tracks; so my feet never stumble.
I call upon You, God, for You answer me;
turn Your ear to me, hear what I say.

Shelter me in the shadow of Your wings.
That I in my uprightness will see Your face,
and when I awake I shall be filled with the vision of You.

4. Contemplatio

From the mystical diary of
Sister Maria Evangelista of the Most Holy Trinity, O.Carm.

This earthly life is also filled with love, with gifts of “truth”, hidden gifts and at the same time, revealed by the sign... I feel an immense gratitude for every human value. To live in communion with creation, in friendship with the brothers, in openness toward the work of God and the work of mankind, in a continuous experience of the gifts of life, even if in the midst of suffering, even is simply only human, it is a continuous grace, a continuous gift.

Lectio Divina Monday, November 11, 2019

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

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

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

2) Gospel reading - Luke 17:1-6

Jesus said to His disciples, "scandals are sure to come, but alas for the one through whom they occur! It would be better for such a person to be thrown into the sea with a millstone round the neck than to be the downfall of a single one of these little ones. Keep watch on yourselves! If your brother does something wrong, rebuke him and, if he is sorry, forgive him.

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

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

3) Reflection

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

- Luke 17:1-2: *First word: To avoid scandal.* “Jesus said to His disciples: “It is unavoidable that there are scandals, but alas for the one through whom they occur. It would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a millstone around the neck than to be the downfall of a single one of these little ones”. To cause scandal means to make people trip and fall. At the level of faith, it means that which drives away the person from the right path. *To scandalize the little ones* means to be the cause of their drawing away from God and to make them lose their faith in God. Anyone who does this deserves the following sentence: “A millstone round the neck and to be thrown into the sea!”. Why such severity? Because Jesus identifies Himself with the little ones who are the poor (Mt 25:40.45). They are those He prefers and the first ones to whom the Good News will be given (cf. Lk 4:18). Anyone who touches them touches Jesus!, Because of our way of living faith, we Christians throughout the centuries have been the cause of why the little ones have many times drawn away from the Church and have gone towards other religions. They have not been able any longer to believe, as the Apostle said in the Letter to the Romans quoting the Prophet Isaiah: “*In fact, it is your fault that the name of God is held in contempt among the nations.*” (Rm 2:24; Is 52:5; Ez 36: 22). Up to what point are we guilty? Is it our fault? Do we also deserve the millstone around the neck?

- Luke 17:3-4: *Second word: Forgive your brother.* “If your brother does something wrong rebuke him and, if he is sorry, forgive him. And if he wrongs you seven times a day and seven times comes back to you and says, ‘I am sorry’, you must forgive him”. Seven times a day! This is not little! Jesus asks very much! In the Gospel of Matthew, He says that we should forgive seventy times seven! (Mt 18:22). Forgiveness and reconciliation are some of the themes on which Jesus insists the most. The grace to be able to forgive persons and to reconcile them among themselves and with God was granted to Peter (Mt 16:19), to the Apostles (Jn 20:23), and to the community (Mt 18:18). The parable on the need to forgive our neighbor leaves no doubt: if we do not forgive our brothers we cannot receive pardon from God (Mt 18:22-35; 6, 12.15; Mk 11: 26). There is no proportion between the pardon that we receive from God and the pardon that we have to offer to our neighbor. The pardon with which God forgives us gratuitously is like *ten thousand talents* compared to *one hundred denarii* (Mt 18: 23-35). It is estimated that ten thousand talents are 174 tons of gold. One hundred denarii are not more than 30 grams of gold.

- Luke 17:5-6: *Third word: Increase our faith.* “The apostles said to the Lord: ‘Increase our faith!’” The Lord answered: *If you had faith like a mustard seed you could say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea’, and it would obey you*”. In this context in Luke, the question of the apostles seems to be motivated by the order of Jesus to forgive, in one day, up to seventy times seven the brother or the sister who sins against us. It is not easy to forgive. It is only with great faith in God that it is possible to reach the point of having such a great love that it makes it possible for us to forgive, in one day, up to seventy times seven the brother who sins against us. Humanly speaking, in the eyes of the world, to forgive in this way is foolish and a scandal. However, for us this attitude is the expression of divine wisdom which forgives us infinitely much more. Paul said: “We announce Christ crucified: a stumbling block for the Jews and foolishness for the gentiles (I Co 1:23).

4) Personal questions

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

5) Concluding prayer

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

Lectio Divina Tuesday, November 12, 2019

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

God of power and mercy,
protect us from all harm.
Give us freedom of spirit
and health in mind and body
to do Your work on earth.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, Your Son,
who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

2) Gospel reading - Luke 17:7-10

Jesus said, "Which of you, with a servant ploughing or minding sheep, would say to him when he returned from the fields, 'Come and have your meal at once?' Would he not be more likely to say, 'Get my supper ready. Fasten your belt and wait on me while I eat and drink. You yourself can eat and drink afterwards'? Must he be grateful to the servant for doing what he was told? So with you: when you have done all you have been told to do, say 'We are useless servants. We have done no more than our duty.'"

3) Reflection

- The Gospel today narrates a parable which is found only in Luke's Gospel and has no parallel in the other Gospels. The parable teaches that our life has to be characterized by an attitude of service. It begins with three questions which are ultimately answered by Jesus.
- Luke 17:7-9: The three questions of Jesus. It asks three questions taken from daily life, and therefore the listeners have to think about each one from their own experience to give a response according to that experience. In the first question, Jesus asks "which of you, with a servant ploughing or minding sheep, would say to him when he returned from the fields, 'Come and have your meal at once?'" All will answer "No!" The second

question asks would he not be more likely to say “Get my supper ready. Fasten your belt and wait on me while I eat and drink. You yourself can eat and drink afterwards?” All will answer: “Yes! Certainly!” Finally, the third question inquires “must he be grateful to the servant for doing what he was told?” All will answer “No!” The way in which Jesus asks the questions orientates people to his way of thinking. He wants us to be servants to one another.

- Luke 17:10: The response of Jesus. At the end Jesus draws a conclusion which was already implicit in the questions: “So with you, when you have done all you have been told to do, say ‘We are useless servants, we have done no more than our duty’”. This applies to all Christians, to serve the Master and to avoid pride in doing so. Jesus has told us what to do, and we must do it with the humility of one who sees himself as a useless servant, expecting to have our reward after doing the Master’s work. He has given us an example of service when He said: “The Son of Man has not come to be served, but to serve” (Mk 10:45). Service is a theme which Luke likes. Service represents the form in which the poor in the time of Jesus, the anawim, were waiting for the Messiah. Not like a royal and glorious Messiah, high priest or judge, but rather as the Servant of Yahweh, announced by Isaiah (Isa 42:1-9). Mary, the Mother of Jesus, says to the angel, “Behold the handmaid of the Lord, may it be done to me according to your word!” (Lk 1:38). In Nazareth, Jesus presents Himself as the Servant described by Isaiah (Lk 4:18-19 and Isa 61:1-2). In Baptism and in the Transfiguration, He was confirmed by the Father who quotes the words addressed by God to the Servant (Lk 3: 22; 9:35 and Isa 42:1). Jesus tells His followers, “Anyone who wants to be first among you must be your slave” (Mt 20:27). Useless servants! This is the definition of the Christian. Paul speaks about this to the members of the community of Corinth when he writes, “I did the planting, Apollos did the watering, but God gave the growth. In this, neither the planter nor the waterer counts for anything, only God who gave growth” (1Cor 3:6-7). Paul and Apollos are nothing, only simple instruments. The only one who counts is God. He alone! (1Cor 3:7).

- To serve and to be served. Here in this text, the servant serves the master and not the master the servant. But in the other text of Jesus the contrary is said: “Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes. In truth, I tell you, he will do up his belt, sit them down at table and wait on them” (Lk 12:37). In this text, the master serves the servant and not the servant the master. In the first text, Jesus spoke in the present. In the second text, Jesus is speaking in the future. This contrast is simply another way of saying that the one who is ready to lose his life out of love for Jesus and the Gospel will find it (Mt 10:39; 16:25). Anyone who serves God in this present life will be served by God in the future life!

4) Personal questions

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

5) Concluding prayer

The lives of the just are in Yahweh's care.
Their birthright will endure forever.

Yahweh guides a strong man's steps and keeps them firm and takes pleasure in him. (Ps 37:18, 23)

Lectio Divina Wednesday, November 13, 2019

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

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

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

2) Gospel reading - Luke 17:11-19

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

As He entered one of the villages, ten lepers came to meet him. They stood some way off and called to him, "Jesus! Master! Take pity on us."

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

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

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

3) Reflection

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

- Luke 17:11: Jesus on His way to Jerusalem. Luke recalls that Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem, passing through Samaria to go to Galilee. From the beginning of His journey (Lk 9, 52) up until now (Lk 17, 11), Jesus walks through Samaria. It is only now that He is leaving Samaria, passing through Galilee in order to reach Jerusalem. That means that the important teachings given in these last chapters from the 9th to the 17th were

all given on a territory which was not predominantly Jewish. To hear that must have been a great joy for Luke's communities, which were from pagan territory. . Jesus the pilgrim continues His journey toward Jerusalem. He continues to eliminate the differences or inequalities which men have created. He continues on the long and painful road of the periphery toward the capital city, from a religion closed in upon itself toward an open religion which knows how to accept others as brothers and sisters, sons and daughters of the same Father. This openness is also manifested in the acceptance given to the ten lepers.

- Luke 17, 12-13: The calling out of the lepers. Ten lepers went close to Jesus, and they stopped at a distance and called out: "Jesus, Master! Take pity on us!" A leper was a person who was excluded, marginalized, despised, and had no right to live with the family. According to the law of purity, lepers had to go around with torn clothes and uncombed hair, calling out: "Impure! Impure!" (Lv 13, 45-46). For the lepers to look for a cure meant the same thing as to seek purity in order to be able to be integrated again into the community. They could not get close to others (Lv 13, 45-46). Anyone who was touched by a leper became unclean and that prevented him from being able to address himself to God. By means of crying out they expressed their faith in Jesus who could cure them and give them back purity. To obtain purity meant to feel again accepted by God and be able to address him to receive the blessings promised to Abraham.

- Luke 17, 14: The response of Jesus and the cure. Jesus answered: "Go and show yourselves to the priest!" (cf. Mk 1, 44). The priest had to verify the cure and bear witness to the purity of the one who had been cured (Lv 14,1-32). The response of Jesus demanded great faith on the part of the lepers. They had to go to the priest as if they had already been cured when in reality their bodies continued to be covered with leprosy. But they believed in Jesus' word and went to the priest. It happens that along the way, their cure takes place. They are purified. This cure recalls the story of the purification of Naaman from Syria (2 K 5, 9-10). The prophet Elisha orders the man to go and wash in the Jordan. Naaman had to believe in the word of the prophet. Jesus orders the ten lepers to present themselves to the priests. They should believe in the word of Jesus.

- Luke 17, 15-16: Reaction of the Samaritan. "One of them, seeing himself cured, turned back praising God at the top of his voice, and threw himself prostrate at the feet of Jesus, thanking him. The man was a Samaritan". Why did the others not return? Why only the Samaritan? According to the opinion of the Jews of Jerusalem, the Samaritan did not observe the law as he should. Among the Jews there was the tendency to observe the law in order to be able to merit or deserve or acquire justice. Thanks to the observance, they already had accumulated merits and credit before God. Gratitude and gratuity do not form part of the vocabulary of persons who live their relationship with God in this way. Perhaps this is the reason why they do not thank God for the benefits received. In the parable of yesterday's Gospel, Jesus had formulated the same question: "Must he be grateful to the servant for doing what he was told?" (Lk 17, 9) And the answer was "No!" The Samaritan represents the person who realizes he has no merits or rights before God. Everything is grace, beginning from the gift of one's own life!

- Luke 17, 17-19: The final observation of Jesus. Jesus observes: "Were not all ten made clean? The other nine, where are they? Has no one has come back to give praise to God

except this foreigner?” For Jesus, thankfulness for benefits received is a way of rendering the praise that is due to God. What of the others though? Are they to be faulted for carrying out Jesus’ orders? Since it was the Law to be proclaimed clean by the priest, the others, like the Pharisees, placed adherence to the Law above gratitude. On this point, the Samaritans gave a lesson to the Jews. Today the poor are those who carry out the role of the Samaritan and help us to rediscover this dimension of gratitude in life. Everything that we receive should be considered a gift from God who comes to us through brother and sister.

