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Lectio Divina Sunday, March 1, 2020

Jesus' encounter with the devil in the desert
Temptations in the desert of life
Matthew 4:1-11

1. Opening prayer

Lord Jesus, send Your Spirit to help us read the Bible as You read it to the disciples on the way to Emmaus. In the light of the Word written in the Bible, You helped them to discover the presence of God in the disturbing events of Your sentence and death. Thus, the cross, which seemed to signal the end of all hope, appeared to them as source of life and resurrection.

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

2. Reading

a) A key to the reading:

Let us read this text describing the temptations of Jesus, temptations that are also those of all human beings. While reading this text we should pay attention to the following: what are the temptations, where do they take place, and how does Jesus deal with them?

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

Mt 4:1-2: The situation where and whence the temptation arises: desert, spirit, fast and hunger

Mt 4:3-4: The temptation concerning bread.

Mt 4:5-7: The temptation concerning prestige.

Mt 4:8-11: The temptation concerning power.

c) The text:

1-2: Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterward He was hungry.

3-4: And the tempter came and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." But He answered, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'"

5-7: Then the devil took Him to the holy city, and set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down; for it is written, 'He will give his angels charge of you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.'" Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'You shall not tempt the Lord your God.'"

8-11: Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them; and he said to Him, "All these I will give You, if You will fall down and worship me." Then Jesus said to him, "Be gone, Satan! for it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God and Him only shall you serve.'" Then the devil left Him, and behold, angels came and ministered to Him.



3. A time of prayerful silence

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

4. Some questions

to help us meditate and pray.

- a) What were the temptations? What is the connection between the Spirit, the desert, the fast and hunger and the temptation of Jesus?
- b) What does the word temptation suggest to us today? How does it affect me in my daily life?
- c) The tempter or Satan is he what takes me away from or makes me deviate from God's path. It may be that I have already been Satan for someone, just like Peter was for Jesus.
- d) The Spirit leads Jesus into the desert to be tempted by the devil. This calls to mind the temptations of the people in the desert after the exodus from Egypt. What does Matthew wish to suggest and teach through this reminder of the temptations of the people in the desert?
- e) The devil uses the Bible to tempt Jesus. Jesus uses the Bible to overcome temptation! Can the Bible be used for everything? How and for what end do I use the Bible?
- f) The temptation of the bread. How can we speak of God to those who have all they need? How can we speak of God to those who are hungry?

g) The temptation concerning prestige. Prestige from knowledge, from money, from faultless moral conduct, from appearances, from fame, from honor: Do these exist in my life?

h) The temptation concerning power. Wherever two people meet, a relationship of power comes into play. How do I use the power that comes my way: in my family, in the community, in society, in my neighborhood? Do I give in to the temptation?

5. A key to the reading

for those who wish to go deeper into the matter.

= Jesus was tempted. Matthew renders the temptations intelligible: temptation of bread, temptation of prestige, temptation of power. These are various forms of messianic hope that, then, existed among the people. The glorious Messiah who, like a new Moses, would feed the people in the desert: "command these stones to turn into bread!" The unknown Messiah who would impose himself on all by means of a spectacular sign in the Temple: "throw yourself from here!" The nationalist Messiah who would come to dominate the world: "All these things I will give to you!"

= In the Old Testament, identical temptations allow the people in the desert to fall after their exodus from Egypt (Deut 6:3; 6:16; 6:13). Jesus repeats history. He resists the temptations and prevents them from perverting God's plan. The tempter or Satan is whatever makes us deviate from God's plan. Peter was Satan for Jesus (Mt 16:23).

= Temptation was always there in the life of Jesus. It went with Him from the beginning to the end, from His baptism to His death on the cross. The more the proclamation of the Good News of the Kingdom spread in the midst of the people, the greater the pressure on Jesus to adapt Himself to the messianic expectations of the people to be the messiah desired and expected by others: "a glorious and nationalist messiah", "a messiah king", "a messiah high priest", "a messiah judge", "a warrior messiah", "a messiah doctor of the law". The letter to the Hebrews says, "Like us, he was tried in all things, except sin" (Heb 4:15).

= But temptation never succeeded in distracting Jesus from His mission. He continued firmly on His journey as "The Servant Messiah", as proclaimed by the prophet Isaiah and awaited especially by the poor, the anawim. In this, Jesus did not fear provoking conflicts with the authorities and with those dearest to Him. All those who tried to make Him deviate from his path received hard replies and unexpected reactions:

* Peter tried to take Him away from the cross: "Far from it, Lord, this will never happen!" (Mt 16:22). And he heard the reply, "Get behind me, Satan!" (Mk 8:33).

* His relatives, wanted to take Him home. They thought He was mad (Mk 3:21), but they heard harsh words, which seemed to create a rupture (Mk 3:33). Then, when Jesus had become famous, they wanted Him to appear more often in public and to remain in Jerusalem, the capital (Jn 7:3-4). Again, Jesus replies showing that there is a radical difference between his purpose and theirs (Jn 7:6-7).

* His parents complained: "Son, why have You done so?" (Lk 2:48). But Jesus replies, "Why were you looking for Me? Do you not know that I must be about My Father's business?" (Lk 2:49).

* The apostles were glad of the publicity Jesus was getting in the midst of the people and wanted Him to turn towards the people. "Everyone is looking for You!" (Mk 1:37). But they heard the refusal, "Let us go elsewhere, to the neighboring villages and cities, so that I may preach also to them; it is for this that I have come!" (Mk 1:38).

* John the Baptist wanted to coerce Jesus into being "the strict judge messiah" (Lk 3:9; Mt 3:7-12; Mt 11:3). Jesus reminded John of the prophecies and asked him to compare them to facts, "Go tell John what you have heard and seen!" (Mt 11:4-6 and Isa 29:18-19; 35:5-6; 61:1).

* The people, when they saw the signs of the multiplication of the bread in the desert, concluded, "This surely is the prophet who is to come on earth!" (Jn 6:14). They got together to urge Jesus to be "the messiah king" (Jn 5:15), but Jesus took refuge on the mountain to be with the Father in solitude.

* When in prison and at the hour of darkness (Lk 22:53), the temptation to be "the warrior messiah" appeared. But Jesus says, "Put your sword back into its scabbard!" (Mt 26:52) and "Pray that you may not enter into temptation" (Lk 22:40,45).

= Jesus turned to the Word of God and there found light and nourishment. Above all, it is the prophecy of the Servant, proclaimed by Isaiah (Isa 42:1-9; 49:1-6; 50:3-9; 52:13-53, 12) that fills Him and motivates Him to go on. At the baptism and in the transfiguration, He receives the Father's confirmation for His journey, His mission. The voice from heaven repeats the words with which Isaiah presents the Servant of Yahweh to the people, "This is My beloved Son, hear Him!" (Mk 1:11; 9:6).

= Jesus defines His mission with these words, "The Son of man did not come to be served but to serve and to give His life for the redemption of many!" (Mt 20:28; Mk 10:45). This lesson He learned from His mother, who said to the angel, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done unto me according to your word!" (Lk 1:38). By turning to the Word of God to deepen awareness of His mission and by seeking strength in prayer, Jesus faced temptations. In the midst of the poor, the anawim, and united to His Father, faithful to both, He resisted and followed the way of the Servant Messiah, the way of service to the people (Mt 20:28).

6. Psalm 91 (90)

God our protector is with us in times of temptation

He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High,
who abides in the shadow of the Almighty,
will say to the Lord, "My refuge and my fortress;
my God, in whom I trust."

For He will deliver you from the snare of the fowler
and from the deadly pestilence;
He will cover you with His pinions,

and under His wings you will find refuge;
His faithfulness is a shield and buckler.
You will not fear the terror of the night,
nor the arrow that flies by day,
nor the pestilence that stalks in darkness,
nor the destruction that wastes at noonday.

Because you have made the Lord your refuge,
the Most High your habitation,
no evil shall befall you,
no scourge come near your tent.
For He will give his angels charge of
you to guard you in all your ways.
On their hands they will bear you up,
lest you dash your foot against a stone.
You will tread on the lion and the adder,
the young lion and the serpent you will trample under foot.

Because he cleaves to me in love, I will deliver him;
I will protect him, because he knows My name.
When he calls to Me, I will answer him;
I will be with him in trouble,
I will rescue him and honor him.
With long life I will satisfy him,
and show him My salvation.

7. Closing prayer

Lord Jesus, we thank You for Your word, which has made the Father's will clearer to us. May Your Spirit enlighten our actions and give us the strength to follow what Your Word has revealed to us. Like Mary, Your Mother, may we not only listen to the Word but also put it into practice. Who live and reign with the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit for ever and ever. Amen.

Lectio Divina Monday, March 2, 2020

Season of Lent

1) OPENING PRAYER

Lord, holy God, loving Father,
you give us the task to love one another
because You are holy
and You have loved us before we could love You.
Give us the ability to recognize Your Son
in our brothers and sisters far and near.
Make us witnesses that love exists and is alive

and that You, the God of love,
exist and are alive now for ever.

2) GOSPEL READING - MATTHEW 25:31-46

Jesus said to his disciples: "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit upon his glorious throne, and all the nations will be assembled before him. And he will separate them one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will place the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the king will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me.' Then the righteous will answer him and say, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?' And the king will say to them in reply, 'Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.' Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you accursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the Devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, a stranger and you gave me no welcome, naked and you gave me no clothing, ill and in prison, and you did not care for me.' Then they will answer and say, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or ill or in prison, and not minister to your needs?' He will answer them, 'Amen, I say to you, what you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me.' And these will go off to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."