- The welcome given to the Samaritan in the Gospel of Luke. For Luke, the place which Jesus gave to the Samaritans is the same as that which the communities had to reserve for the pagans. Jesus presents a Samaritan as a model of gratitude (Lk 17, 17-19) and of love toward neighbor (Lk 10, 30-33). This must have been quite shocking, because for the Jews, the Samaritans or pagans were the same thing. They could not have access inside the temple of Jerusalem or participate in worship. They were considered to be bearers of impurity. They were impure from birth. For Luke, the Good News of Jesus is addressed in the first place to the persons of these groups who were considered unworthy to receive it. The salvation of God which reaches us through Jesus is purely a gift. It does not depend on the merits of any one.

4) Personal questions

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

5) Concluding prayer

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

Lectio Divina Thursday, November 14, 2019

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

God of power and mercy,
protect us from all harm.
Give us freedom of spirit
and health in mind and body
to do your work on earth.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,

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

2) Gospel reading - Luke 17:20-25

When asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was to come, Jesus gave them this answer: "The coming of the kingdom of God comes not with observation and there will be no one to say, "Look, it is here! Look, it is there!" For look, the kingdom of God is within you."

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

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

3) Reflection

- Today's Gospel gives us the discussion between Jesus and the Pharisees on the coming of the Kingdom. The Gospel today and that of the following days deal with the coming of the end of time.
- Luke 17, 20-21: The Kingdom is among you. "Asked when the Kingdom of God was to come?" Jesus answered "The coming of the Kingdom of God does not come with (through) observation and there will be no one to say, 'Look, it is here! Look, it is there! For look, the Kingdom of God is within you!" The Pharisees thought that the Kingdom could come only after people would have reached the perfect observance of the Law of God. For them, the coming of the Kingdom would be the reward from God for the good behavior of the people, and the Messiah would have come in a very solemn way as a king, to be received by his people. Jesus says the contrary. The coming of the Kingdom cannot be observed as the coming of an earthly king is observed. For Jesus, the Kingdom of God has already come! It is already among us, independently of our effort or merit. Jesus sees things in a different way. He has another way of reading life. He prefers the Samaritan who lives with gratitude to the nine who think that they merit the good that they receive from God (Lk 17, 17-19).
- Luke 17, 22-24: The signs to recognize the coming of the Son of Man. "A time will come when you will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and will not see it. They will say to you, 'Look it is there!' or 'Look, it is here!' Make no move, and do not set off in pursuit. For as the lightning flashing from one part of heaven lights up the other, so will be the Son of Man when His Day comes". In this affirmation, from there are elements taken from apocalyptic visions of history quite common in the first centuries after Jesus. An apocalyptic vision of history has certain distinguishing characteristics.. Certainly, in time of great persecution and oppression the poor have the impression that God loses control of history. They feel lost, without a horizon and without any hope of liberation. In those moments of apparent absence of God, prophecy assumes the form of apocalypse. The apocalyptic vision seeks to enlighten the desperate situation with the light of faith in order to help people not lose hope and continue to have courage . To show that God does not lose control of history,

they describe the different stages of the realization of the project of God throughout history. Begun in a particular significant moment in the past, this project of God advances, stage after stage, through the situations lived by the poor, until the final victory is obtained at the end of history. In this way, the apocalyptic places the present moment like a stage which has already been foreseen in the overall project of God. Generally, the last stage, before the coming of the end, is represented as a moment of suffering and crisis, which many try to profit from by deceiving people. “They will tell you: Look it is here, or look it is there, but do not move, do not follow them. Because like lightening flashing from one part of heaven lights up the other, so will be the Son of man when His Day comes”. Having the eyes of faith which Jesus communicates, the poor can perceive that the Kingdom is already among them (Lk 17, 21), like lightening, without any doubt. The coming of the Kingdom brings with it its own evidence and does not depend on the forecast or prediction of others.

- Luke 17, 25: By the Cross up to the Glory. “But first He is destined to suffer many things and be rejected by this generation”. Always the same warning: the Cross, scandal for the Jews and foolishness for the Greek, but for us the expression of the wisdom and the power of God (1Co 1, 18.23). The path toward the glory passes through the Cross. The life of Jesus is our Canon. It is the canonical norm for all of us.

4) Personal questions

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

5) Concluding prayer

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

Lectio Divina Friday, November 15, 2019

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

God of power and mercy,
protect us from all harm.
Give us freedom of spirit
and health in mind and body
to do Your work on earth.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, Your Son,

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

2) Gospel reading - Luke 17:26-37

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

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

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

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

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

3) Reflection

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

- Luke 17:26-29: “As it was in the day of Noah and of Lot. Life goes by normally: eating, drinking, getting married, buying, selling, sowing, harvesting. Our routine can include so much that we do not manage to think about anything else. The consumerism of our time generates in many of us a total lack of attention to the more profound dimensions of life. We allow the moths to enter into the beam of faith which holds up the more profound dimensions of life. When the storm destroys the house, many of us blame the carpenter: “It was badly made!” In reality, it crumbled down due to our continual lack of attention. The reference to the destruction of Sodom as a figure of what will happen at the end of time may be a reference to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in the year 70 AD (cf. Mk 13:14).

- Luke 17:30-32: So it will also be in the days of the Son of Man. “So it will be in the days when the Son of Man will reveal Himself”. It is difficult for us to imagine the

suffering and the trauma that the destruction of Jerusalem caused in both Jewish and Christian communities. In order to help them to understand and face this suffering Jesus uses a comparison taken from life: “When that Day comes, no one on the housetop, with his possessions in the house, must come down to collect them, nor must anyone in the fields turn back”. The destruction will take place so rapidly that it is not worth while to go down to look for something in the house (Mk 13:15-16). “Remember Lot’s wife” (cf. Gen 19:26): that is, do not look back, do not lose time, decide and go. It is a question of life or death.

- Luke 17:33: To lose one’s life in order to save it. “Anyone who tries to preserve his life will lose it, and anyone who loses it will keep it safe”. Only the person who has been capable of giving himself/herself completely to others will feel totally fulfilled in life. Anyone who preserves life for self alone loses it. This advice of Jesus is the confirmation of the most profound human experience: the source of life is found in the gift of life. In giving, one receives. “In all truth I tell you: unless a wheat grain falls into the earth and dies, it remains only a single grain, but if it dies it yields a rich harvest.” (Jn 12:24). The motivation which Mark’s Gospel adds is important: “for my sake and for the sake of the Gospel” (Mk 8:35). Saying that no one is capable of preserving his life by his own efforts, Jesus recalls the psalm in which it is said that nobody is capable of paying the price for the ransom of his life: “No one can redeem himself or pay his own ransom to God. The price for himself is too high. It can never be that he will live on forever and avoid the sight of the abyss.” (Ps 49:8-10).

- Luke 17:34-36: Vigilance. “I tell you, on that night, when two are in one bed, one will be taken, the other left. When two women are grinding corn together one will be taken, the other left”. This recalls the parable of the ten Virgins. Five were prudent and five were foolish (Mt 25:1-11). What is important is to be prepared. The words “one will be taken and the other left” recall the words of Paul to the Thessalonians (1Thess 4:13-17), when he says that with the coming of the Son of Man, we will be taken to Heaven at the side of Jesus. These words “left behind” furnished the title of a terrible and dangerous romance of the fundamentalist extreme right of the United States: “Left Behind!” This is a romance which has nothing to do with the real meaning of the words of Jesus.

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

4) Personal questions

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

5) Concluding prayer

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

Lectio Divina Saturday, November 16, 2019

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

God of power and mercy,
protect us from all harm.
Give us freedom of spirit
and health in mind and body
to do your work on earth.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

2) Gospel reading - Luke 18:1-8

Jesus told a parable to His disciples about the need to pray continually and never lose heart. There was a judge in a certain town, who had neither fear of God nor respect for anyone. In the same town there was also a widow who kept on coming to him and saying, "I want justice from you against my enemy!" For a long time he refused, but at last he said to himself, "Even though I have neither fear of God nor respect for any human person, I must give this widow her just rights lest she continually weary me."

And the Lord said, "You notice what the unjust judge has to say? Now, will not God see justice done to His elect if they keep calling to Him day and night even though He still delays to help them?"

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

3) Reflection

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

- Luke 18, 1: The introduction. Luke presents the parable with the following phrase: “Then He told them a parable about the need to pray continually and never lose heart”. The recommendation “to pray without losing heart” appears many times in the New Testament (1 Th 5, 17; Rm 12, 12; Ep 6, 18; etc), And it is a characteristic of the spirituality of the first Christian communities.
- Luke 18, 2-5: The parable. Then Jesus presents two personages of real life: a judge who had no consideration for God and no consideration for others, and a widow who struggles to obtain her rights from the judge. The simple fact of indicating these two personages reveals the critical conscience which He had regarding the society of His time. The parable presents the poor people who struggle in the tribunal to obtain their rights. The judge decides to pay attention to the widow and to do justice. The reason is to free himself from the widow who is pestering him and to get rid of her. This is an interesting reason. But the widow obtained what she wanted! This is an example from daily life, which Jesus uses to teach us to pray.
- Luke 18, 6-8: The application. Jesus applies the parable: “You notice what the unjust judge has said. Now, will not God see justice done to His elect if they keep calling to Him day and night even though He still delays to help them? Will He make them wait long? I tell you He will see justice done to them, and done speedily”. If it had not been Jesus, we would not have had the courage to compare Jesus to an unjust judge! Nevertheless, at the end, Jesus expresses a doubt: “When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on earth?” In other words, will we have the courage to wait and have patience, even if God delays in doing what we ask him?
- Jesus in prayer. The first Christians had an image of Jesus in prayer, in permanent contact with the Father. In fact, the life of Jesus was to do the will of the Father (Jn 5: 19). Jesus prayed very much and insisted that His disciples also pray. T. Luke is the Evangelist who gives us a great deal of information on the prayer life of Jesus. He presents Jesus in constant prayer. The following are some moments in which Jesus appears praying:
 - When He was twelve years old and goes to the temple, to the House of the Father (Lk 2: 46-50).
 - He prays when He is baptized and assumes His mission (Lk 3: 21).
 - At the beginning of the mission, He spends forty days in the desert (Lk 4: 1-2).
 - At a time of temptation, He opposes the devil with texts from Scripture (Lk 4: 3-12).
 - Jesus used to participate in the celebration in the Synagogue on Saturday (Lk 4: 16)
 - He seeks solitude in the desert to pray (Lk 5: 16; 9, 18).
 - Before choosing the twelve Apostles, He spends the night in prayer (Lk 6: 12).
 - He prays before meals (Lk 9: 16; 24, 30).
 - (Lk 9: 18).
 - In a time of crises, He goes up to the mountain and pray where he is transfigured. (Lk 9: 28).
 - When revealing the Gospel to little ones He says: “Father, I thank you!” (Lk 10: 21)
 - In praying, He arouses in the Apostles the desire to pray (Lk 11: 1).
 - He prays for Peter so that he does not lose his faith (Lk 22: 32).
 - He celebrates the Paschal Supper with His disciples (Lk 22: 7-14).
 - In the Garden of Olives, He prays, even when sweating blood (Lk 22: 41-42).
 - In the anguish of the agony, He asks His friends to pray with Him (Lk 22: 40.46).

- At the moment when He was being nailed to the Cross, He asks pardon for the murderers (Lk 23: 34).
- At the hour of death, He says “Into your hands I commend my spirit!” (Lk 23: 46; Ps 31: 6)
- Jesus dies crying out with the cry of the poor (Lk 23: 46).
- This long list indicates everything which follows. For Jesus, prayer is intimately linked to life, to concrete facts, and to the decisions which He had to take. In order to be able to be faithful to the project of the Father, He sought to remain alone with Him. He listened to Him. In difficult and decisive moments in His life, Jesus recited Psalms. Just as any devout Jew, He knew them by heart. The recitation of the Psalms did not take away His creativity. Rather, Jesus Himself created a Psalm which He transmitted to us: the Our Father. His life is a permanent prayer: “I always seek the will of the one who sent me!” (Jn 5: 19.30) The Psalm applies to Him when it says: “I am prayer!” (Ps 109: 4)

4) Personal questions

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

5) Concluding prayer

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

Lectio Divina Sunday, November 17, 2019

The discourse of Jesus on the end of time
Luke 21:5-19

1. Opening prayer

Lord, You who have made sky and earth and sea, and everything in them; it is You who said through the Holy Spirit and speaking through our ancestor David, Your servant:

Why this uproar among the nations,
 this impotent muttering of the peoples?
 Kings of earth take up position,
 princes plot together
 against the Lord and His Anointed”.

... Stretch out your hand to heal and to work miracles and marvels through the name of Your holy servant Jesus (Acts 4:24-25,30)”. Fill us with Your Spirit as You gave it to

the Apostles after this prayer, in the time of trial, so that we can also proclaim the Word openly and give witness as prophets of hope.

2. Lectio

a) The context:

The passage concerns the beginning of Jesus' discourse on the end of the world. The passage Luke 21:5-36 is a whole literary unit. Jesus is in Jerusalem, at the entrance to the temple, the Passion is near. The Synoptic Gospels (also see Mt 24; Mk 13) have the so called "eschatological" discourse precede the account of the Passion, Death and Resurrection. These are events to be read in the light of the Passover. The language is the "apocalyptic" one. Attention is not placed on each word, but on the announcement of the total overturn. The community of Luke already knew about the events concerning the destruction of Jerusalem. The Evangelist universalizes the message and makes evident the intermediate time of the Church waiting for the coming of the Lord in glory. Luke refers to the end of time also in other parts (12:35-48; 17: 20; 18:18).



b) A possible division of the text:

Luke 21:5-7: introduction.

Luke 21:8-9: initial warning.

Luke 21:10-11: the signs.

Luke 21:12-17: the disciples put to the test.

Luke 21:18-19: protection and trust.

c) The text:

While some people were speaking about how the temple was adorned with costly stones and votive offerings, Jesus said, "All that you see here-- the days will come when there will not be left a stone upon another stone that will not be thrown down." Then they asked him, "Teacher, when will this happen? And what sign will there be when all these things are about to happen?" He answered, "See that you not be deceived, for many will come in my name, saying, 'I am he,' and 'The time has come.' Do not follow them! When you hear of wars and insurrections, do not be terrified; for such things must happen first, but it will not immediately be the end." Then he said to them, "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be powerful earthquakes, famines, and plagues from place to place; and awesome sights and mighty signs will come from the sky. "Before all this happens, however, they will seize and persecute you, they will hand you over to the synagogues and to prisons, and they will have you led before kings and governors because of my name. It will lead to your giving testimony. Remember, you are not to prepare your defense beforehand, for I myself shall give you a wisdom in speaking that all your adversaries will be powerless to resist or refute. You will even

be handed over by parents, brothers, relatives, and friends, and they will put some of you to death. You will be hated by all because of my name, but not a hair on your head will be destroyed. By your perseverance you will secure your lives."

3. A moment of prayerful silence

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

4. A few questions

- Which sentiments prevail in me: anguish, fear, trust, hope, doubt...?
- Where is the Good News in this discourse?
- Do we love what we expect and do we conform ourselves to its demands?
- How do I react to trials in my life of faith?
- Can I make a connection with the present historical events?
- What place does Jesus have in history today?

5. Meditatio

a) A key for reading:

Let us not allow ourselves to be attracted by the exterior upheavals, typical of the apocalyptic language, but by the interior ones, which are necessary, which pre-announce and prepare the encounter with the Lord. Even being aware that today also, in different parts of the world, "apocalyptic" situations are being lived, it is possible to make a personalized reading, not an evasive one, which shifts the attention to personal responsibility. Luke, regarding the other Evangelists, underlines that the end has not come, that it is necessary to live the waiting with commitment. Let us open our eyes to the tragedies of our time, not to be prophets of misfortune, but courageous prophets of a new order based on justice and peace.

b) Comment:

[5] "When some were talking about the temple remarking how it was adorned with fine stonework and votive offerings", He said: Jesus was probably at the entrance to the temple, considering the reference to the votive offerings. Luke does not specify who the listeners are. It is directed to all. He universalizes the eschatological discourse. This discourse can refer to the end of time, but also to our personal end, the proper time of life. In common there is the definitive encounter with the Risen Lord.

[6] "All these things you are staring at now, the time will come when not a single stone will be left on another; everything will be destroyed". Jesus introduces a language of misfortune (17:22; 19:43) and repeats the admonitions of the prophets concerning the temple (Micah 3:12; Jer 7:1-15; 26:1-19). It is also a consideration on the fragility of every human achievement, no matter how marvelous. The community of Luke already knew about the destruction of Jerusalem (year 70). Let us consider our attitude towards the things that end with time.

[7] They asked Him: "Master, when will this happen, then, and what sign will there be that it is about to take place?" The listeners are interested in the external upheavals which characterize this event. Jesus does not respond to this specific question. The

“when” is not placed by Luke in relation to the destruction of Jerusalem. He underlines that the end “will not be immediately” (v. 9) and “that before all this...” (v. 12) others things will happen. He questions us on the relation between the historical events and the fulfillment of the history of salvation: the time of man and the time of God.

[8] He answered, “Take care not to be deceived, because many will come using My name and saying: ‘I am the one’ and ‘the time is near at hand’. Refuse to join them”. In regard to the other Evangelists, Luke adds the reference to time. The community of the first Christians is overcoming the phase of an immediate coming of the Lord and prepares itself for the intermediate time of the Church. Jesus recommends that they not allow themselves to be deceived, or better, to be seduced by impostors. There are two types of false prophets: those who pretend to come in the name of Jesus saying “I am the one” and those who affirm that the time is near at hand, that the day is already known (10:11; 19:11).

[9] “When you hear of wars and revolutions, do not be terrified, for this is something that must happen first, but the end will not come at once”. Even the war events, and today we would say, the terrorist acts, are not the beginning of the end. All this happens but it is not a sign of the end. Luke wants to warn them about the illusion of the imminent end of time with the consequent disillusionment and abandonment of faith.

[10] “Then He said to them, ‘Nation will fight against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.

[11] There will be great earthquakes and plagues and famines in various places; there will be terrifying events and great signs from heaven”. The words “and then He said” is a repetition of the discourse after the initial warnings. This is fully apocalyptic language, which means revelation (Isa 19:2; 2Cor 15:6) and at the same time concealment. Traditional images are used to describe the rapid changes of history (Isa 24:19-20; Zech 14:4-5; Ezek 6:11-12, etc.). The imaginary catastrophe is like a curtain which hides the beauty of the scene which is behind: the coming of the Lord in glory (v. 27).

[12] “But before all this happens, you will be seized and persecuted; you will be handed over to the synagogues and to imprisonment, and brought before kings and governors for the sake of My name.”

[13] “and that will be your opportunity to bear witness”. The Christian is called to conform himself to Christ. They have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. Luke recalls the scene of Paul before King Agrippa and Governor Festo (Acts 25:23-26, 32). Behold the time of trial. Not necessarily under the form of persecution. Saint Teresa of the Child Jesus suffered the absence of God for eighteen months, when she discovered her illness. A time of purification which prepares for the encounter. It is the normal condition of the Christian, that of living in a healthy tension which is not frustration. Christians are called to give witness to the hope which animates them.

[14] “Make up your minds not to prepare your defense;
[15] because I Myself shall give you an eloquence and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to resist or contradict”. The time has come to place our trust completely in God, God alone suffices. It is that same wisdom with which Stephen

confused his enemies (Acts 6:10). The capacity to resist to persecution is guaranteed for the believer.

[16] “You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, relatives and friends, and some of you will be put to death”.

[17] “You will be hated universally on account of my name. The radical following of Christ implies also the overcoming of blood relations, those which we affectionately believe to be more secure. There is the risk of remaining alone, like Jesus in His Passion.

[18] “But not a hair of your head will be lost”. Luke repeats the preceding verse (12:7) to remind us of the divine protection which is assured at the moment of trial. The believer is also guaranteed the care of his physical integrity.

[19] “Your perseverance will win you your lives.” Perseverance (cf. Acts 11:23; 13:43; 14:22) is indispensable in order to bear fruit (8:15), in the daily trials and in persecutions. It means the same as the “remain in Christ” of John. The final victory is certain: the Kingdom of God will be established by the Son of Man. Therefore, it is necessary to be persevering, vigilant and in prayer (v. 36 and 12:35-38). The life-style of the Christian has to be a sign of the future which will come.

6. Oratio: Psalm 98

Sing a new song to the Lord

Acclaim Yahweh, all the earth,
burst into shouts of joy!

Play to Yahweh on the harp,
to the sound of instruments;
to the sound of trumpet and horn,
acclaim the presence of the King.

Let the sea thunder, and all that it holds,
the world and all who live in it.

Let the rivers clap their hands,
and the mountains shout for joy together,
at Yahweh's approach,

for He is coming to judge the earth;
He will judge the world with saving justice
and the nations with fairness.

7. Contemplatio

Good God, whose Kingdom is all love and peace, You Yourself create in our soul that silence that You need to communicate Yourself to it.

Peaceful acting, desiring without passion, zeal without agitation: all that can only come from You, Eternal Wisdom, Infinite activity, unalterable repose, principle and model of true peace.

You have promised us by Your prophets this peace. You have given it by Jesus Christ. You have given us the guarantee with the effusion of Your Spirit.

Do not permit that the envy of the enemy, the anxiety of passion, the scruples of conscience make us lose this heavenly gift, which is the pledge of Your love, the object

of Your promises, the reward of the blood of Your Son. Amen. (Teresa of Avila, 38:9-10).

Lectio Divina Monday, November 18, 2019

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

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

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

2) Gospel reading - Luke 18:35-43

Now it happened that as Jesus drew near to Jericho there was a blind man sitting at the side of the road begging. When he heard the crowd going past he asked what it was all about, and they told him that Jesus the Nazarene was passing by. So he called out, "Jesus, Son of David, have pity on me." The people in front scolded him and told him to keep quiet, but he only shouted all the louder, "Son of David, have pity on me." Jesus stopped and ordered them to bring the man to Him, and when he came up, asked him "What do you want me to do for you?" "Sir," he replied, "let me see again." Jesus said to him, "Receive your sight. Your faith has saved you." And instantly his sight returned and he followed Him praising God, and all the people who saw it gave praise to God.

3) Reflection

- The Gospel today describes Jesus' arrival in Jericho. It is the last stop before Jesus goes to Jerusalem, where His "Exodus", according to what He announced in the Transfiguration scene will take place. He has also issued similar sentiments along the way to Jerusalem (Lk 9: 44; 18:31-33).
- Luke 18:35-37: The blind man sitting on the side of the road. "Now it happened that as Jesus drew near to Jericho, there was a blind man sitting on the side of the road begging. When he heard the crowd going past he asked what it was all about. They told him that Jesus the Nazarene was passing by". In the Gospel of Mark, the blind man is called Bartimaeus (Mk 10:46). Since he was blind, he could not participate in the procession which accompanied Jesus. At that time, there may have been many blind people in Palestine possibly because of the strong sun and arid conditions.
- Luke 18:38-39: The cry of the blind man and the reaction of the people. "Then he began to cry out: Jesus, Son of David, have pity on me!" He calls Jesus using the title "Son of David". The teaching of that time taught that the Messiah would descend from David, a "Son of David". Jesus did not like this title. In quoting the Messianic Psalm, he asks Himself: "How is it that the Messiah can be the son of David if even David calls

him “My Lord?” (Lk 20:41-44) The cry of the blind man bothers the people who accompany Jesus. Consequently, “The people in front scold him telling him to keep quiet.” However, “he only shouted all the louder, Son of David have pity on me!” This occurs in our time when the cry of the poor bothers the established society.

- Luke 18:40-41: The reaction of Jesus before the cry of the blind man. And what did Jesus do? Jesus stopped and ordered them to bring the man to Him. Those who wanted to stop the blind man from shouting now are asked to help the poor man to get to Jesus. The Gospel of Mark adds that the blind man left everything and went to Jesus. He did not have much, only his mantle to cover his body (cf. Ex 22:25-26). His mantle was his home! Today, Jesus listens to the cry of the poor which we do not want to hear. When he came up to Jesus, He asked him: “What do you want me to do for you?” It is not sufficient to shout or cry out. It is necessary to know why he is shouting! The blind man answers, “Lord that I may see again”.