3) REFLECTION

The Gospel of Matthew presents Jesus as the New Messiah. Like Moses, Jesus also promulgates the Law of God. As with the ancient law, the new one, given by Jesus, also contains five books or discourses. The Sermon on the Mountain (Mt 5:1 to 7:27), the first discourse, opens with eight Beatitudes. The discourse on vigilance (Mt 2:4, 1 to 25, 46), the fifth discourse, contains the description of the Last Judgment. The Beatitudes describe the door of entrance into the Kingdom, enumerating eight categories of people: the poor in spirit, the meek, the afflicted, those who hunger and thirst for justice, the merciful, the pure of heart, the peacemakers and the persecuted because of justice (Mt 5:3-10). The parable of the Last Judgment tells us what we should do in order to possess the Kingdom: accept the hungry, the thirsty, the foreigners, the naked, the sick and the prisoners (Mt 25:35-36): At the beginning, as well as at the end of the New Law, there are the excluded and the marginalized.

Matthew 25:31-33: Opening of the Last Judgment. The Son of Man gathers together around Him the nations of the world. He separates people as the shepherd does with the sheep and the goats. The shepherd knows how to discern. He does not make a mistake; sheep on the right, goats on the left. Jesus does not make a mistake. Jesus does not judge nor condemn. (cfr. Jn 3:17; 12:47). He does not separate alone. It is the person

himself/herself who judges and condemns because of the way in which he/she behaves toward the little ones and the excluded.

Matthew 25:34-36: The sentence for those who are at the right hand of the Judge. Those who are at the right hand of the judge are called Blessed of my Father! That is, they receive the blessing which God promised to Abraham and to his descendants (Gen 12:3). They are invited to take possession of the Kingdom, prepared for them from the foundation of the world. The reason for the sentence is the following: I was hungry, a foreigner, naked, sick and prisoner, and you accepted me and helped me! This sentence makes us understand who are the sheep. They are the persons who accepted the Judge when he was hungry, thirsty, a foreigner, naked, sick and prisoner. Because of the way of speaking about my Father and the Son of Man, we can know that the Judge is precisely Jesus Himself. He identifies Himself with the little ones!

Matthew 25:37-40: A request for clarification and the response of the Judge: Those who accept the excluded are called just . That means that the justice of the Kingdom is not attained by observing norms and prescriptions, but rather by accepting those in need. But it is strange that the just do not even know themselves when they accepted Jesus in need. Jesus responds: Every time that you have done this to one of my brothers, you have done it to me. Who are these little brothers of mine? In other passages of the Gospel of Matthew, the expression “my brothers” indicates the disciples (Mt 12:48-50; 28:10). This also indicates the members of the community who are more abandoned and neglected who have no place and are not well received (Mt 10:40). Jesus identifies Himself with them. In the broader context of the last parable, the expression “my smallest brothers” is extended and includes all those who have no place in society. It indicates all the poor. The just and the blessed by my Father are all the persons from all nations who accept and welcome others with total gratuity, independently of the fact that they are Christians or not.

Matthew 25:41-43: The sentence for those who were at the left hand side. Those who were on the other side of the Judge are called cursed and they are destined to go to the eternal fire, prepared by the devil and his friends. Jesus uses a symbolic language common at that time to say that these persons will not enter into the Kingdom. And here, also, their is only one reason: they did not accept or welcome Jesus as one who is hungry, thirsty, a foreigner, naked, sick and/or a prisoner. It is not that Jesus prevents them from entering into the Kingdom, rather it is our way of acting that is our blindness which prevents us from seeing Jesus in the little ones.

Matthew 25:44-46: A request for clarification and the response of the Judge. The request for clarification indicates that it is a question of people who have behaved well, people who have their conscience in peace. They are certain to have always practiced what God asked from them. For this reason they were surprised when the Judge says that they did not accept Him, did not welcome Him. The Judge responds: Every time that you have not done these things to one of my brothers, the little ones, you did not do it to me. It is the omission! They did not do anything extra. They only missed practicing good towards the little ones and the excluded. This is the way the fifth Book of the New Law ends!

In the saints and Church Fathers we have a lot to learn about virtues and vices. It is not enough to just avoid vice, or sin, but to also work toward attaining virtue and virtuous behavior. To do no harm is not the same as to help. This is what we are called to do: to not just avoid doing wrong or harm, but to go out of our way to do good as well.

4) PERSONAL QUESTIONS

What struck you the most in this parable of the Last Judgment?

Do I focus my life more on avoiding harm or on doing good for others?

Stop and think: if the Last Judgment would take place today, would you be on the side of the sheep or on the side of the goats?

5) CONCLUDING PRAYER

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

Lectio Divina Tuesday, March 3, 2020

Season of Lent

1) OPENING PRAYER

Lord God,
You speak Your mighty word to us,
but we cannot hear it
unless it stirs our lives
and is spoken in human terms.
Keep speaking Your word to us, Lord,
and open our hearts to it,
that it may bear fruit in us
when we do Your will
and carry out what we are sent to do.
We ask You this through Your living Word,
Jesus Christ our Lord.

2) GOSPEL READING - MATTHEW 6:7-15

Jesus said to his disciples: "In praying, do not babble like the pagans, who think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them. Your Father knows what you need before you ask him. "This is how you are to pray: Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. "If you forgive men their transgressions, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you do not forgive men, neither will your Father forgive your transgressions."

3) REFLECTION

There are two versions of the Our Father: Luke (Lk 11:1-4) and Matthew (Mt 6:7-13). In Luke, the Our Father is shorter. Luke writes for the communities which came from Paganism. In Matthew the Our Father is found in the Discourse on the Mountain, in the part where Jesus orientates the disciples in the practice of the three works of piety: alms (Mt 6:1-4), prayer (Mt 6:5-15) and fasting (Mt 6:16-18). The Our Father forms part of a catechesis for the converted Jews. They were accustomed to pray, but had some vices which Matthew tries to correct.

Matthew 6:7-8: The faults to be corrected. Jesus criticizes the people for whom prayer was a repetition of a magic formula, strong words addressed to God to oblige Him to respond to our needs. The acceptance of our prayer by God does not depend on the repetition of words, but on God's goodness, on God who is love and mercy. He wants our good and knows our needs even before we pray to Him.

Matthew 6:9a: The first words: Our Father, Abba Father, is the name which Jesus uses to address Himself to God. It reveals the new relationship with God that should characterize the life of the communities (Ga 4:6; Rm 8:15). We say Our Father and not My Father. The adjective places the accent on the awareness or knowledge that we all belong to the great human family of all races and creeds. To pray to the Father is to enter in intimacy with Him. It also means to be sensitive to the cry of all the brothers and sisters who cry for their daily bread. It means to seek in the first place the Kingdom of God. The experience of God as our Father is the foundation of universal fraternity.

Matthew 6:9b-10: Three requests for the cause of God: The Name, the Kingdom, the Will. In the first part we ask that our relationship with God may be re-established again. To sanctify His name: The name JAHVE means I am with you! God knows. In this name He makes Himself known (Ex 3:11-15). The name of God is sanctified when it is used with faith and not with magic; when it is used according to its true objective, not for oppression but for the liberty or freedom of the people and for the construction of the Kingdom. The coming of the Kingdom: The only Lord and King of life is God (Is 45:21; 46:9). The coming of the Kingdom is the fulfillment of all the hopes and promises. It is life in plenitude, the overcoming of frustration suffered with human kings and governments. This Kingdom will come when the Will of God will be fully accomplished. To do His will: The will of God is expressed in His Law. His will be done on earth as it is in Heaven. In Heaven the sun and the stars obey the laws of their orbit and create the order of the universe (Is 48:12-13). The observance of the law of God will be a source of order and well-being for human life.

Matthew 6:11-13: Four petitions for the cause of the brothers: Bread, Pardon, Victory, Liberty. In the second part of the Our Father we ask that the relationship among persons may be restored. The four requests show how necessary it is to transform or change the structures of the community and society in order that all the sons and daughters of God may have the same dignity. The daily bread. In Exodus the people received the manna in the desert every day (Ex 16:35). Divine Providence passed through the fraternal organization, the sharing. Jesus invites us to live a new Exodus, a new fraternal way of living together which will guarantee the daily bread for all (Mt 6:34-44; Jo 6:48-51).

Forgive us our debts: Every 50 years, the Jubilee Year obliged people to forgive their debts. It was a new beginning (Lv 25:8-55). Jesus announces a new Jubilee Year, a year of grace from the Lord (Lk 4:19). The Gospel wants to begin everything anew! Do not lead us into temptation, do not put us to the test: In Exodus, people were tempted and fell (Dt 9:6-12). The people complained and wanted to go back (Ex 16:3; 17:3). In the new Exodus, the temptation will be overcome by the strength which people receive from God (I Co 10:12-13). Deliver us from evil: The Evil One is Satan, who draws away from God and is a cause of scandal. He succeeds in entering in Peter (Mt 16:23) and to tempt Jesus in the desert. Jesus overcomes him (Mt 4:1-11). He tells us: Courage, I have conquered the world! (Jn 16:33).

Matthew 6:14-15: Anyone who does not forgive will not be forgiven. In praying the Our Father, we pronounce the phrase which condemns us or absolves us. We say: Forgive our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass us (Mt 6:12). We offer God the measure of pardon that we want. If we forgive very much, He will forgive us very much. If we forgive little, He will forgive little. If we do not forgive, He will not forgive us.

4) PERSONAL QUESTIONS

Jesus prayer says forgive our debts . In some countries it is translated as forgive our offenses . What is easier to forgive, the offenses or to forgive the debts?

Christian nations of the Northern Hemisphere (Europe and USA) pray everyday: Forgive our debts as we forgive those who are in debt to us! But they do not forgive the external debt of poor countries of the Third World. How can we explain this terrible contradiction, source of impoverishment of millions of people?

Debt, in the context of society, is not only money. In fact, in referring to people who have served time in jail we say “they have paid their debt to society”. Do we accept these people back into society? Not only have they paid their “debt”, they are often treated as having not been forgiven.