- Luke 18:42-43: Go! Your faith has saved you! And Jesus says, “Receive your sight. Your faith has saved you”. Immediately he recovers his sight and begins to follow Jesus praising God. And all the people, when they saw that, praised God. When the blind man calls Jesus by a title that was uncomfortable, by the title “Son of David,” he probably bothered people. His faith in Jesus exceeded his ideas about Jesus. He did not demand anything as Peter did (Mk 8:32-33). Healing is the fruit of his faith in Jesus. Once he is cured, he follows Jesus and walks along with Him toward Jerusalem. In this way, he becomes a model disciple for all of us who want “to follow Jesus along the road” toward Jerusalem. This decision to walk with Jesus is the source of courage and seed of victory in the cross, The cross is not something fatal but rather an experience of God. It is a consequence of the decision to follow Jesus in obedience to the Father.

- Faith is a force which transforms the person. The Good News of the Kingdom announced by Jesus was a sort of fertilizer. It made the seed of life hidden in people grow. That seed lay hidden like fire under the ashes. Jesus blew on the ashes and the fire ignited. The Kingdom appears and people rejoice. The condition was always the same: to believe in Jesus. The cure of the blind man clarifies a very important aspect of our faith. The blind man had faith and was cured despite his understanding of Jesus. He was converted and left everything behind and followed Jesus along the road toward Calvary! The full understanding of the following of Jesus is not obtained from a theoretical instruction but rather from a practical commitment to walk with Him in the way of service. Anyone who insists, as Peter at one point does, that Messiahship comes without the cross, understands nothing of Jesus. Such a person does not have the attitude of a true disciple of Jesus. Anyone who believes in Jesus and gives himself (Lk 9:23-24), anyone who accepts being last (Lk 22:26), anyone who drinks the chalice of suffering and carries his/her cross (Mt 20:22; Mk 10:38), will succeed in “following Jesus along the way” (Lk 18:43). Walking with Jesus is the source of courage and provides the seed of victory in the cross.

4) Personal questions

- How do I see and hear the cry of the poor such as migrants, people of color, AIDS sufferers, beggars, refugees, et al. ?
- What is my faith like? Am I rigid in my ideas about Jesus?.

5) Concluding prayer

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

Lectio Divina Tuesday, November 19, 2019

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

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

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

2) Gospel reading - Luke 19:1-10

Jesus entered Jericho and was going through the town and suddenly a man whose name was Zacchaeus made his appearance. He was one of the senior tax collectors and a wealthy man. He kept trying to see where Jesus was, but he was too short and could not see Him for the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to catch a glimpse of Jesus who was to pass that way.

When Jesus reached the spot, He looked up and spoke to him, "Zacchaeus, come down. Hurry, because I am to stay at your house today."

And he hurried down and welcomed Him joyfully.

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

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

3) Reflection

- In today's Gospel, we reach the end of a long journey which began in chapter 9 (Lk 9:51). During the journey, it has not been easy to know where Jesus is going. Now the geography is clear. Jesus reaches Jericho, the city of the palm trees, in the Valley of the Jordan. This is the last stop of pilgrims before going up toward Jerusalem. He went to Jericho where the long road of exodus in the desert ended. Jesus' exodus has also ended. In entering Jericho, Jesus meets a blind man who wanted to see Him (Lk 18:35-43). Now, going out of the city, He meets Zacchaeus, a tax collector. He also wants to see Him. Both the blind man and the Publican are excluded from Jewish

society. Both bother and disturb the people. The blind man disturbed people because he was shouting to Jesus. The Publican incurs people's hostility because he collects taxes. Both are accepted by Jesus.

- Luke 19:1-2: Jesus enters Jericho and crosses the city where he sees "a man whose name was Zacchaeus, head of the tax collectors and a rich man". The tax collector was the person who collected the public taxes on selling and buying of merchandise. As head tax collector, Zacchaeus was closely linked to the Roman government which dominated the Israel. Since the more religious Jews believed their king to be God, they regarded Rome's dominion as ungodly. Anyone who collaborates with the Romans sins against God. Thus, the soldiers who served in the Roman army and tax collectors like Zacchaeus were excluded and avoided because they were considered traitorous and impure.

- Luke 19:3-4: The attitude of Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus wants to see Jesus. Being small, he ran ahead and climbed up a tree and waited for Jesus to go by. He really had a great desire to see Jesus. Before, in the parable of poor Lazarus and the rich man (Lk 16: 19-31), Jesus had said that it was truly difficult for a rich person to be converted. However, in Zacchaeus, we see a rich man who does not close himself up in his riches. Zacchaeus wants something more. Certainly, an adult who climbs a tree does not care much about the opinion of others. Something more important moves him. He wants to open the door for poor Lazarus.

- Luke 19:5-7: Attitude of Jesus, reaction of the people and of Zacchaeus. Seeing Zacchaeus in the tree, Jesus does not ask, nor does He demand, anything. He only responds to the desire of the man and says, "Zacchaeus come down. Hurry, because I am to stay at your home today!" Zacchaeus gets down and receives Jesus, in his house, with great joy. All complained, "He has gone to stay at a sinner's house!" Luke says that all complained. Jesus is alone in His attitude of accepting the excluded, especially Roman collaborators. But Jesus does not care about the criticism. He goes to the house of Zacchaeus and defends him from the criticism. Rather than calling him sinner, He calls him "son of Abraham" (Lk 19:9).

- Luke 19:8: Decision of Zacchaeus. "Look, Lord, I am going to give half of my property to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody I will pay him back four times the amount!" This is the conversion produced in Zacchaeus because of the acceptance that he received from Jesus. To give back four times was what the law prescribed to do in certain cases (Ex 22:1;). To give half of my possessions to the poor was the novelty which contact with Jesus produced in him. In fact, sharing was taking place.

- Luke 19:9-10: Final word of Jesus. "Today salvation has come to this house because this man too is a son of Abraham". The interpretation of the Law by means of the ancient tradition excluded the tax collectors from the race of Abraham. Jesus says that He comes to seek and save what was lost. The Kingdom is for all. Nobody can be excluded. By denouncing unjust divisions, Jesus opens a space for a new way of living directed by the values of truth, justice and love.

- Son of Abraham. "Today salvation has come to this house because this man too is a son of Abraham!" By being a descendant of Abraham, all nations of earth will be blessed (Gen 12:3; 22:18). It was very important for Luke's communities, formed by Christians of both Jewish and pagan origin, that Jesus calls Zacchaeus "son of Abraham". For we find the confirmation that in Jesus, God was fulfilling the promises

made to Abraham, addressed to all nations. Gentiles are also sons of Abraham and heirs of the promises. Jesus accepts those who were not accepted. He offers a place to those who do not have it. He receives as brothers and sisters people whom the religion and the government excluded. Here is a list of those outcasts in who found acceptance in Jesus: :

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

4) Personal questions

- How does our community accept people who are despised and marginalized? Can we, like Jesus, perceive people's problems and give them attention?
- How do we perceive salvation entering into our house and our community? The welcoming tenderness of Jesus produced a total change in the life of Zacchaeus. Is the tenderness of our community producing some change in the neighborhood? Where?

5) Concluding prayer

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

Lectio Divina Wednesday, November 20, 2019

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

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

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

2) Gospel reading - Luke 19:11-28

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

3) Reflection

- The Gospel today presents the parable of the talents in which Jesus speaks of the gifts that people receive from God. All people have some qualities; they receive some gifts or know something which they can teach to others. Nobody is only a pupil. Nobody is only a professor. We all learn from one another.
- Luke 19: 11: The key to understanding the story of the parable. To introduce the parable Luke says the following: "At that time Jesus went on to tell a parable because He was near Jerusalem and the disciples thought that the Kingdom of God was going to show itself then and there". In this initial statement, Luke presents the reasons which led Jesus to tell this parable: proximity to the Passion and the imminent coming of the Kingdom of God, because the people who accompanied Jesus thought that the Kingdom of God would come later.
- Luke 19:12-14: The beginning of the parable. "A man of noble birth went to a distant country to be appointed king and then return. He summoned ten of his servants and gave

them ten pounds telling them, ‘Trade with these, until I get back’”. Some scholars think that in this parable Jesus is referring to Herod who seventy years before (40 BC), went to Rome to receive the title and power of King of Palestine. People did not like Herod and did not want him to become king because of the experience they had with him. He was the commander who repressed the rebellions in Galilee against Rome, which was tragic and painful. This is why they said, “We do not want this man to be our king!” The last sentence of this parable would apply to Herod: “As for my enemies who did not want me for their king, bring them here and execute them in my presence”. In fact, Herod killed many people.

- Luke 19:15-19: The account given by the first of ten servants who each received one pound. The story also recounts that Herod, after having obtained the title of king, returned to Palestine to take over power. In the parable, the king called his servants to whom he had given ten pounds to know how much they had gained. The first one came in and said, “Sir, your pound has produced ten other pounds.” He replied, “Well done, my good servant! Since you have proved yourself trustworthy in a very small thing, you shall have the government of ten cities.” Then came the second one, and said, “Sir, your pound has brought five other pounds.” To this one also he said, “And you shall be in charge of five cities”.

According to the story, Herod the Great and his son Herod Antipas both knew how to deal with money and to promote the people who helped them. In the parable, the king gave ten cities to the servant who multiplied by ten the money he had received and five cities to the one who multiplied it by five.

- Luke 19:20-23: The rendering of account by the servant who gained nothing. The third servant arrived and said, “Sir, here is your pound. I put it away safely wrapped up in a cloth, because I was afraid of you, for you are an exacting man, you gather in what you have not laid out and reap what you have not sown.” In this part, we have a mistaken idea of God, which is criticized by Jesus. The servant considers God a severe master. Before such a God, the human being is afraid and hides himself behind the exact and poor observance of the law. He thinks that by acting this way, he will not be punished severely by the ruler. In reality, such a person does not believe in God, but believes only in self and in his observance of the law. He closes himself up in self. He draws away from God and is not concerned about others. He becomes incapable of growth as a free person. This false image of God isolates the human being, kills the community, extinguishes joy and impoverishes life. The king answers, “Out of your own mouth I condemn you, wicked servant!” You knew that I was an exacting man, gathering what I have not laid out and reaping what I have not sown? Then why did you not put my money in the bank? On my return I could have drawn it out with interest. The servant is not consistent in his image of God. If he imagined God to be so severe, he should have put the money in the bank. He is not condemned by God, but by his mistaken idea of God, which renders him immature and fearful. One of the things which greatly influence a person’s life is his image of God. Some Jews, especially the Pharisees, imagined God as a severe judge who treated them according to the merits gained by observance of the Law. This caused fear and prevented people from growing. Above all, it prevented them from opening a space within themselves to accept the new experience of God which Jesus communicated.

• Luke 19:24-27: Conclusion for all. “And he said to those standing by: Take the pound from him and give it to the man who has ten pounds.” And they answered, “But, Sir, he already has ten! “I tell you, to everyone who has will be given more, but anyone who has not will be deprived even of what he has. As for my enemies who did not want me for their king, bring them here and execute them in my presence”. The king then orders it taken away and given to the one who has ten, because “To everyone who has will be given more, but anyone who has not will be deprived even of what he has“. In this last sentence is found the key which clarifies the Parable. In the symbolism of the parable, the silver coin of the king are the goods of the Kingdom of God, that is, everything that makes the person grow and which reveals God’s presence: love, service, sharing. Anyone who becomes selfish out of fear will lose what little he has. Therefore, the person who does not think only of self, but gives himself/herself to others, will grow and will receive super abundantly, all that he/she has given and much more: “one hundred times more, a hundred fold” (Mk 10:30). “Anyone who wants to save his life will lose it, anyone who has the courage to lose it, will save it” (Lk 9:24; 17:33; Mt 10:39; 16:25; Mk 8:35). The third servant is afraid and does nothing. He does not want to lose anything and because of this he gains nothing. He loses even the little he had. The Kingdom is a risk. Anyone who does not run, runs a risk and loses the Kingdom!

• Luke 19: 28: Return to the triple initial key. At the end, Luke closes this theme with the following information: “Having said these things Jesus went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem”. This final information recalls the triple key given at the beginning: the acceptance to be given to the excluded, the closeness of the Passion, death and Resurrection of Jesus in Jerusalem, and the idea of the imminent coming of the Kingdom. To those who thought that the Kingdom of God was about to arrive, the parable orders a change in understanding. The Kingdom of God arrives but through the death and the Resurrection of Jesus which will take place within a short time in Jerusalem. The reason for Jesus’ death and Resurrection is His acceptance of the excluded. He disturbs the great, and they eliminated Him by condemning Him to death on the cross.

4) Personal questions

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

5) Concluding prayer

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

Lectio Divina Thursday, November 21, 2019

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

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

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

2) Gospel reading - Luke 19:41-44

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

Yes, a time is coming when your enemies will raise fortifications all 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.”

3) Reflection

- The Gospel today tells us that Jesus, when he saw Jerusalem as he approached, began to shed tears and to pronounce a very dark future for the city of His people.
- Luke 19, 41-42 Jesus sheds tears over Jerusalem. At that time, Jesus was near Jerusalem, and when He saw the city, He shed tears over it and said “if you too had only recognized on this day the way to peace! But in fact it is hidden from your eyes!” Jesus sheds tears because He loves His homeland and His people, the capital city of His land, and the temple. He sheds tears because He knows that everything will be destroyed because of the fault of His people who were not aware of the call made by God through His ministry. People were not aware of the way to peace (Shalom). In fact, it is hidden from their eyes. This affirmation recalls the criticism of Isaiah to the person who adored idols: “He adores ashes, his deluded heart has led him astray; he will not save himself, he will not think. What I have in my hand is nothing but a lie!” (Is 44, 20). People became incapable of perceiving the truth. As Saint Paul says: “But for those who out of jealousy have taken for their guide not truth but injustice, there will be a fury of retribution” (Rm 2, 8). It is truth that remains the prisoner of injustice. On another occasion, Jesus complains that Jerusalem did not know how to become aware of God’s visit nor of accepting it: “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you that kill the prophets and stone those who are sent to you! How often have I longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you refused! Look, your house will be left to you, it will be deserted” (Lk 13, 34-35).
- Luke 19, 43-44 Announcement of the destruction of Jerusalem. “Yes, a time is coming when your enemies will raise fortifications all around you, when they will encircle you and hem you in on every side; they will dash you and your children inside your walls to

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

4) Personal questions

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

5) Concluding prayer

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

Lectio Divina Friday, November 22, 2019

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

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

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

2) Gospel Reading - Luke 19:45-48

Jesus went into the temple and began driving out those who were busy trading, saying to them, “According to scripture, my house shall be a house of prayer but you have turned it into a den of robbers.”

He taught in the temple every day. The chief priests and the scribes, along with the leading citizens, tried to do away with Him, but they could not find a way to carry this out because the whole people hung on His words.

3) Reflection

- Context. Luke, having described Jesus' journey to Jerusalem (11-19, 28), now presents carrying out His mission in the temple. (vv. 45-48).
- The gesture of Jesus. His action does not have political value but rather prophetic significance. The great purpose of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem is to enter the temple. The prophecy of Malachi is fulfilled with Jesus' entrance. Malachi says, "and suddenly the Lord whom you seek will come to His Temple..." (3:1). Jesus' gesture of driving out the sellers recalls Isaiah 56:7, which says, "My house will be a house of prayer". Jesus returns the temple to the Father. The commercial and business activity has made the temple a den of robbers and has deprived it of its only function: to provide a dwelling for the presence of God. The second reference from scripture is taken from Jeremiah 7:11: "Do you look on this temple that bears my name as a den of robbers?" The image of a den of robbers serves Jesus to condemn the material traffic on the one side and the dishonest traffic of trade or business that was carried out in the temple. Jesus demands a complete change in order to purify the temple from all of these negative human things and to make it a place for authentic service to God. In driving out those merchants of trade and business, the prophecy of Zechariah is fulfilled: "There will be no more traders in the temple of Yahweh Sabaoth, when that day comes" (14:21). These words of Jesus regarding the temple are not directed at a restoration of the purity of the cult or worship, as was the intention of the Zealots. The intention of Jesus goes beyond the purity of the cult. It is more radical and timeless. The temple is not a work done by human efforts, and the presence of God is not bound to its material aspect. The authentic service of God is carried out by Jesus through His teaching. Because of this preaching, "the high priests and the scribes together with the leading citizens tried to do away with him" (v. 47). Within this temporary place of the temple, Jesus carries out a highly significant teaching. It is precisely because this place is so fundamental to the Jews that His teaching reaches its summit and it will be from here that the words of the Apostles will also begin (Acts 5:12, 20, 25, 42). The diffusion of the Word of grace which Jesus bears extends like an arch. It begins with His opposition when He was still only twelve years old in the temple among the doctors of the Law. It is continued with His teaching across Galilee and during His journey to Jerusalem, until it reaches a climax when He enters the temple and takes possession of the house of God. The basis for the future mission of the Church, the proclamation of the Word of God, begins in this place. The leaders of the people do not intend to suppress Jesus for having ruined the progress of the economic affairs of that time. Rather, the reasons go back to His previous teaching activities. These play a part in His discourse against the temple. Jesus claims something and this causes a reaction from the high priests and the scribes. In contrast with this hostile behavior, one can see a positive one from the people who "are hanging from His words". Jesus is the Messiah who gathers around Him with His Word of grace the people of God.

4) Personal questions

- Does your prayer to the Lord consist in a simple relationship of father to son in which you find all that is needed to communicate with God, or is it accompanied by usage and practices to gain His goodness?

- When you listen to the Word of Jesus do you feel seized by His teaching like the crowds who hung from His words? Are you sufficiently attentive to listen to the Gospel and do you adhere to Christ?

5) Concluding Prayer

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

Lectio Divina Saturday, November 23, 2019

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Father of all that is good,
keep us faithful in serving you,
for to serve you is our lasting joy.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

2) Gospel reading - Luke 20:27-40

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

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

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

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

3) Reflection

- The Gospel today gives us the discussion of the Sadducees with Jesus on faith in the resurrection.
- Luke 20, 27: The ideology of the Sadducees. The Gospel today begins with the following affirmation: “The Sadducees affirm that there is no resurrection”. The

Sadducees were an elite type of aristocrat. They were conservative, insisting on a literal interpretation of the Law, and were invested in Roman rule and order. They did not accept faith in the resurrection. At that time, this faith was beginning to be valued by both the Pharisees and by ordinary people. This motivated people to resist the dominion of the Romans and of the priests, elders, and the Sadducees for whom the Messianic Kingdom was already present in the status quo. The Sadducees were typically well off and content with the way things were at the time. They wanted religion to remain immutable like God himself. To ridicule faith in the resurrection, they created fictitious cases in which faith in the resurrection seemed absurd.

- Luke 20, 28-33: The fictitious case of the woman who married seven times. According to the law of the time, if the husband died without leaving any children, his brother had to marry the widow of the deceased man. This was done in case someone died without any descendants. In such cases, the dead man's property would go to another family (Dt 25, 5-6). The Sadducees invented the story of a woman who buried seven husbands, brothers among themselves, and then she herself also died without children. And they asked Jesus: "This woman then, in the resurrection, whose wife will she be? Because the seven of them had her as wife". This was invented in order to show that faith in the resurrection creates absurd situations, and exemplifies the literal interpretation the Sadducees gave to the Law..

- Luke 20, 34-38: The response of Jesus which leaves no doubts. The response of Jesus displays the irritation of one who cannot bear pretense or deceit. Jesus cannot bear hypocrisy on the part of the elite which manipulates and ridicules faith in God to legitimize and defend its own interests. The response contains two parts. (a) you understand nothing of the resurrection: "The children of this world take wives and husbands, but those who are judged worthy of a place in the other world and in the resurrection from the dead, do not marry, because they can no longer die, for they are the same as the angels, and being children of the resurrection, they are children of God" (vv. 34-36). Jesus explains that the condition of persons after death will be totally different from the current condition. After death, there will be no marriages and all will be like angels in heaven. (b) The Sadducees imagined life in Heaven the same as life on earth. You understand nothing about God: "That the dead will rise, Moses has also showed this in regard to the bush, when he calls the Lord: the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. God is not God of the dead, but of the living, because all live in him". The disciples are attentive and learn! Those who are on the side of the Sadducees find themselves on the opposite side of God.

- Luke 20, 39-40: The reaction of others before the response of Jesus. "Then some of the scribes said: "Master you have spoken well. And they no longer dared to ask Him any more questions". It is possible that some of these scribes were Pharisees, because the Pharisees believed in the resurrection (cf. Ac 23, 6). Either way, Jesus reduced his opponents to silence.

4) Personal questions

- Today, how do the groups which have power imitate the Sadducees and prepare traps in order to prevent changes in the world and in the Church?
- Do you believe in the resurrection? When you say that you believe in the resurrection,

do you think about something of the past, of the present or of the future? Have you ever had an experience of resurrection in your life?

5) Concluding prayer

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

Lectio Divina Sunday, November 24, 2019

Jesus the King of the Jews
A King different from the kings of the earth
Luke 23:35-43

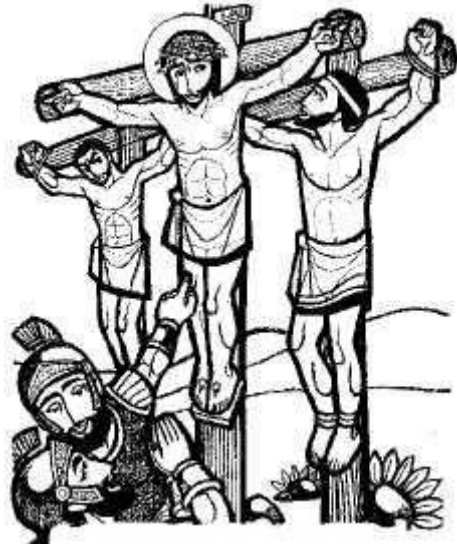
Opening prayer

Holy One, God of the mountain,
You who make of our fragile life
the rock of Your dwelling place,
lead our mind
to strike the rock of the desert,
so that water may gush to quench our thirst.
May the poverty of our feelings
cover us as with a mantle in the darkness of the night
and may it open our heart to hear the echo of silence
until the dawn,
wrapping us with the light of the new morning,
may bring us,
with the spent embers of the fire of the shepherds of the Absolute
who have kept vigil for us close to the divine Master,
the flavor of the holy memory.

1. LECTIO

a) The text:

The rulers sneered at Jesus and said, "He saved others, let him save himself if he is the chosen one, the Christ of God." Even the soldiers jeered at him. As they approached to offer him wine they called out, "If you are King of the Jews, save yourself." Above him there was an inscription that read, "This is the King of the Jews." Now one of the criminals hanging there reviled Jesus, saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us." The other, however, rebuking him, said in reply, "Have you no fear of God, for you are subject to the same condemnation? And indeed, we have been condemned justly, for the sentence we received corresponds to our crimes, but this man has done nothing criminal." Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." He replied to him, "Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."



b) A moment of silence:

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

2) MEDITATIO

a) Questions:

- The people stayed there watching. Why do you never take a stand concerning the events? Everything that you have lived, listened to, seen... you cannot just throw it away only because an obstacle seems to make it difficult! Move, do something!

“If You are the King of the Jews, save Yourself”. How many attempts and threats do we make with God in prayer? If You are God why do You not intervene? There are so many innocent people who suffer. If You love me, do what I tell You and I will believe You... When will you ever stop dealing with the Lord as if you knew more than He what is good and what is not?