How do we forgive others in terms of immigration, documented or not, and accept them into our communities?

5) CONCLUDING PRAYER

Proclaim with me the greatness of Yahweh,
let us acclaim His name together.
I seek Yahweh and He answers me,
frees me from all my fears. (Ps 34,3-4)

Lectio Divina Wednesday, March 4, 2020

1) OPENING PRAYER

Forgiving, merciful God,
we pray to You for a good measure
of humility and honesty

to acknowledge before You and people
that we are weak and fallible men and women,
who often try to turn a blind eye
to our shortcomings and our sins.
Strong with the grace won in the hard way
by Your Son on the cross,
we beg You for the courage
to seek Your forgiveness
and to turn and return wholeheartedly to You
and to serve You and people.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.

2) GOSPEL READING - LUKE 11:29-32

While still more people gathered in the crowd, Jesus said to them, “This generation is an evil generation; it seeks a sign, but no sign will be given it, except the sign of Jonah. Just as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites, so will the Son of Man be to this generation. At the judgment the queen of the south will rise with the men of this generation and she will condemn them, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and there is something greater than Solomon here. At the judgment the men of Nineveh will arise with this generation and condemn it, because at the preaching of Jonah they repented, and there is something greater than Jonah here.”

3) REFLECTION

We are in Lent. The Liturgy presents texts which can help us to convert ourselves and to change our life. What helps more in conversion are the facts of the history of the People of God. In today’s Gospel, Jesus presents two episodes of the past: Jonah and the Queen of the South, and transforms this into a mirror in such a way that one can discover God’s call to conversion.

Luke 11:29: The evil generation which asks for a sign. Jesus calls the generation evil because it does not want to believe in Jesus and continues to ask for signs which can indicate that Jesus has been sent by the Father. But Jesus refuses to present these signs, because if they ask for a sign it is because they do not believe. The only sign which will be given is that of Jonah.

Luke 11:30: The sign of Jonah. The sign of Jonah has two different aspects. The first one is what the text of Luke affirms in today’s Gospel. Jonah was a sign, through his preaching, for the people of Nineveh. Listening to Jonah, the people were converted. In the same way, the preaching of Jesus was a sign for His people, but the people did not show any sign of conversion. The other aspect is that which the Gospel of Matthew affirms when he quotes the same episode: For as Jonah remained in the belly of the sea-monster for three days and three nights, so will the Son of man be in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights (Mt 12:40). When the fish vomited Jonah into the dry land, he went to announce the Word of God to the people of Nineveh. In the same way, after the death and resurrection on the third day, the Good News will be announced to the people of Judah.

Luke 11:31: The Queen of the South. Following this, Jesus recalls the story of the Queen of the South, who came from the ends of the earth to meet Solomon, and to learn from his wisdom (cfr. I Kg 10:1-10). Twice Jesus affirms: Look, there is something greater than Solomon here, and look, there is something much greater than Jonah here .

A very important point in the discussion between Jesus and the leaders of His people is the way in which Jesus and His enemies place themselves before God. The Book of Jonah is a parable which criticizes the mentality of those who wanted God only for the Jews. In the story of Jonah, the pagans were converted listening to the preaching of Jonah and God accepts them in His goodness and does not destroy the city. When Jonah sees that God accepts the people of Nineveh and does not destroy the city Jonah became very indignant. He fell into a rage. He prayed to the Lord: Lord, is not this what I said would happen when I was still in my own country? That was why I first tried to flee to Tarshish, since I knew You were a tender, compassionate God, slow to anger, rich in faithful love, who relents about inflicting disaster. So now, Lord, please take my life, for I might as well be dead as go on living!. (Jon 4:1-3). For this reason, Jonah was a sign for the Jews of the time of Jesus and it continues to be for us Christians. He wants for all to be disciples (Mt 28:19), that is, that they be persons who, like Him, radiate and announce the Good News of the love of God for all peoples (Mk 16:15).

4) PERSONAL QUESTIONS

Lent, the time for conversion. What has to change in the image of God that I have? Am I like Jonah or like Jesus?

On what is my faith based, founded? In signs or in the Word of Jesus?

5) CONCLUDING PRAYER

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

Lectio Divina Thursday, March 5, 2020

Season of Lent

1) Opening prayer

Lord, our God,
You are a generous Father,
who give us what is good for us
simply because You love us.
Give us grateful hearts, Lord,
that we may learn from You
to give and share without counting the cost
but simply with love and joy,

as Jesus, Your Son, did among us,
who lives with You and the Holy Spirit forever.

2) Gospel reading - Matthew 7:7-12

Jesus said to his disciples: "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and the one who seeks, finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. Which one of you would hand his son a stone when he asked for a loaf of bread, or a snake when he asked for a fish? If you then, who are wicked, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good things to those who ask him. "Do to others whatever you would have them do to you. This is the law and the prophets."

3) Reflection

- The Gospel today gives a part of the Sermon on the Mount, the new law of God which has been revealed to us by Jesus. The Sermon on the Mount has the following structure:

- a) Mathew 5:1-16: The entrance door: the Beatitudes (Mt 5:1-10) and the mission of the disciples: to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Mt 5:12-16).

- b) Mathew 5:17-18: The new relationship with God: The new justice (Mt 5:17-48) which does not expect a reward for practicing almsgiving, for praying and fasting (Mt 6:1-18).

- c) Mathew 6:19-34: The new relationship with the goods of the earth (Mt 6:19-21), do not look at the world with a jaundiced eye (Mt 6:22-23), do not serve God and money (Mt 6:24), do not be concerned about food and drink (Mt 6:23-34).

- d) Mathew 7:1-23: The new relationship with other people: do not look for the splinter in your brother's eye (Mt 7:1-5); do not throw your pearls in front of pigs (Mt 7:6); the Gospel today: do not be afraid to ask things from God (Mt 7:7-11); and the Golden Rule (Mt 7:12); choose the hard and narrow roads (Mt 7:13-14), beware of false prophets (Mt 7:15-20).

- e) Mathew 7:21-29: Conclusion: do not only speak but also practice (Mt 7:21-23); the community built on this basis will resist the storm (Mt 7:24-27). The result of these words is a new conscience before the scribes and the doctors (Mt 7:28-29).

- Mathew 7:7-8: Jesus' three recommendations: to ask, to seek and to knock: "Ask and you shall receive; seek and you shall find; knock and it shall be opened to you!" A person is asked. The response depends both on the person as well as on the insistence with which it is asked (cf Lk 18:1-7). The seeking is defined by some criteria. The better the criteria, the more certainty one can have of finding what one is looking for. To knock at the door is done with the hope that there will be someone on the other side of the door at home. Jesus completes the recommendation, offering the certainty of the response: "Ask and you shall receive; seek and you shall find; knock and it will be opened; because anyone who asks receives, and anyone who seeks will find and to anyone who knocks the door will be opened". That means that when we ask God, He listens to our petition. When we seek God, He allows Himself to be found (Isa 5: 5-6). When we knock on the door of God's house, He opens the door for us.

• Mathew 7:9-11: Jesus' question to the people. "Is there anyone among you who would hand his son a stone when he asked for bread? Or would hand him a snake when he asked for a fish?" Here appears the simple and direct way which Jesus has for teaching the things of God to the people. Speaking to the parents, He connects Himself to the daily experience. Between the lines of the question one can guess the response the people yelled out: "No!" because nobody gives a stone to a son who asks for bread. There is no father and no mother who would give a snake to their son when he asks for a fish. And Jesus draws the conclusion: "If you, then, evil as you are, know how to give your children what is good, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!" Jesus calls us evil to stress the certainty of being listened to by God when we ask Him for something. And this, because if we who are not saints, know how to give good things to our children, how much more is the Father in heaven. This comparison has as its objective to take away from our heart any doubt concerning the prayer addressed to God with trust. God will listen! Luke adds that God will give the Holy Spirit (Lk 11:13).

• Mathew 7:12: The Golden Rule. "So always treat others as you would like them to treat you; that is the law and the prophets." This is the summary of the entire Old Testament, of the law and the prophets. And this is the summary of everything which God wants to tell us, the summary of all the teaching of Jesus. This Golden Rule is not found only in the teaching of Jesus, but also, in one way or other, in all religions. This responds to the most profound and more universal sentiment of humanity.

4) Personal questions

- Ask, seek, knock on the door: How do you pray and speak with God?
- Are you persistent in what you ask for, as the widow in Lk 18:1-7 was, or do you give up after not getting results immediately? Would you pray persistently (and insistently) for years, or just months, or just a week?
- How are your wants aligned with what God would want for you?
- How do you live the Golden Rule?

5) Concluding prayer

Lord I praise Your name for Your faithful love and Your constancy;
Your promises surpass even Your fame.
You heard me on the day when I called,
and You gave new strength to my heart. (Ps 138: 2-3)

Lectio Divina Friday, March 6, 2020

Season of Lent

1) OPENING PRAYER

God of mercy and compassion,
you challenge us to be responsible

for the good and the evil we do
and You call us to conversion.

God, help us to face ourselves
that we may not use flimsy excuses
for covering up our wrongs.
Make us honest with ourselves,
and aware that we can always count on Jesus Christ
to be our guide and strength on the road to You,
now and for ever.

2) GOSPEL READING - MATTHEW 5:20-26

Jesus said to his disciples: "I tell you, unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter into the Kingdom of heaven. "You have heard that it was said to your ancestors, You shall not kill; and whoever kills will be liable to judgment. But I say to you, whoever is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment, and whoever says to his brother, raqa, will be answerable to the Sanhedrin, and whoever says, 'You fool,' will be liable to fiery Gehenna. Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar, and there recall that your brother has anything against you, leave your gift there at the altar, go first and be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Settle with your opponent quickly while on the way to court. Otherwise your opponent will hand you over to the judge, and the judge will hand you over to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison. Amen, I say to you, you will not be released until you have paid the last penny."