Jesus, remember me. When will you see in Christ the only TODAY who gives you life?

b) Key for the reading:

Solemnity of Christ, King of the Universe. We would expect a passage of the Gospel of those which are more luminous, and instead we find ourselves before one of the darkest passages... The amazement of the unexpected is the most suitable sentiment to enter into the heart of today's feast, the amazement of the one who knows that he cannot understand the infinite mystery of the Son of God.

v. 35. The people stayed there watching, as for the leaders, they jeered at Him with these words: “He saved others, let Him save Himself if He is the Christ of God, the Chosen One.” Around the Cross are gathered together many of those who have met

Jesus during the three years of His public life. And, here, before a Word nailed on the wood, are revealed the secrets of the heart. The people who had listened to and followed the Rabbi of Galilee, who had seen miracles and wonders, are there watching: the perplexity on the faces, thousands of questions in the heart, the disillusionment and the perception that everything ends like this! The leaders go through all that has happened while they say the truth concerning the person of Jesus: the Christ of God, the Chosen One. They ignore God's logic even if they are faithful observers of the Hebrew law. That very despicable invitation: Let Him save Himself... indicates the hidden purpose of their actions: salvation is won by oneself by the observance of the commandments of God.

vv. 36-37. The soldiers mocked Him too, coming up to Him, offering Him vinegar, and saying, "If You are the King of the Jews, save Yourself". The soldiers, who have nothing to lose in the religious field, get fierce against Him. What do they have in common with that man? What have they received from Him? Nothing. The possibility to exercise, even if for a short time, power over someone cannot be allowed to fall! The power of possession is intertwined with evil and they claim the right of derision. The other one, defenseless, becomes the object of their enjoyment.

v. 38. Above Him was an inscription: This is the King of the Jews. Truly, a mockery of their own guilt: Jesus is guilty for being the King of the Jews, a guilt which in reality is no guilt. In spite of what the leaders had intended, in all their ways, to crush the royalty of Christ, the truth is written by itself: This is the King of the Jews! This one, not any other! It is a royalty which goes across the centuries and asks those going by to stop and fix their thought on the novelty of the Gospel. Man needs someone to govern him, and this someone can be only a man crucified out of love, capable to stand on the wood of condemnation so as to be found alive at the dawn of the eighth day: A King without a scepter, a King capable of being considered by all a criminal but without rejecting His love for man.

v. 39. One of the criminals hanging there abused Him: "Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us as well!" One can be on the cross for various reasons just as one can be with Christ for various reasons. Being near to the cross divides or unites. One of the two who were near Christ insults, provokes, ridicules or derides. The objective is always the same: Save yourself and us as well! Salvation is invoked as a flight from the cross. A sterile salvation, deprived of life, already dead in itself. Jesus is nailed to the cross, this criminal is hung on the cross. Jesus has become one same thing with the wood, because the cross is for Him the scroll of the book which unfolds to narrate the wonders of the divine life which is surrendered, given without any conditions. The other one is hung as a fruit, rotten by evil and ready to be thrown away.

v. 40. But the other spoke up and rebuked him: "Have you no fear of God at all? You got the same sentence as He did." The other one, being close to Jesus, acquires again the holy fear and makes a judgment. Can the one who lives next to Jesus reproach one who is there, two steps away from life and does not see it, and continues to waste it to the end? Everything has a limit, and in this case the limit is not fixed by Christ who is there, but by His companion. Christ does not respond; the other one responds in His

place, recognizing his responsibility and helping the other one to read the present moment as an opportunity for salvation.

v. 41. “In our case, we deserve it. We are paying for what we did. But this man has done nothing wrong”. Evil leads to the cross, the serpent had guided to the forbidden fruit hanging on the tree. But which cross: the cross of one’s own “reward” or the cross of the good fruit? Christ is the fruit which every man or woman can get from the tree of life, which is in the middle of the garden of the world, the just one who has never done any evil except love until ad finem.

v. 42. And then he said: “Jesus, remember me when You come into Your kingdom”. It is a life which is fulfilled and is enclosed in an invocation incredibly dense in significance. A man, a sinner, conscious of his own sin and of the just condemnation, accepts the mystery of the cross. At the feet of that throne of glory he asks to be remembered in the Kingdom of Christ. He sees an innocent who is crucified and he recognizes and sees beyond what appears exteriorly, the life of the eternal Kingdom. What an acknowledgement! The eyes of the one who has known, in one instant, to get the life which was passing by and which was proclaiming a message of salvation even if in a shocking way. That culprit, criminal deserving death, insulted and ridiculed by all those who had had the possibility of knowing Him closely and for a long time, receives His first subject, the first one He wins over. The scripture says, damned is the one hanging on the wood. The damned innocent becomes blessing for the one who deserved condemnation. A political and earthly tribunal, that of Pilate, a divine tribunal, that of the cross, where the one condemned is saved in virtue of the consuming love of the innocent Lamb.

v. 43. He answered him: “In truth I tell you, today you will be with Me in paradise”. Today: the only word which bursts into the new life of the Gospel. Salvation has been accomplished; it is no longer necessary to wait for any Messiah to save the people from their sins. Today, salvation is here, on the cross. Christ does not enter into His Kingdom alone. He takes with Him the first one who has been saved: the same humanity, the same judgment, the same luck, the same victory. Jesus is not jealous of His filial prerogatives, immediately He has pulled away from the distance separating Him from the Father and from the death which could not escape nor had a way out. Wonderful the kingdom which was inaugurated on Golgotha. Someone has said that the good thief committed the last robbery of his life; he robbed salvation. And so it is, for those who move with the things of God! How much truth, instead, in contemplating the gift which Christ gives to His companion of the cross. No robbery, no theft! All is a gift: the presence of God is not bargained or traded! Faith is what opens the door of the Kingdom to the good thief. Good because he knew how to name justly what his existence had been and saw the Savior in Christ. Was the other one evil? Neither more nor less than the other one perhaps, but he remained beyond faith: he was looking for the strong and powerful God, the powerful God in battle, a God who places things in their place and he did not know how to recognize him in the eyes of Christ, he stopped at his powerlessness.

c) Reflection

Christ dies on the Cross. He is not alone. He is surrounded by the people, by the strangest persons, the hostile ones who throw on Him their responsibility of lack of understanding, the indifferent ones who do not get involved except for personal interest, those who do not understand as yet but who, perhaps, are better disposed to allow themselves to be questioned, since they think they have nothing to lose, like one of the two criminals. If death is to fall into nothingness, then human time becomes anguish. If, instead, it is to wait for the light, then human time becomes hope, and the space of the finite opens a passage to tomorrow, to the new dawn of the Resurrection. I am the way, the truth and the life. How true are these words, the words of Jesus, words which enlighten the darkness of death. The way does not stop, the truth is not turned off. Life does not die. In those words "I AM" is enclosed the royalty of Christ. We journey toward a goal, and to attain it cannot mean to lose it... I am the way... We live from truth, and truth is not an object, but something which exists: "Truth is the splendor of reality – says Simon Weil – and to desire truth is to desire a direct contact with reality in order to love it". "I am the truth... Nobody wants to die, we feel deprived of something which belongs to us: life, and then, if life does not form part of us, it can not hold us to itself... I am the life... Jesus has said it: "He who wants to save his life, will lose it, but the one who loses his life for Me, will find it". Is there some contradiction in the terms or rather secrets hidden to be revealed? Do we remove the veil from what we see in order to enjoy what we do not see? Christ on the cross is the object of everybody's attention. Many think of Him or are even at His side. But this is not sufficient. The closeness which saves is not that of those who are there to deride or to mock. The closeness which saves is that of the one who humbly asks to be remembered not in the fleeing time but in the eternal Kingdom.

3. ORATIO

Psalm 145

I shall praise You to the heights, God my King,
I shall bless Your name for ever and ever.
Day after day I shall bless You,
I shall praise Your name for ever and ever.

Great is Yahweh and worthy of all praise,
his greatness beyond all reckoning.
Each age will praise Your deeds to the next,
proclaiming Your mighty works.

Your renown is the splendor of Your glory,
I will ponder the story of Your wonders.
They will speak of Your awesome power,
and I shall recount Your greatness.

They will bring out the memory of Your great generosity,
and joyfully acclaim Your saving justice.
Yahweh is tenderness and pity,
slow to anger, full of faithful love.

Yahweh is generous to all.
His tenderness embraces all His creatures.
All Your creatures shall thank You, Yahweh,
and Your faithful shall bless You.

They shall speak of the glory of Your kingship
and tell of Your might,
making known Your mighty deeds to the children of Adam,
the glory and majesty of Your kingship.

Your kingship is a kingship forever,
Your reign lasts from age to age.
Yahweh is trustworthy in all His words,
and upright in all His deeds.

Yahweh supports all who stumble,
lifts up those who are bowed down.
All look to You in hope
and You feed them with the food of the season.

And, with generous hand,
You satisfy the desires of every living creature.
Upright in all that He does,
Yahweh acts only in faithful love.

He is close to all who call upon Him,
all who call on Him from the heart.
He fulfills the desires of all who fear Him,
He hears their cry and He saves them.

Yahweh guards all who love Him,
but all the wicked He destroys.
My mouth shall always praise Yahweh,
let every creature bless His holy name for ever and ever.

4. CONTEMPLATIO

Lord, it sounds strange to call You King. One does not get close to a King easily. And, instead, today I find You sitting beside me, in the ditch of sin, here, where I would never have thought to find You. Kings are in palaces, far from the difficulties of the poor people. You, instead, live Your Lordship wearing the worn out clothes of our poverty. What a great feast for me to see You here where I went to hide myself so as not to feel the indiscreet looks of human judgment. On the edge of my failures, whom have I found if not You? The only one who could reproach me for my incoherence comes to look for me to sustain me in my anguish and in my humiliation! What great illusion when we think that we should come to You only when we have attained perfection... I would want to think that You do not like what I am, but perhaps, it is not exactly like that: I do not like what I am, but for You, I am all right, because Your love is something special

which respects everything in me and makes of every instant of my life a space of encounter and of gift. Lord, teach me not to get down from the cross with the absurd pretension of saving myself! Grant that I may know how to wait, at Your side, the TODAY of Your Kingdom in my life.

Lectio Divina Monday, November 25, 2019

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

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

2) Gospel reading - Luke 21:1-4

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

3) Reflection

- In today's Gospel, Jesus weaves the praise of a poor widow who knows how to share more than the rich. Many poor people today do the same. People say: "The poor do not let the poor starve to death". But sometimes even this is not possible. A woman who went to live out in the country in the periphery of a city in Brazil, in Paraiba, said, "In the country the people are poor, but they always have something to share with the poor who knock at their door. Now that I am here in the city, when I see a poor person who knocks on the door, I hide because I feel ashamed, because I have nothing in the house to share with him!" On one side, there are rich people who have everything but do not know how to share and on the other side, there are poor people who have hardly anything but who want to share the little they have.
- At the beginning, in the Church, the great majority of the first Christian communities were formed by poor people. (1 Cor 1:26). After a short time, well- to-do people also joined these communities and this caused several problems. The social tensions which were present in the Roman Empire began to appear in the life of the communities. For example, it manifested itself when they met together to celebrate the supper (1Cor 11: 20-22), or when they held a meeting (Jn 2:1-4). This is why the teaching of the act of the widow was very meaningful, both for them as well as for us today.
- Luke 21:1-2: The widow's mite. Jesus was near the treasury in the temple and observed people who put in their offering. The poor put in a few pennies. The rich put in offerings of great value. The treasury of the temple received much money. All gave something for the maintenance of the worship, to support the clergy and for the

preservation of the building. Part of this money was used to help the poor, because at that time there was no social security. The poor lived at the mercy of public charity. The persons who had the greatest needs were the orphans and the widows. They depended on the charity of others for everything, but even in this way, they tried to share with others the little that they had. Thus, a very poor widow put her offering into the treasury of the temple of just two pennies!

- Luke 21:3-4: Jesus' comment. Which is worth more: the few pennies of the widow or the great amount of the rich? According to the majority, the money of the rich was more useful for charity, than the few pennies of the widow. For example, the disciples thought that the problems of the people could be resolved only with much money. On the occasion of the multiplication of the loaves, they had suggested buying bread to feed the people (Lk 9:13; Mk 6:37). Philip succeeded in saying, "Two-hundred denarii of bread are not even enough for everyone to have a piece of bread" (Jn 6:7). In fact, for anyone who thinks like that, the two pennies of the widow do not serve for anything. But Jesus says, "I tell you truly, this poor widow has put in more than any of them." Jesus has a different criterion. Calling the attention of the disciples to the act of the widow, He teaches them and us where we have to look for the manifestation of God's will: in the poor and in sharing. This is a very important criterion: "In fact all these have put in money they could spare, but she in her poverty has put in all she had to live on".
- Alms, sharing, riches. The practice of giving alms was very important for the Jews. It was considered to be a "good work", because the law of the Old Testament said, "Of course, there will never cease to be poor people in the country, and that is why I am giving you this command: Always be open handed with your brother, and with anyone in your country who is in need and poor" (Deut 15:11). The alms put into the treasury of the temple, whether for worship or for the needy, orphans, or widows, were considered a pleasing act to God (Eccl 35:2; cf. Eccl 17:17; 29:12; 40:24). To give alms was a way to recognize that all goods of the earth belong to God and that we are only the administrators of these gifts. But the tendency to accumulate continues to exist and is very strong. It always arises anew in the human heart. Conversion is always necessary. This is why Jesus said to the rich young man, "Go, sell all you possess, and give it to the poor!" (Mk 10:21). In the other Gospels the same requirement is repeated: "Sell your possessions and give to those in need. Get yourselves purses that do not wear out, treasure that will not fail you, in heaven where no thief can reach it and no moth destroy it" (Lk 12:33-34; Mt 6:9-20). The practice of sharing and of solidarity is one of the characteristics which the Spirit of Jesus wants to realize in the community. The result of the effusion of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost was this: "None of the members was ever in want, as all those who owned land or houses would sell them, and bring the money from the sale of them, to present it to the apostles" (Acts 4:34-35^a; 2:44-45). This money, deposited at the feet of the Apostles, was not accumulated but "it was then distributed to any who might be in need" (Acts 4:35 b; 2:45). The entry of the rich into the Christian communities on the one side rendered possible the expansion of Christianity, providing better conditions for the missionary voyages. But on the other side, the tendency to accumulate blocked the movement of solidarity and of sharing. James helped people to become aware that they were following a mistaken path: "Well now you rich! Lament, weep for the miseries that are coming to you. Your wealth is rotting; your clothes are all moth-eaten." (Jas 5:1-3). To undertake the way to the

Kingdom, all need to become pupils of that poor widow, who shared with others what was necessary for her living (Lk 21: 4).

4) Personal questions

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

5) Concluding prayer

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

Lectio Divina Tuesday, November 26, 2019

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Lord,
increase our eagerness to do your will
and help us to know the saving power of your love.

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

2) Gospel reading - Luke 21:5-11

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

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

But He said, "Take care not to be deceived, because many will come using my name and saying, 'I am the one' and 'The time is near at hand.' Refuse to join them. And when you hear of wars and revolutions, do not be terrified, for this is something that must happen first, but it will not immediately be the end." Then He said to them, "Nation will fight against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes and plagues and famines in various places; there will be terrifying events and great signs from heaven."

3) Reflection

- The Gospel today begins with the discourse of Jesus called the Apocalyptic Discourse. It is a long discourse which will be the theme of the Gospels in the next days up to the last week of the liturgical year. For us of the XXI century, the apocalyptic language is strange and confusing. But, for the poor and persecuted people of the Christian

communities of that time, these were the words that everybody understood and the principal purpose was to animate the faith and hope of the poor and oppressed. The apocalyptic language is the fruit of the witness of faith by these poor people, who in spite of the persecution, and against all contrary appearances, continued to believe that God was with them and that He continued to be the Lord of history.

- Luke 21:5-7: Introduction to the Apocalyptic Discourse. In the days leading up to the Apocalyptic Discourse, Jesus had broken away from the temple (Lk 19:45-48), the priests and the elders (Lk 20:1-26), the Sadducees (Lk 20:27-40), and from the scribes who exploited the widows (Lk 20:41-47). Finally, as we read in yesterday's Gospel, He ends by praising the widow who gave as alms all she possessed (Lk 21:1-4). Now, in today's Gospel, "while some were talking about the temple, remarking how it was adorned with fine stonework and votive offerings, Jesus said: "The time will come when not a single stone will be left on another everything will be destroyed". In listening to this comment of Jesus, the disciples asked: "Master, when will this happen, then, and what sign will there be that it is about to take place?" They ask for more information. The Apocalyptic Discourse which follows is the response of Jesus to this question from the disciples on when and how the destruction of the temple will take place. The Gospel of Mark tells us the following about the context of this discourse which Jesus pronounces. He says that Jesus had left the city and was now sitting on the Mount of Olives (Mk 13:2-4). There, from the top of the mountain He had a majestic view of the temple. Mark also says that there were only four disciples who listened to His last discourse. At the beginning of His preaching, three years before in Galilee, the crowds followed Jesus to listen to His words. Now, in the last discourse, there are only four who listen: Peter, James, John and Andrew (Mk 13:3).

- Luke 21:8: Objective of the discourse: "Take care not to be deceived!" The disciples had asked: "Master, when will this happen, then, and what sign will there be that it is about to take place?" Jesus begins His response with a warning: "Take care not to be deceived. Many will come using my name and saying, 'I am the one' and 'the time is near at hand'; refuse to join them". At a time of change and confusion there are always people who want to take advantage of the situation and deceive others. This happens today and it happened in the time of the 80's, at the time when Luke wrote his Gospel. Many thought that the end of time was close at hand with the disasters and wars of those years, and the destruction of Jerusalem in the year 70 and the persecution of Christians by the Roman Empire. There were people who said: "God no longer controls the events! We are lost!" This is why the main concern of the Apocalyptic Discourses is always the same: to help the communities to better discern the signs of the times. They should not be deceived by the conversations of people concerning the end of the world: "Take care not to be deceived". The discourse offers signs to help them discern and increases their hope.

- Luke 21:9-11: Signs to help them read the facts. After this brief introduction, the discourse begins: "When you hear of wars and revolutions, do not be terrified, for this is something that must happen first, but the end will not come at once" Then He said to them: "Nation will fight against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes and plagues and famines in various places, there will be terrifying events and great signs from heaven". To understand these words one has to understand that Jesus lives and speaks in the year 33. The readers of Luke live and listen in the year

85. Now, in the 50 years between the year 33 and the year 85, the majority of things mentioned by Jesus had already taken place and were known to everyone. For example, in diverse parts of the world there were wars, false prophets arose, there were sicknesses and plagues, and in Asia Minor, the earthquakes were frequent. According to the apocalyptic style, this discourse lists all these events, one after the other, as signs or stages of the project of God in the history of the People of God, from the time of Jesus down to our time:

1st sign: the false Messiahs (Lk 21:8);

2nd sign: war and revolutions (Lk 21:9);

3rd sign: nations which fight against other nations, one kingdom against another kingdom (Lk 21:10);

4th sign: earthquakes in different parts (Lk 21:11);

5th sign: hunger, plagues and signs in the sky (Lk 21:11).

Here ends the Gospel for today. That of tomorrow presents another sign: the persecution of the Christian communities (Lk 21:12). Thus, by means of these signs within the Apocalyptic Discourse, the communities of the 80's, the time when Luke wrote his Gospel, could see God's plan and discover that history had not escaped the hands of God. Everything happened according to what was foretold and announced by Jesus in the Apocalyptic Discourse.

4) Personal questions

- What sentiment or feeling did you experience during the reading of today's Gospel? Peace or fear?
- Do you think that the end of the world is close at hand? What can we answer to those who say that the end of the world is close at hand? How can we encourage people today to resist and to have hope?

5) Concluding prayer

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

Lectio Divina Wednesday, November 27, 2019

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Lord,
increase our eagerness to do Your will
and help us to know the saving power of Your love.

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

2) Gospel reading - Luke 21:12-19

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

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

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

Your perseverance will gain your lives.”

3) Reflection

- In today’s Gospel, which is a continuation of the discourse begun yesterday, Jesus lists different signs to help the communities place themselves in these events and not lose faith in God, as well as the courage to persevere against the attacks of the Roman Empire. We will repeat the first five signs mentioned in yesterday’s Gospel:

1st sign: the false Messiahs (Lk 21:8);

2nd sign: war and revolutions (Lk 21:9);

3rd sign: nations which fight against other nations, a kingdom against another kingdom (Lk 21:10);

4th sign: earthquakes in different places (Lk 21:11);

5th sign: hunger, plagues and signs in the sky (Lk 21:11);

Yesterday’s Gospel ends here. Now, in today’s Gospel another sign is added.

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

- Luke 21:12. *The sixth sign is the persecution.* At various times, in the few years which He lived among us, Jesus warned the disciples that they would be persecuted. Here, in the last discourse, He repeats the same warning and makes them know that the persecution has to be taken into consideration in discerning the signs of the times: “*You will be seized and persecuted, you will be handed over to the Synagogues and to imprisonment, and brought before kings and governors, for the sake of my name*”. Of these apparently very negative warnings, Jesus had said, “*Do not be terrified for this is something that must happen first, but the end will not come at once*”. (Lk 21:9). And the Gospel of Mark adds that all these signs “*have only begun, this is the beginning of the birth pangs!*” (Mk 13:8). Birth pangs, though being very painful for the mother are not a sign of death, but rather of life! They are not a reason for fear, but rather to hope! This way of reading the events brings peace to the persecuted communities. Reading or hearing these signs, prophesied by Jesus in the year 33, the readers of Luke of the years 80 could conclude that all these things are taking place according to the plan foreseen and announced by Jesus! Therefore, history has not escaped from God’s hand! God is with us!

- Luke 21:13-15: *The mission of the Christians during the time of persecution.* Persecution is not something fatal or a reason for discouragement or despair. It should be considered a possibility offered by God and a way that the

communities may carry out the mission of witnessing to the Good News of God. God says, *“That will be your opportunity to bear witness. Make up your minds not to prepare your defense because I myself shall give you a mouth and wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to resist or contradict”*.

Through this affirmation Jesus encourages the persecuted Christians who lived in anguish. He makes them know that even if they are persecuted, they have a mission to carry out, to give witness of the Good News of God and thus be a sign of the Kingdom (Acts 1:8). A courageous witness would lead the people to repeat what the magicians in Egypt said before the signs and to have courage like Moses and Aaron: *“The finger of God is here”* (Ex 8:19). Conclusion: the communities should not be worried. If everything is in God’s hands, if everything was already foreseen, if everything is nothing more than birth pangs, then there is no reason to worry.

- Luke 21:16-17: *Persecution even within the family. “You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, relatives and friends, and some of you will be put to death; you will be hated universally on account of My name”*. Persecution does not only come from outside, from the Empire, but also from inside, from one’s own family. In the same family, some accepted the Good News, others did not. The announcement of the Good News caused divisions within families. There were even some people who denounced and killed their own relatives who declared themselves followers of Jesus, using the old Law (Deut 13:7-12).

- Luke 21:18-19: *the source of hope and of resistance. “But not a hair of your head will be lost. Your perseverance will gain your lives!”* This final observation of Jesus recalls the other word which Jesus had said: *“But not a hair of your head will be lost!”* (Lk 21:18). This comparison was a strong call not to lose faith and to continue righteously in the community. And this also confirms what Jesus had said on another occasion: *“Anyone who wants to save his life will lose it, but anyone who will lose his life for My sake will save it”* (Lk 9:24).

4) Personal questions

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

5) Concluding prayer

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

Lectio Divina Thursday, November 28, 2019

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

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

2) Gospel reading - Luke 21:20-28

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

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

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

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

3) Reflection

- In today's Gospel we have the continuation of the Apocalyptic Discourse which gives two signs, the 7th and the 8th, which should take place before the end of time or better before the coming of the end of this world in order to give place to the new world, to the "new Heavens and the New Earth" (Is 65, 17). The seventh sign is the destruction of Jerusalem and the eighth is the upsetting of the old creation.
- Luke 21, 20-24. The seventh sign: the destruction of Jerusalem. Jerusalem was for them the Eternal City. And now it was destroyed! How can this fact be explained? Is it possible that God is not aware of this? It is difficult for us to imagine the trauma and the crisis of faith that the destruction of Jerusalem caused in the communities both of the Jews and of the Christians. Here it is possible to make an observation on the composition of the Gospel of Luke and of Mark. Luke writes in the year 85. He uses the Gospel of Mark to compose his narrative on Jesus. Mark writes in the year 70, the same year in which Jerusalem was surrounded and destroyed by the Roman armies. This is why Mark writes giving an indication to the reader: "When you see the appalling abomination set up where it ought not to be – (and here he opens a parenthesis and says) "let the reader understand!") (he closes the parenthesis) - then those in Judaea must escape to the mountains" (Mk 13, 14). When Luke mentions the destruction of Jerusalem, for the past fifteen years Jerusalem was in ruins. This is why he omits the

parenthesis of Mark and Luke says: “When you will see Jerusalem surrounded by the army, then you must realize that it will soon be laid desolate. Then those in Judaea must escape to the mountains, those inside the city must leave it, and those in country districts must not take refuge in it; for this is the time of retribution when all that Scripture says must be fulfilled. Alas for those with child, or with babies at the breast, when those days come. For great misery will descend on the land and retribution on this people. They will fall by the edge of the sword and be led captive to every gentile country; and Jerusalem will be trampled down by gentiles until their time is complete”. Hearing Jesus who announces persecution (6th sign) and the destruction of Jerusalem (7th sign), the readers of the persecuted communities in the time of Luke concluded saying: “This is our day! We are in the 6th and 7th signs!”