3) REFLECTION

The text of today's Gospel forms part of a broader or more extensive whole: Mt 5:20 up to Mt 5:48. In these passages Matthew tells us how Jesus interprets and explains the Law of God. Five times He repeats the phrase: You have heard how it was said to our ancestors, in truth I tell you! (Mt 5:21. 27. 33.38. 43). Before, He had said: Do not imagine that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; no, I have come not to abolish, but to complete them (Mt 5:17). The attitude of Jesus before the Law is, at the same time, one of breaking and of continuity. He breaks away from the erroneous interpretations, but maintains firm the objective which the Law should attain: the practice of a greater justice, which is Love.

Matthew 5:20: An uprightness which surpasses that of the Pharisees. This first verse presents the general key of everything which follows in Matthew 5:20-48. The word Justice never appears in the Gospel of Mark, and it appears seven times in that of Matthew (Mt 3:15; 5:6.10.20; 6:1.33; 21:32). This has something to do with the situation of the communities for which Mark wrote. The religious ideal of the Jews of the time was to be just before God. The Pharisees taught: people attain justice before God when they succeed to observe all the norms of the law in all its details! This teaching generated a legalistic oppression and caused great anguish in the people because it was very difficult to be able to observe all the norms (cfr. Rm 7:21-24). This is why Matthew takes the words of Jesus on justice to show that it has to surpass the justice of the Pharisees (Mt, 5:20). According to Jesus, justice does not come from what

I do for God in observing the law, but rather from what God does for me, accepting me as His son or as His daughter. The new ideal which Jesus proposes is the following: therefore, be perfect as is your Heavenly Father! (Mt 5:48). That means: you will be just before God when you try to accept and forgive people as God accepts and pardons me, in spite of my defects and sins.

By means of these five very concrete examples, Jesus shows us what to do in order to attain this greater justice which surpasses the justice of the and the Pharisees. As we can see, today's Gospel takes the example of the new interpretation of the fifth commandment: You shall not kill! Jesus has revealed what God wanted when He gave this commandment to Moses.

Matthew 5:21-22: The law says: You shall not kill! (Ex 20:13). In order to observe fully this commandment it is not sufficient to avoid murdering. It is necessary to uproot from within everything which, in one way or another, can lead to murder, for example, anger, hatred, the desire to revenge, insult, and exploitation, etc.

Matthew 5:23-24. The perfect worship which God wants. In order to be accepted by God and to remain united to Him, it is necessary to reconcile oneself with brother and sister. Before the destruction of the Temple, in the year 70, when the Christian Jews participated in the pilgrimages in Jerusalem to present their offerings at the altar and to pay their promises, they always remembered this phrase of Jesus. In the year 80, at the time when Matthew wrote, the Temple and the Altar no longer existed. They had been destroyed by the Romans. The community and the communitarian celebration became the Temple and the Altar of God.

Matthew 5:25-26: To reconcile oneself. One of the points on which the Gospel of Matthew exists the most is reconciliation. That indicates that in the communities of that time, there were many tensions among the radical groups with diverse tendencies and sometimes even opposing ones. Nobody wanted to cede to the other. There was no dialogue. Matthew enlightens this situation with the words of Jesus on reconciliation which demands acceptance and understanding. The only sin that God does not forgive is our lack of pardon toward others (Mt 6:14). That is why one should try to reconcile yourself before it is too late!

4) PERSONAL QUESTIONS

Today there are many people who cry out for justice! What meaning does evangelical justice have for me?

How do I behave before those who do not accept me as I am? How did Jesus behave before those who did not accept Him?

5) CONCLUDING PRAYER

From the depths I call to You, Yahweh:

Lord, hear my cry.

Listen attentively to the sound of my pleading! (Ps 130,1-2)

Lectio Divina Saturday, March 7, 2020

1) OPENING PRAYER

Lord God, from You comes the initiative of love.
You seek us out and You tell us:
I am your God; you are my people.
You love us in Jesus Christ, Your Son.
God, may our response of love
go far beyond the demands of any law.
May we seek You and commune with You
in the deepest of our being
and may we express our gratitude to You
by going to our neighbor
with a love that is spontaneous like Yours.
We ask You this through Christ our Lord.

2) GOSPEL READING - MATTHEW 5:43-48

Jesus said to his disciples: "You have heard that it was said, You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your heavenly Father, for he makes his sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what recompense will you have? Do not the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brothers and sisters only, what is unusual about that? Do not the pagans do the same? So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect."

3) REFLECTION

In today's Gospel we see how Jesus has interpreted the commandment "You shall not kill" in such a way that its observance leads to the practice of love. Besides saying "You shall not kill" (Mt 5:21), Jesus quoted four other commandments of the ancient law: you shall not commit adultery (Mt 5:27), you shall not bear false witness (Mt 5:33), eye for eye, and tooth for tooth (Mt 5:38) and, in today's Gospel, you shall love your neighbor and will hate your enemy (Mt 5:43), five times, Jesus criticizes and completes the ancient way of observing these commandments and indicates the new way to attain the objective of the law, which is the practice of love (Mt 5:22-26; 5:28-32; 5:34-37; 5:39-42; 5:44-48).

Love your enemies. In today's Gospel Jesus quotes the ancient law which says: You will love your neighbor and hate your enemy. This text is not found like this in the Old Testament. It is more a question of the mentality of the time, according to which there was no problem if a person hated his enemy. Jesus was not in agreement and says: But I tell you: if you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Do not even the tax collectors do as much? And if you save your greetings for your brothers, are you doing anything exceptional? Do not even the gentiles do as much? You must, therefore, set no bounds to your love, just as your heavenly Father sets none to His. And Jesus gives us the proof. At the hour of His death He observed that which He preached.

Father, forgive them, they do not know what they are doing. A soldier takes the wrist of Jesus and places it on the arm of the cross, places a nail and begins to hammer it in. Several times. The blood was flowing down. The body of Jesus contorted with pain. The soldier, a mercenary, ignorant, far from knowing what he was doing, and of what was happening around him, continued to hammer as if it were a piece of the wall of his house and he had to put up a picture. At that moment Jesus prays for the soldier who tortures Him and addresses His prayer to the Father: Father, forgive them! They know not what they are doing! He loved the soldier who killed Him. Even wanting it with all their strength, the lack of humanity did not succeed to kill in Jesus His humanity and love! He will be imprisoned, they will spit on Him, will laugh and make fun of Him, they will make of Him a false king crowning Him with a crown of thorns, they will torture Him, will oblige Him to go through the streets like a criminal hearing the insults of the religious authority. On Calvary they will leave Him completely naked in the sight of all. But the poison of this lack of humanity did not succeed in suppressing the source of love and humanity which sprang from within Jesus. The water of the love which sprang from within was stronger than the poison of hatred which was coming from without. Looking at that soldier, Jesus felt sorrow and prayed for him and for all: Father, forgive them! They know not what they are doing! Jesus, in solidarity, almost excuses those who were ill treating and torturing Him. He was like a brother who goes with his murderous brothers before the judge and he, the victim of his own brothers, says to the judge: They are my brothers, you know they are ignorant. Forgive them! They will become better! He loved the enemy!

Be perfect as is your Father who is in Heaven. Jesus does not want to frighten, because this would be useless. He wants to change the system of human living altogether. The notion which He constructs comes from the new experience He has from God the Father, full of tenderness and who accepts all! The words of threat against the rich cannot be an occasion of revenge on the part of the poor. Jesus orders that we have a contrary attitude: Love your enemies! True love cannot depend on what one receives from others. Love should want the good of others independently of what they do for me. This is the way God's love is for us.

4) PERSONAL QUESTIONS

Am I capable to love my enemies?

Contemplate Jesus, in silence, who at the hour of His death, loved the enemy who killed Him.

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 Sunday, March 8, 2020

The Transfiguration of Jesus

Matthew 17:1-9

1. LECTIO

a) Initial Prayer:

Oh God, who in the glorious Transfiguration of Christ, the Lord, confirmed the mysteries of faith by the witness of the Law and of the prophets and have admirably pre-announced our definite adoption as Your children, may we listen to the Word of Your Beloved Son to become coheirs of His immortal life.

b) Reading of the Gospel:

1 Six days later, Jesus took with Him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain by themselves. 2 There in their presence He was transfigured: His face shone like the sun and His clothes became as dazzling as light. 3 And suddenly Moses and Elijah appeared to them; they were talking with Him. 4 Then Peter spoke to Jesus. 'Lord,' he said, 'it is wonderful for us to be here; if you want me to, I will make three shelters here, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.' 5 He was still speaking when suddenly a bright cloud covered them with shadow, and suddenly from the cloud there came a voice which said, 'This is My Son, the Beloved; He enjoys my favor. Listen to Him.' 6 When they heard this, the disciples fell on their faces, overcome with fear. 7 But Jesus came up and touched them, saying, 'Stand up, do not be afraid.' 8 And when they raised their eyes they saw no one but Jesus. 9 As they came down from the mountain Jesus gave them this order, 'Tell no one about this vision until the Son of man has risen from the dead.'



c) Moments of silence:

So that God's Word may enter into us and enlighten our life.

2. MEDITATIO

a) Key for the Reading:

The Gospel according to Matthew insists on the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven. This is why Matthew's Gospel is the Gospel of the Church, that is of the People of God guided by its Head and Master Jesus, the Christ. The text which narrates the event of the Transfiguration forms part of a section of the Gospel in which, the Evangelist develops the theme of the beginning of the coming of the Kingdom in a group of disciples who gradually will constitute the Body of the Church. We find the account of the Transfiguration in all the Synoptic Gospels (Mk 9: 2-8; Lk 9: 28-36), and we also

find a reference to this event in the second letter of Peter (2 Pet 1:16-18). The text of Matthew (17: 1-9) though presents some diversity. The account is found immediately after the first announcement of the Passion and the mentioning of the conditions necessary for the following of Christ and also the event of the glorification of the Son of Man in the glory of the Father (Mt 16: 21-28). Before the glorification, Jesus has to go to Jerusalem for the fulfillment of the Pascal mystery, that is: Passion, Death and Resurrection (Mt 16: 21). Those who desire and wish to follow Jesus have to deny themselves and then, also carry their cross to follow the Master. (Mt 16: 24). Only in this way can we participate in His glory: “Anyone who wants to save his life will lose it; but anyone who loses his life for My sake will find it” (Mt 16: 25). Those who do not accept the event of the Cross in the life of Christ and therefore in the program of following him, are considered by Jesus as “Satan”, because they do not think “according to God but as human beings do” (Mt 16: 23). The command which Jesus addresses to Peter: “Get behind me, Satan!” (Mt 16: 23) reminds us of a similar expression used by Jesus in the parable of the final judgment “When the Son of man comes in His glory”, (Mt 25: 31-46): “Go away from me, with your curse upon you, to the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels” (Mt 25:41). This curse is addressed to those who do not know the Lord and do not form part of His Kingdom.

Then follows the account of the Transfiguration (Mt 17: 1-9) with the question on the coming of Elijah and the healing of the epileptic demoniac (Mt 17: 10-21). After these events Jesus, for the second time, announces His Passion (Mt 17: 22) and concerning the question of the payment of taxes for the needs of the temple, Jesus plays on the words regarding the reality of son-ship (Mt 17:24-27). In the Transfiguration the Father declares that Jesus is “My Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Listen to Him” (Mt 17: 5). We are also sons and daughters, in Him, of the same Father (Mt 5: 45; Mt 17:25-26).

Jesus then presents Himself as our guide on the journey towards the Kingdom. In the account of the Transfiguration Jesus is presented as the new Moses who encounters God “on a high mountain” (Mt 17:1) in the “bright cloud” (Mt 17: 5), with His face shining (Mt 17: 2. Moses also encounters God in the cloud on Mount Sinai (Ex 24: 15-18) with the bright face (Ex 34: 29-35). Elijah also encounters the Lord on Mount Horeb, the mountain of God (1 Kings 19: 9-13). Just as in the event of Sinai (Ex 19: 20; 33-34), here also in the Transfiguration there is the revelation of the new law. To listen to the Beloved Son in whom God the Father is pleased (Mt 17: 5). This new law, given by God on Tabor by means of the new Moses, reminds us of what the Patriarch says in the Book of Deuteronomy: “Yahweh, your God will raise up a prophet like me; you will listen to him” (Deut 18:15). In this text of the Transfiguration, more important than the law, of which Jesus is the fulfillment (that is why after the vision the Apostles “saw no one, but Jesus alone” (Mt 17: 7), the revelation on the part of the Father, who proclaims the divine filiation of Jesus Christ is stressed. Besides this proclamation in the Transfiguration, the identity of the Son is proclaimed two other times in the Gospel of Matthew: at the beginning and at the end. After the Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan, a voice from heaven says: “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am pleased” (Mt 3: 17); and when Jesus dies on the Cross, the centurion exclaims using words of revelation and of faith: “Truly this one was the Son of God!” (Mt 27:54). Besides, in this proclamation,

the Father reveals Jesus as the servant of the Lord, pre-announced by Isaiah: “Behold my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom my soul delights” (Isa 42:1).

The discovery of the identity of the Son, arouses in the three witnesses the fear of God, falling on their faces (Mt 17: 6). Already at the beginning of the Gospel, in the birth of Jesus, the Magi “Entering into the house saw the Child with His mother Mary, and falling to their knees, they did Him homage” (Mt 2: 11). A similar reaction is also found in the Gospel of John, after the self revelation of the Lord, in the account when Jesus was arrested in Gethsemane. Jesus says to them: I am He!” [...] As soon as he said, “I am he”, they moved back and fell on the ground” (Jn 18:5-6). Also in the Book of Revelation, John “in ecstasy” (Rev 1:10), saw “one similar to a son of man [...] his face like the sun shining with all its force” (Rev 1:12-16), and because of all these visions he fell at his feet like dead (Rev 1: 17). The apostle in Rom 14: 11 and Phil 2:10 will proclaim that before the Lord, “in the name of Jesus every knee will bow before Him in heaven, on earth and in the underworld; every tongue shall proclaim that Jesus Christ is the Lord, to the glory of God the Father”.

This vision is strictly linked to the mystery of the Passover, it seems like an apparition of the Risen Jesus in all His glory, it is a pre-announcement of the future life. For this reason, “coming down from the mountain, Jesus ordered them, “Tell no one about this vision until the Son of man has risen from the dead” (Mt 17: 9).

b) To orientate the meditation and the realization:

= Read once again the passage from the Gospel, and find in the Bible all the texts quoted in the key to the reading. Try to find other parallel texts which can help you to penetrate deeper into the text in meditation.

= Some questions:

- i) Have you ever asked yourself who the Person of Christ is? Does your vision of the identity of Jesus correspond to that proclaimed in the Transfiguration?
- ii) What meaning does the proclamation of Jesus as Son of God have in your life?
- iii) Jesus cannot be understood without the Pascal mystery of the Passion, Death and Resurrection. What sense does this mystery have for you? How do you live it daily?

3. ORATIO

a) Psalm 97:

I seek Your face, oh Lord, show me Your face.

Yahweh is king!

Let earth rejoice, the many isles be glad!

Cloud, black cloud enfolds Him,

saving justice and judgement the foundations of His throne.

I seek Your face, oh Lord, show me Your face.

The mountains melt like wax,

before the Lord of all the earth.

The heavens proclaim His saving justice,
all nations see His glory.
For you are Yahweh,
Most High over all the earth, far transcending all gods.

I seek Your face, oh Lord, show me Your face.

b) Concluding prayer:

Let us rejoice, Beloved,
and let us go forth to behold ourselves in your beauty
to the mountain and to the hill,
to where the pure water flows,
and further, deep into the thicket.
(John of the Cross, Spiritual Canticle, 36)

4. CONTEMPLATIO

“Let us go forth to behold ourselves in your beauty”

This means: Let us so act that by means of this loving activity we may attain to the vision of ourselves in your beauty in eternal life. That is: That I be so transformed in your beauty that we may be alike in beauty, and both behold ourselves in your beauty, possessing then your very beauty; this, in such a way that each looking at the other may see in the other their own beauty, since both are your beauty alone, I being absorbed in your beauty; hence, I shall see you in your beauty, and you will see me in your beauty, and I shall see myself in you in your beauty, and you will see yourself in me in your beauty; that I may resemble you in your beauty, and you resemble me in your beauty, and my beauty be your beauty and your beauty my beauty; wherefore I shall be you in your beauty, and you will be me in your beauty, because your very beauty will be my beauty; and thus we shall behold each other in your beauty. (John of the Cross, Spiritual Canticle, 36/5)

Lectio Divina Monday, March 9, 2020

Season of Lent

1) OPENING PRAYER

Just and holy God,
our loving Father,
you offered us Your hand in friendship
and You sent us Your Son Jesus
to go with us on the road
of obedience and loyalty.
God, we often hurt this friendship,
we act as if we were not Your sons and daughters.
See the look of shame on our faces.
Forgive us, for we count on You.

Accept our thanks
for continuing to take us as we are
and loving us notwithstanding our sins.
We ask You this through Christ our Lord.

2) GOSPEL READING - LUKE 6:36-38

Jesus said to his disciples: "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. "Stop judging and you will not be judged. Stop condemning and you will not be condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven. Give and gifts will be given to you; a good measure, packed together, shaken down, and overflowing, will be poured into your lap. For the measure with which you measure will in return be measured out to you."

3) REFLECTION

These three brief verses of today's Gospel (Lk 6:36-38) are the final part of a brief discourse of Jesus (Lk 6:20-38). In the first part of His discourse, He addresses Himself to the disciples (Lk 6:20) and to the rich (Lk 6:24) proclaiming four beatitudes for the disciples (Lk 6:20-23), and four curses for the rich (Lk 6:24-26). In the second part, He addresses Himself to all those who are listening (Lk 6:27), that is, the immense crowd of poor and sick, who had come from all parts (Lk 6:17-19). The words which He addresses to this people and to all of us are demanding and difficult: to love the enemy (Lk 6,27), not curse them (Lk 6:28), offer the other cheek to the one who slaps you on one, and do not complain if someone takes what is ours (Lk 6:29). How can this difficult advice be understood? The explanation is given in the three verses of today's Gospel from which we draw the center of the Good News brought by Jesus.

Luke 6:36: Be merciful as your Heavenly Father is merciful. The Beatitudes for the disciples (Lk 6:20-23) and the curses against the rich (Lk 6:24-26) cannot be interpreted as an occasion for the poor to take revenge against the rich. Jesus orders us to have the contrary attitude. He says: Love your enemies! (Lk 6:27). The change which Jesus wants to bring about in us does not consist in merely changing something to invert the system, because in this way nothing would change. He wants to change the system. The idea which Jesus wants to portray comes from the new experience that He has of God the Father, full of tenderness, who accepts all, good and bad, who makes the sun shine on both the good and on the bad and makes the rain fall on both good and bad (Mt 5:45). True love does not depend, nor can it depend, on what I receive from others. Love must want the good of the other independently of what he does for me. Because this is how God's love is for us. He is merciful not only toward those who are good, but with all, even with the ungrateful and the evil (Lk 6:35). The disciples of Jesus should radiate this merciful love.