- Luke 21, 25-26: The eighth sign: changes in the sun and in the moon. When will the end come? At the end, after having spoken about all these signs which had already been realized, there was still the following question: “God’s project is very much advanced and the stages foreseen by Jesus are already being realized. We are in the sixth and the seventh stages, how many stages or signs are still lacking until the end arrives? Is there much lacking?” The response is now given in the 8th sign: "There will be signs in the sun and moon and stars, and on earth nations in agony, bewildered by the turmoil of the ocean and its waves; men fainting away with terror and fear at what menaces the world, for the powers of heaven will be shaken”. The 8th sign is different from the other signs. The signs in heaven and on earth are an indication of what is taking place, at the same time, at the end of the old world, of the ancient creation, it is the beginning of the coming of the new Heaven and the new earth. When the shell of the egg begins to crack it is a sign that the novelty is about to appear. It is the coming of a New World which is provoking the disintegration of the ancient world. Conclusion: very little is lacking! The Kingdom of God is arriving already!

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

4) Personal questions

- Persecution of the communities, destruction of Jerusalem. Lack of hope. Before the events which today make people suffer, do I despair? Which is the source of my hope?

- Son of Man is the title which Jesus liked to use. He wants to humanize life. The more human it is the more divine as Pope Leo the Great said. Am I human in my relationships with others? Do I humanize?

5) Concluding prayer

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

Lectio Divina Friday, November 29, 2019

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

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

2) Gospel reading - Luke 21: 29-33

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

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

3) Reflection

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

- Luke 21: 29-31: Look at the fig tree and indeed every tree. Jesus orders them (and us) to look at nature: “Look at the fig tree and indeed every tree; as soon as you see them bud, you can see for yourselves that summer is now near. So with you, when you see these things happening know that the kingdom of God is near”. Jesus says we can contemplate the phenomena of nature to learn how to read and interpret the things that are happening in nature. The buds or sprouts on the fig tree are a sign that Summer is near. In the same way, when the seven signs appear, they are proof that “the Kingdom of God is close at hand!” Discerning this is not easy. A person who is alone does not become aware of this. By reflecting together in community, the light appears. The light is this: to experience in everything that happens the call to open ourselves to the present, to keep the horizon open, and to perceive everything that happens as an arrow directed toward the future. But, nobody knows the exact hour of the coming of the Kingdom. In

Mark's Gospel, Jesus says: "But as for that day or hour, nobody knows it, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, no one but the Father!" (Mk 13: 32).

- Luke 21: 32-33: "In truth I tell you, before this generation has passed away all will have taken place. Sky and earth will pass away, but My words will never pass away." This word of Jesus recalls the prophecy of Isaiah which says: "All humanity is grass and all its beauty like the wild flowers. The grass withers, the flower fades when the breath of Yahweh blows on them. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God remains for ever". (Is 40, 7-8). The word of Jesus is the source of our hope. What He says will survive!

- The coming of the Messiah and the end of the world. Today, many people worry about the end of the world. Some, basing themselves on a mistaken and fundamentalist reading of the Apocalypse of John, try calculating the exact date of the end of the world. In the past, beginning at "one thousand years" quoted in the Apocalypse (Rv 20: 7), it was usually repeated: "The year one thousand has gone by but the year two thousand will not pass!" Because of this, as the year two thousand approached, many were worried. There were some people who, anguished because of the coming of the end of the world, committed suicide! But the year 2000 arrived and nothing happened. The end of the world did not arrive! The Christian communities of the first centuries faced the same problems. They lived in the expectation of the imminent coming of Jesus. Jesus was coming to carry out the Final Judgment so as to finish the unjust history of the world here on earth and to inaugurate a new phase of history, being the New Heavens and of the New Earth. They thought that this would take place between one or two generations. Many people thought they would still be alive when Jesus would appear glorious in Heaven (1Th 4: 16-17; Mk 9: 1). There were some people who no longer worked, because they thought that the end would arrive within a few days or weeks (2Th 2: 1-3; 3: 11). This is what they thought. But even today, the coming of Jesus has not arrived as yet! How can this delay be interpreted? On the streets of the cities people see writing on walls and billboards which say Jesus will return! Is He coming or not? And how will His coming be? Many times, the affirmation "Jesus will return" is used to frighten people and oblige them to go to a particular church.

In the New Testament, the return of Jesus is always a reason for joy and peace! For those who are exploited and oppressed, the coming of Jesus is Good News! When will this coming take place? Among the Jews, there were various opinions. The Sadducees and the Herodians were aristocratic and incorporated Hellenistic views as an elite class. For this reason they did not accept change and they fought against the preaching of Jesus who invited people to change and convert themselves. The Pharisees said: "The coming of the Kingdom will depend on our effort in observing the law!" These two parties made up the Great Sanhedrin. Among the Christians there were the same variety of opinions. Some of the community of Thessalonica, the Greeks, basing themselves on Paul's preaching, said: "Jesus will return!" (1 Th 4, 13-18; 2 Th 2, 2). Paul responds that it was not as simple as they imagined. And to those who did not work he said: "Anyone who does not work has no right to eat!" (2 Th 3, 10). It was likely a problem of people who would beg others for food at meal time. Other Christians thought that Jesus would return only after the Gospel had been announced to the whole world (Ac 1, 6-11). They thought that the greater their effort to evangelize, the more quickly the

end of the world would arrive. Others, tired of waiting, said: “He will never come back!” (2 Peter 3:4). Others basing themselves on the word of Jesus merely said: “He is already among us!” (Mt 25, 40).

The same thing happens today. There are people who say: “The way things are in the Church and in society are alright”. They want no change. Others are waiting for the immediate coming of Jesus. Others think that Jesus will return only through our work and announcement. For us, Jesus is already among us (Mt 28:20), in the stranger, the poor, the sick and those who are “the least” (Mt 25:40). He is already at our side in the struggle for justice, for peace and for life. But the fullness has not yet been attained. For this reason, we wait with perseverance for the liberation of humanity and of nature (Rm 8:22-25).

4) Personal questions

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

5) Concluding prayer

Lord, how blessed are those who live in Your house;
they shall praise You continually.
Blessed those who find their strength in You,
whose hearts are set on pilgrimage. (Ps 84:4-5)

Lectio Divina Saturday, November 30, 2019

Matthew 4:18-22

The call of Andrew and his brother.

The first disciples fishers of men.

1) Prayer

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

2) Reading

As He was walking by the Sea of Galilee, He saw two brothers, Simon who is called Peter, and his brother Andrew, casting a net into the sea; they were fishermen.¹⁹ He said to them, "Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men."²⁰ At once they left

their nets and followed him. 21 He walked along from there and saw two other brothers, James, the son of Zebedee, and his brother John. They were in a boat, with their father Zebedee, mending their nets. He called them, 22 and immediately they left their boat and their father and followed him.

3) Meditation

* "He was walking along the Sea of Galilee." Jesus is just out of the desert, after 40 days of great loneliness and struggle against the devil (Mt 4, 1-11). He emerged victorious, secure in His love of the Father, and came into Galilee and dwelt in Capernaum on the sea coast, in the borders of Zabulon and of Nephthalim, bringing His great light and His salvation (Mt 4, 12-16). Here He began to shout His message of joy and liberation: "The kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Mt 4, 17). There is no more loneliness since the Lord Jesus has arrived in our land, Galilee, among the Gentiles. He is very close, He is God-with-us. He is not far away and does not stay hidden. He "walks", along the sea and along the shores of our poor lives. Indeed, even more. Galilee, meaning "ring", tells us that He, being love, is to marry and to join with Him forever. Then you just have to welcome Him, as He walks by the sea. He already sees us, even from a distance, we already know.

* The verb "saw", repeated twice, first in reference to Andrew and his brother, then James and John, brings all the strength and intensity of a gaze that comes deep from the heart. Thus the Lord sees us, as readers, with loving attention to browse the pages of our lives, and who knows everything about us, everything He loves.

* It is no accident that Matthew often uses a particular vocabulary to describe this episode of family vocation. In this encounter with the Lord Jesus we find the word "brother" four times and the word "father" two times. We discover that we too are sons and brothers. Jesus enters our reality in a most human way everyday. He enters the flesh, in the heart, in my entire life, to make us born again.

* "Follow me." These are His words, simple and clear. He asks us to set out, to move, to "come to Him." It is a nice feeling to awaken to this voice that reaches us and is stronger and sweeter than the voice of the waters of the sea in the world which are noisy and confused. When He speaks to the heart, it becomes a great calm, and calm returns. Then He offers a course, marks the path to follow, and does not let us lose. "Follow me," says the Lord. Just accept the invitation, accept Him to know more, and just follow him as He opens the road.

"They left and followed." The two brothers, the first called, Peter and Andrew, become for us the beginning of this journey, as a clear, strong decision. They teach us to do the moves, the movement, to choose. "Release" and "Forward" become the key verbs and the words are written in the heart. Maybe we will often have to make these changes on the inside, in the secret soul, where only we can see. This is where the Lord is faithful. For us it does this wonderful thing, this word of the Gospel, so bright and strong that it changes your life.

* "Now." Matthew shows us twice the welcoming and readiness of the disciples as the Lord is passing by, with His gaze and His voice for them. They do not put up obstacles.

There is no doubt or fear, and they trust Him blindly and respond immediately, saying yes to that Love.

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

4) Some questions

* The horizon of this Gospel story and the grace that God still does for us is like the sea, a clear sea, which has a name and a geography. Can I, before the Word of God, at this moment, give a precise image of the horizon of my life? Do I have the inner peace to lay bare my life as it is, my Galilee, my sea, before the eyes of Christ? Do I fear that water in my heart, like a menacing sea, dark and empty? Can I allow the Lord to walk along my bank? Can I let myself look like Andrew, or as Simon, James or John?

* And if I'm silent at this moment, if I believe the steps of Jesus really are as close to me as to leave my poor sand on His prints of love and friendship, then do I have the courage to let myself look into His eyes full of light? Or do I continue to hide a bit, to escape, to hide somewhere such that I do not want to see or accept?

And again, do I let Him talk to me, tell me, perhaps for the first time: "Come after me"? Or do I prefer to just keep listening to the sound of the sea, its waves invading and breaking on the shore?

* This Gospel speaks to me very strongly of the company of brothers. I speak of my being a son. It lays bare the deepest part of the heart, like the intimacy of home. Perhaps this is the place where there is more pain for me, where I do not feel understood, accepted and loved as I am? For the Lord puts His finger in my wound. Brothers, father, mother, friends... Jesus is all this for me, and much more. Do I really feel it? Is there room for Him in my house? And how is my relationship with him? Is it as a brother, or friend, or a son? Do you only know from a distance?

* It seems very clear that in this passage the Lord does great things in the life of the disciples. "I will make you fishers of men" He tells them. How do you react to this discovery? Do I let myself be touched by Him, really and truly? Do you want to let Him change your life? With Him I want to start a new adventure, looking for brothers and sisters who need to meet, to know and to feel loved by His infinite love? I can be a fisher of men, like Andrew and his brothers.

* We have just one thing: the decision to follow the Lord and to walk behind Him. What do I have to leave today to take this important step? What is holding me back which does not allow me to move? What weight in my heart, my soul? Perhaps I have in me the need to confess, to open my heart. My answer is now written into the look that He has laid on me, His words being stronger than the sound of the sea and I can not pretend that nothing has happened. The Lord has left a mark. I am no longer what I was. I mean yes, as did Andrew. Amen.

5) Concluding Prayer

Your Word, Lord is a lamp to my feet.

How can the young walk without fault?

Only by keeping your words.

With all my heart I seek you;

do not let me stray from your commands.

In my heart I treasure your promise,

that I may not sin against you.

Blessed are you, O LORD;

teach me your laws.

With my lips I recite all the edicts you have spoken.

I find joy in the way of your decrees more than in all riches.

I will ponder your precepts and consider your paths.

In your laws I take delight; I will never forget your word.