Luke 6:37-38: Do not judge and you will not be judged. These last words repeat in a clearer way what Jesus had said before: Treat others as you would like them to treat you (Lk 6:31; cf. Mt 7:12). If you do not want to be judged, do not judge! If you do not want to be condemned, do not condemn. If you want to be forgiven, then forgive! If you want to receive a good measure, give this good measure to others! Do not wait for the other one to take the initiative. You take it and begin now! You will see that it is like this.

4) PERSONAL QUESTIONS

Lent is a time of conversion. Which is the conversion which today's Gospel is asking of me?

Have you already been merciful as the Heavenly Father is?

What are my limits in being merciful and forgiving?

5) CONCLUDING PRAYER

Help us, God our Savior,
for the glory of Your name;
Yahweh, wipe away our sins,
rescue us for the sake of Your name. (Ps 79,9)

Lectio Divina Tuesday, March 10, 2020

Season of Lent

1) OPENING PRAYER

Lord God,
You want us to live our faith
not so much as a set of rules and practices
but as a relationship from person to person
with You and with people.

God, keep our hearts turned to You,
that we may live what we believe
and that we may express our love for You
in terms of service to those around us,
as Jesus did, Your Son,
who lives with You and the Holy Spirit
for ever and ever.

2) GOSPEL READING - MATTHEW 23:1-12

Jesus spoke to the crowds and to his disciples, saying, "The scribes and the Pharisees have taken their seat on the chair of Moses. Therefore, do and observe all things whatsoever they tell you, but do not follow their example. For they preach but they do not practice. They tie up heavy burdens hard to carry and lay them on people's shoulders, but they will not lift a finger to move them. All their works are performed to be seen. They widen their phylacteries and lengthen their tassels. They love places of honor at banquets, seats of honor in synagogues, greetings in marketplaces, and the salutation 'Rabbi.' As for you, do not be called 'Rabbi.' You have but one teacher, and you are all brothers. Call no one on earth your father; you have but one Father in heaven. Do not be called 'Master'; you have but one master, the Christ. The greatest among you must be your servant. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled; but whoever humbles himself will be exalted."

3) REFLECTION

Today's Gospel presents the criticism of Jesus against the scribes and the Pharisees of His time. At the beginning of the missionary activity of Jesus, the doctors of Jerusalem went to Galilee to observe Him (Mk 3:22; 7:1). Disturbed by Jesus' preaching, they had based their attacks on saying that He was possessed (Mk 3:22). All along the three years the popularity of Jesus grew. And at the same time, the conflict between He and the religious authority also grew. The origin of this conflict was the way in which they placed themselves before God. The Pharisees sought their own security, not so much in God's love toward them, but rather in the rigorous observance of the Law. Before this mentality, Jesus insists on the practice of love which makes the observance of the law relative and gives it its true significance.

Matthew 23:1-3: The root or origin of the criticism: They say but they do not do. Jesus recognizes the authority of the scribes and of the Pharisees. They occupy the chair of Moses and teach the law of God, but they themselves do not observe what they teach. So Jesus tells them: You must, therefore, do and observe what they tell you, but do not do as they do, because they say but do not do! This is a terrible criticism! Immediately, as in a mirror, Jesus shows some aspects of the incoherence of the religious authority.

Matthew 23:4-7: Look in the mirror in order to make a revision of life. Jesus calls the attention of the disciples concerning the incoherent behavior of some doctors of the Law. In meditating on this incoherence, it is helpful to think about ourselves and not about the Pharisees and the scribes of that time already past. They tie up heavy burdens and lay them on people's shoulders, but will not lift a finger to move them; they do their works in order to be admired; they love to take the first places and to be called doctors. The scribes liked to enter into the houses of the widows and to recite long prayers to receive money in exchange! (Mk 12:40).

Matthew 23:8-10): You are all brothers. Jesus orders that we have the contrary attitude. Instead of using the religion and the community as means for self-promotion in order to appear more important before others, He asks not to use the title of Rabbi or Teacher, of Master, Father and Guide because only one is the guide, Christ; only God in Heaven is Father, and Jesus is the Master, the Teacher. You are all brothers. This is the basis of the fraternity which comes from the certainty that God is our Father.

Matthew 23:11-12: The final summary: the greatest must be the servant. This phrase is what characterizes both the teaching and the behavior of Jesus: The greatest among you must be your servant; the one who raises himself up, will be humbled (cfr. Mk 10:43; Lk 14:11; 18:14).

4) PERSONAL QUESTIONS

In what does Jesus criticize the Doctors of the Law and in what does He praise them?
In what would He criticize me and in what would He praise me?

5) CONCLUDING PRAYER

'Honor to me is a sacrifice of thanksgiving;
to the upright I will show God's salvation.' (Ps 50:23)

Lectio Divina Wednesday, March 11, 2020

Season of Lent

1) Opening prayer

Lord our God,
your prophets remind us
in season and out of season
of our responsibilities toward You
and toward the world of people.
When they disturb and upset us,
let it be a holy disturbance
that makes us restless, eager to do Your will
and to bring justice and love around us.
We ask You this through Christ our Lord.

2) Gospel Reading - Matthew 20:17-28

As Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, He took the Twelve disciples aside by themselves, and said to them on the way, "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death, and hand him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and scourged and crucified, and He will be raised on the third day." Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee approached Jesus with her sons and did him homage, wishing to ask him for something. He said to her, "What do you wish?" She answered him, "Command that these two sons of mine sit, one at your right and the other at your left, in your kingdom." Jesus said in reply, "You do not know what you are asking. Can you drink the chalice that I am going to drink?" They said to him, "We can." He replied, "My chalice you will indeed drink, but to sit at my right and at my left, this is not mine to give but is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father." When the ten heard this, they became indignant at the two brothers. But Jesus summoned them and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and the great ones make their authority over them felt. But it shall not be so among you. Rather, whoever wishes to be great among you shall be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave. Just so, the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many."

3) Reflection

Today's Gospel presents three points: the third announcement of the Passion (Mt 20:17-19), the petition of the mother of the sons of Zebedee (Mt 20:20-23) and the discussion of the disciples regarding the first place among them (Mt 20:24-28).

Matthew 20:17-19: The third announcement of the Passion. Going toward Jerusalem, Jesus walks in front of them. He knows that He is going to be killed. The Prophet Isaiah had already announced it (Is 50:4-6; 53:1-10). His death is not the fruit of a plan established in advance, but the consequence of the commitment taken concerning the mission received from the Father, to be at the side of the excluded of His time. This is why Jesus speaks to the disciples about the tortures and death that He will have to face in Jerusalem. The disciple should follow the Master, even if He has to suffer like He.

The disciples are frightened and accompany Him with fear. They do not understand what is happening (cfr. Lk 18:34). Suffering did not correspond to the idea that they had of the Messiah (cfr. Mt 16:21-23).

Matthew 20:20-21: The petition of the mother to obtain the first place for her sons. The disciples do not only not understand the importance and significance of the message of Jesus, but they continue with their own personal ambitions. When Jesus insists on service and the gift of oneself, they continue to ask for the first places in the Kingdom. The mother of James and John, taking her sons with her, gets close to Jesus. The two did not understand the proposal of Jesus. They were concerned only about their own interests. This is a sign that the ideology of that time had profoundly penetrated the mentality of the disciples. In spite of the fact of having lived with Jesus several years, they had not renewed their way of seeing things. They looked at Jesus as always, with the same look. They wanted a reward for following Jesus. The same tensions existed in the communities of the time of Matthew and they still exist today in our own communities.

Matthew 20-22-23: Jesus' answer. Jesus reacts firmly: You do not know what you are asking for! And He asks if they are capable of drinking the chalice that he, Jesus, will drink and if they are ready to receive the baptism which He will receive. It is the chalice of suffering, the baptism of blood! Jesus wants to know if they, instead of the places of honor, accept to give their life up to death. Both answer: We can! It seems to be a response not given from within, because a few days later, they abandoned Jesus and left Him alone at the hour of suffering (Mk 14:50). They do not have a great critical knowledge, they do not perceive their personal reality. In what concerns the first place, the place of honor, in the Kingdom at the side of Jesus, the one who grants this is the Father. What he, Jesus, has to offer, is the chalice and the baptism, suffering and the cross.

Matthew 20:24-27: It should not be like that among you: Jesus speaks once again, on the exercise of power (cfr. Mk 9:33-35). At that time those who held power did not give an account to people. They acted as they wished (cfr. Mk 6:27-28). The Roman Empire controlled the world and maintained it with the force of the arms. Through tributes, taxes, it succeeded in concentrating the riches of the people in the hands of a few in Rome. Society was characterized by the repressive and abusive exercise of power. Jesus had an altogether different proposal. He said: It should not be like that among you; the one who wants to become great among you should become a servant, and the one who wants to be the first one among you will become your slave! He teaches against privileges and rivalry. He wants to change the system and insists on that service as the remedy against personal ambition.

Matthew 20:28: The summary of the life of Jesus. Jesus defines His mission and His life: I have not come to be served but to serve! He has come to give His own life for the salvation of many. He is the Messiah Servant, announced by the Prophet Isaiah (cfr. Is 42:1-9; 49:1-6; 50:4-9); 52:13-53:12). He learned from His Mother who said: Behold, the handmaid of the Lord! (Lk 1:38). A totally new proposal for the society of that time.

4) Personal questions

James and John ask for a favor and Jesus promises suffering. What do I ask Jesus for in my prayer? How do I accept suffering and the pains and sorrow which come to me in

my life?

Jesus said: It should not be like that among you! Does my way of living in community follow this advice of Jesus?

5) Concluding Prayer

Draw me out of the net they have spread for me,
for You are my refuge;
into Your hands I commit my spirit,
by You have I been redeemed. God of truth. (Ps 31,4-5)

Lectio Divina Thursday, March 12, 2020

Season of Lent

1) Opening prayer

Lord our God,
many of us never had it so good, and
so we have become smug and self-satisfied, happy in our own little world.
God, may our ears remain open to Your word
and our hearts to You
and to our brothers and sisters.
Do not allow us to forget You,
or to place our trust in ourselves.
Make us restless for You
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

2) Gospel Reading - Luke 16:19-31

Jesus said to the Pharisees: "There was a rich man who dressed in purple garments and fine linen and dined sumptuously each day. And lying at his door was a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who would gladly have eaten his fill of the scraps that fell from the rich man's table. Dogs even used to come and lick his sores. When the poor man died, he was carried away by angels to the bosom of Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried, and from the netherworld, where he was in torment, he raised his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. And he cried out, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me. Send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am suffering torment in these flames.' Abraham replied, 'My child, remember that you received what was good during your lifetime while Lazarus likewise received what was bad; but now he is comforted here, whereas you are tormented. Moreover, between us and you a great chasm is established to prevent anyone from crossing who might wish to go from our side to yours or from your side to ours.' He said, 'Then I beg you, father, send him to my father's house, for I have five brothers, so that he may warn them, lest they too come to this place of torment.' But Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the prophets. Let them listen to them.' He said, 'Oh no, father Abraham, but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.' Then

Abraham said, 'If they will not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone should rise from the dead.'

3) Reflection

- Every time that Jesus has something important to communicate, He creates a story and tells a parable. In this way, through reflection on an invisible reality, He leads those who listen to Him to discover the invisible call of God, who is present in life. A parable is meant to make us think and reflect. For this reason it is important to pay attention to even the smallest details. In the parable in today's Gospel there are three persons: the poor Lazarus, the rich man without a name, and Father Abraham. In the parable, Abraham represents the thought of God. The rich man without a name represents the dominating ideology of that time. Lazarus represents the silent cry of the poor in the time of Jesus and in all times.

- Luke 16:19-21: The situation of the rich man and the poor man. The two extremes of society. On the one side, aggressive richness; on the other, the poor man without resources, without rights, covered with wounds, without anybody to accept him, to receive him, except the dogs which came to lick his wounds. What separates both of them is the closed door of the rich man's house. For the rich man, there is no acceptance nor pity concerning the poor man at his door. But the poor man has a name; the rich man does not. That is, the poor man has his name written in the book of life, not the rich one. The poor man's name is Lazarus. It means God helps. And through the poor man, God helps the rich man who could have a name in the book of life. But the rich man does not allow himself to be helped by the poor man, because he keeps his door closed. The beginning of this parable is a faithful mirror of what was happening during the time of Jesus and the time of Luke. It is a mirror of everything that is happening today in the world!

- Luke 16:22: The change which reveals the hidden truth. The poor man died and was carried away by the angels into Abraham's embrace. The rich man also died and was buried. In the parable the poor man dies before the rich one. This is a warning for the rich. During the time when the poor man is alive and at the door, there is still the possibility of salvation for the rich man. But when the poor man dies, the only instrument of salvation for the rich man also dies. Now, the poor man is in Abraham's embrace. The embrace of Abraham is the source of life, where the people of God were born. Lazarus, the poor man, is part of the people of Abraham, from which he was excluded when he was before the rich man's door. The rich man, who believes that he is a son of Abraham, does not go toward Abraham's embrace! The introduction to the parable ends here. Now its significance begins to be revealed, through the three conversations between the rich man and Father Abraham.

- Luke 16:23-26: The first conversation. In the parable, Jesus opens a window on the other side of life, the side of God. It is not a question of Heaven. It is a question of the life which only faith generates and which the rich man, who has no faith, cannot see. It is only in the light of death that this ideology disintegrates; then appears as what the true value of life is. On the part of God, without the deceptive thinking of the ideology, things change. The rich man sees Lazarus in the arms of Abraham and asks to be helped

in his suffering. The rich man discovers that Lazarus is his only possible benefactor. But now it is too late! The nameless rich man is pious, because he recognizes Abraham and calls him Father. Abraham responds and calls him son. In reality, this word of Abraham is addressed to all the rich who are alive. In so far as they are alive, they have the possibility of becoming sons and daughters of Abraham if they know how to open the door to Lazarus, the poor man, the only one who in God's name can help them. Salvation for the rich man does not consist in Lazarus giving him a drop of fresh water to refresh his tongue, but rather, that he, the rich man, open the closed door to the poor man so as fill the great abyss that exists.

- Luke 16:27-29: The second conversation. The rich man insists: "Then, Father, I beg you to send Lazarus to my father's house, because I have five brothers!" The rich man does not want his brothers to end in this place of suffering. Lazarus, the poor man, is the only true intermediary between God and the rich. He is the only one, because it is only to the poor that the rich have to return what they had and, thus, re-establish the justice which has been damaged! The rich man is worried for his brothers, but was never concerned about the poor! Abraham's response is clear: "They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them!" They have the Bible! The rich man had the Bible. He knew it by heart. But he was never aware that the Bible had something to do with the poor. The rich man's key to understanding the Bible is the poor man sitting at his door!

- Luke 16:30-31: The third conversation. "No, Abraham, but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent!" The rich man recognizes that he is wrong, he has committed an error, because he speaks of repenting, something which he never heard during his life. He wants a miracle, a resurrection! But this type of resurrection does not exist. The only resurrection is that of Jesus. Jesus, risen from the dead comes to us in the person of the poor, of those who have no rights, of those who have no land, of those who have no food, of those who have no house, of those who have no health. In his final response, Abraham is clear and convincing: "If they will not listen either to Moses or to the prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone should rise from the dead!" The conversation ends this way and is the end of the parable!

- The key to understanding the sense of the Bible is the poor Lazarus, sitting before the door! God presents Himself in the person of the poor, sitting at our door, to help us cross the enormous abyss which the rich have created. Lazarus is also Jesus, the poor and servant Messiah, who was not accepted, but whose death changed all things radically. And everything changes in the light of the death of the poor. The place of torment, of torture, is the situation of the person without God. Even if the rich man thinks that he has religion and faith, in fact, he is not with God, because he does not open the door to the poor, as Zacchaeus did (Lk 19:1-10).

4) Personal questions

- How do we treat the poor? Do they have a name? In my attitude toward them, am I like Lazarus or like the rich man?
- When the poor come in contact with me, do they hear the Good News?
- Who do I consider are the poor? There are many kinds of poverty. Identifying these

kinds of poverty should cause us to expand who we help, rather than limit us to “giving a donation” and not becoming personally involved.

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 meditates on His law day and night. (Ps 1:1-2)

Lectio Divina Friday, March 13, 2020

Season of Lent

1) Opening prayer

God, we do not want to die;
we want to live.
We want to be happy
but without paying the price.
We belong to our times,
when sacrifice and suffering are out of fashion.
God, make our life worth living.
Give us back the age-old realization,
that life means to be born
again and again in pain,
that it may become again
a journey of hope to You,
together with Christ Jesus, our Lord.

2) Gospel reading - Matthew 21:33-43,45-46

Jesus said to the chief priests and the elders of the people: "Hear another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a hedge around it, dug a wine press in it, and built a tower. Then he leased it to tenants and went on a journey. When vintage time drew near, he sent his servants to the tenants to obtain his produce. But the tenants seized the servants and one they beat, another they killed, and a third they stoned. Again he sent other servants, more numerous than the first ones, but they treated them in the same way. Finally, he sent his son to them, thinking, 'They will respect my son.' But when the tenants saw the son, they said to one another, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and acquire his inheritance.' They seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. What will the owner of the vineyard do to those tenants when he comes?" They answered him, "He will put those wretched men to a wretched death and lease his vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the proper times." Jesus said to them, "Did you never read in the Scriptures: The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; by the Lord has this been done, and it is wonderful in our eyes? Therefore, I say to you, the Kingdom of God will be taken away from you

and given to a people that will produce its fruit." When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they knew that he was speaking about them. And although they were attempting to arrest him, they feared the crowds, for they regarded him as a prophet.

3) Reflection

- The text of today's Gospel forms part of a greater whole which includes Matthew 21:23-40. The chief priests and the elders had asked Jesus by what authority He did those things (Mt 21:23). They considered themselves the custodians of everything and they did not want anybody to do things without their permission. Jesus' answer is divided into three parts: 1) He, in turn, asks them a question because He wants to know, in their opinion, if John the Baptist was from heaven or from earth (Mt 21:24-27); 2) He then tells them the parable of the two sons (Mt 21:28-32); 3) He tells them the parable of the vineyard (Mt 21:33-46), which is today's Gospel.

- Matthew 21:33-40: The parable of the vineyard. Jesus begins as follows: "Listen to another parable: There was a man, a landowner, who planted a vineyard, he fenced it around, dug a winepress in it and built a tower." The parable is a beautiful summary of the history of Israel, taken from the prophet Isaiah (Is 5:1-7). Jesus addresses Himself to the chief priests, to the elders (Mt 21:23) and to the Pharisees (Mt 21:45) and He gives a response to the question which they addressed to Him about the origin of His authority (Mt 21:23). Through this parable, Jesus clarifies several things: (a) He reveals the origin of His authority: He is the Son, the heir; (b) He denounces the abuse of the authority of the tenants, that is of the priests and elders who were not concerned and did not take care of the people of God; (c) He defends the authority of the prophets, sent by God, but who were killed by the priests and the elders; (d) He unmasks the authority by which they manipulate the religion and kill the Son, because they do not want to lose the source of income which they have accumulated for themselves throughout the centuries.

- Matthew 21:41: The sentence which they give to themselves. At the end of the parable Jesus asks: "Now, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?" They are not aware that the parable was speaking precisely of them. This is why, with the response that they give, they decree their own condemnation: "The chief priests and the elders of the people answered: 'He will bring those wretches to a wretched end and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will deliver the produce to him at the proper time'." Several times Jesus uses this same method. He leads the person to tell the truth about himself, without knowing that he is condemning himself. For example, in the case of the Pharisee who condemns the young woman, considering her a sinner (Luke 7:42-43), and in the case of the parable of the two sons (Mt 21:28-32).

- Matthew 21:42-46: The sentence given by themselves was confirmed by their behavior. From the clarification given by Jesus, the chief priests, the elders and the Pharisees understand that the parable is about them, but they do not convert. Rather, they keep to their own plan to kill Jesus. They will reject "the cornerstone." But they do not have the courage to do it openly because they fear the reaction of the people.

- The diverse groups which held the power at the time of Jesus. In today's Gospel three groups appear, which, at that time, governed: the priests, the elders and the Pharisees. Then, some brief information on the power which each of these groups and others had is given:

a) The priests: They were the ones in charge of the worship in the Temple. The people paid the Temple a tithe and other taxes and offerings. The High Priest occupied a very important place in the life of the nation, especially after the exile. He was chosen and appointed from among the three or four aristocratic families who possessed more power and riches.

b) The elders or the Chief Priests of the People: They were the local leaders in the different villages of the city. Their origin came from the heads of the ancient tribes.

c) The Sadducees: they were the lay aristocratic elite of society who wanted to maintain a priestly caste. Many of them were rich merchants or landlords. From the religious point of view they were liberal in their willingness to incorporate Hellenism into their lives. They did not accept the changes supported by the Pharisees, for example, faith in the resurrection and the existence of angels.

d) The Pharisees: Pharisee means "separated." They believed in the Oral Law handed down from Moses and that through the perfect observance of the Law of purity, people would succeed in being pure, separated and holy as the Law and Tradition demanded! Because of the exemplary witness of their life according to the norms of the time, their moral authority was widespread in the villages of Galilee.

e) Scribe or doctor of the Law: They were the ones in charge of teaching. They dedicated their life to the study of the Law of God and taught people what to do to observe all the Law of God. Not all the Scribes belonged to the same line. Some were united with the Pharisees, others with the Sadducees.

4) Personal questions

- Have you sometimes felt that you were unduly controlled or misunderstood? What was your reaction? Was it the same as that of Jesus?
- If Jesus returned today and told us the same parable, would it be as relevant? What would the reaction be from society and on a personal level?

5) Concluding prayer

As far as heaven is above the earth,
so strong is the faithful love of the Lord for those who fear Him.
As far as the east is from the west,
so far from us does He put our faults. (Ps 103:11-12)

Lectio Divina Saturday, March 14, 2020

Season of Lent

1) Opening prayer

Faithful Father, You are our God
of grace, mercy and forgiveness.
When mercy and pardon
sound paternalistic to modern ears, make us realize, Lord,
that You challenge us to face ourselves
and to become new people,
responsible for our destiny
and for the happiness of others.
Make us responsive to Your love
through Christ Jesus our Lord.

2) Gospel Reading - Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

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 to them Jesus addressed this parable. "A man had two sons, and the younger son said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of your estate that should come to me.' So the father divided the property between them. After a few days, the younger son collected all his belongings and set off to a distant country where he squandered his inheritance on a life of dissipation. When he had freely spent everything, a severe famine struck that country, and he found himself in dire need. So he hired himself out to one of the local citizens who sent him to his farm to tend the swine. And he longed to eat his fill of the pods on which the swine fed, but nobody gave him any. Coming to his senses he thought, 'How many of my father's hired workers have more than enough food to eat, but here am I, dying from hunger. I shall get up and go to my father and I shall say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son; treat me as you would treat one of your hired workers."' So he got up and went back to his father. While he was still a long way off, his father caught sight of him, and was filled with compassion. He ran to his son, embraced him and kissed him. His son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son.' But his father ordered his servants, 'Quickly, bring the finest robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Take the fattened calf and slaughter it. Then let us celebrate with a feast, because this son of mine was dead, and has come to life again; he was lost, and has been found.' Then the celebration began. Now the older son had been out in the field and, on his way back, as he neared the house, he heard the sound of music and dancing. He called one of the servants and asked what this might mean. The servant said to him, 'Your brother has returned and your father has slaughtered the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.' He became angry, and when he refused to enter the house, his father came out and pleaded with him. He said to his father in reply, 'Look, all these years I served you and not once did I disobey your orders; yet you never gave me even a young goat to feast on with my friends. But when your son returns who swallowed up your property

with prostitutes, for him you slaughter the fattened calf.' He said to him, 'My son, you are here with me always; everything I have is yours. But now we must celebrate and rejoice, because your brother was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.'"

3) Reflection

- Chapter 15 of Luke's Gospel includes the following information: The tax collectors and sinners were all crowding around to listen to Him and the Pharisees and Scribes complained saying, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them" (Lk 15:1-3). Luke presents these three parables which are bound together by the same theme: the lost sheep (Lk 15:4-7), the lost drachma (Lk 15:8-10), the lost son (Lk 15:11-32). This last parable constitutes the theme of today's Gospel.

- Luke 15:11-13: The younger son's decision. A man had two sons. The younger one asks for the part of the estate which will be his. The father divides everything between the two and each receives his part. To receive the inheritance is not any merit of ours. It is a gratuitous gift. The inheritance of the gifts of God is distributed among all human beings, whether Jewish or Gentiles, whether Christians or non-Christians. All receive something of the inheritance of the Father, but not all take care of it in the same way. The younger son leaves and goes to a distant country and squanders his money on a life of debauchery, getting away from the father. At the time of Luke, the elder one represented the communities which came from Judaism, and the younger represented the gentile communities. Today, who would be the younger and who the elder?

- Luke 15:14-19: The disillusionment and the will to return to the father's home. The need to find some food makes the young man lose his freedom, and he becomes a farm worker and takes care of the pigs. This was the condition of life of millions of slaves in the Roman Empire at the time of Luke. The situation in which he finds himself makes the young man remember how he was in his father's home. Finally, he prepares the words which he will say to his Father: "I no longer deserve to be called your son! Treat me as one of your hired men!" The hired man executes the orders and fulfills the law of servants. The younger son wants to fulfill the law as the Pharisees and the Scribes of the time of Jesus wanted (Lk 15:1). The missionaries of the Pharisees accused the Gentiles who were converted to the God of Abraham (Mt 23:15). At the time of Luke, some Christians who converted from Judaism submitted themselves to the yoke of the Law (Gal 1:6-10).

- Luke 15:20-24: The joy of the father when he meets his younger son again. The parable says that the younger son was still a long way off from the house, but the father saw him, and ran to the boy, clasped him in his arms and kissed him. The impression given by Jesus is that the Father remained all the time at the window to see if his son would appear around the corner. According to our human way of thinking and feeling, the joy of the father seems exaggerated. He does not even allow his son to finish his words. Nobody listens! The father does not want his son to be his slave. He wants him to be his son! This is the Good News which Jesus has brought to us! A new robe, new sandals, a ring on his finger, the calf, the feast! In the immense joy of the encounter, Jesus allows us to see how great the sadness of the father is because of the loss of his son. God was

very sad and the people now become aware of this, seeing the immense joy of the father because of the encounter with his son! It is joy shared with all in the feast that he has prepared.

- Luke 15:25-28b: The reaction of the older son. The older son returns from his work in the fields and finds that there is a feast in the house. He refuses to enter. He wants to know what is happening. When he is told the reason for the feast, he is very angry and does not want to go in. He thinks that he is in the right. He does not like the feast and he does not understand the why of his father's joy. This is a sign that he did not have great intimacy with the father, in spite of their having lived in the same house. In fact, if he had had this intimacy, he would have noticed the father's sadness for the loss of his younger son and would have understood his joy when the son returned. Those who live in a state of anxiety about the observance of the Law of God run the risk of forgetting God himself! The young son, even being far away from home, seemed to know the father better than the older son who lived with him. The younger one had the courage to go back home to his father, while the older one no longer wants to enter the father's house. He does not realize that the father, without him, will lose his joy, because he, the older son, is son as much as the younger one!

- Luke 15:28a-30: The attitude of the father and the older son's response. The Father goes out of the house and begs the older son to come inside. But the son answers, "All these years I have slaved for you and never once disobeyed any orders of yours, yet you never offered me so much as a kid for me to celebrate with my friends. But for this son of yours, when he comes back after swallowing up your property, he and his loose women, you kill the calf we had been fattening." The older son also wants feast and joy, but only with his own friends, not with his brother and much less with his father. He does not even call his own brother "brother," but rather "this son of yours," as if he were no longer his brother. And he, the older brother, speaks about prostitutes. His malice makes him interpret his younger brother's life in this way. How many times does the older brother misinterpret the life of the younger brother. How many times do we misinterpret the life and the practices of others! The attitude of the father is the contrary! He accepts the younger son but does not want to lose the older son. Both of them form part of the family. One cannot exclude the other!

- Luke 15:31-32: The father's final response. Like the father who does not pay attention to the arguments of the younger son, in the same way he does not pay attention to those of the older son. He says, "My son, you are with me always and all I have is yours, but it was only right we should celebrate and rejoice, because your brother here was dead and has come to life; he was lost and is found!" Was the older son really aware that he was always with his father and found in his presence the reason for his joy? The father's declaration - "All I have is yours!" also includes the younger son who has returned! The older brother does not have the right to make a distinction, and if he wants to be the father's son, he has to accept the father as he is and not as he would like him to be! The parable does not say what was the older brother's final response. It is up to the older son, who we are, to give it!

- The one who experiences the gratuitous and surprising eruption of the love of God in his life becomes joyful and wishes to communicate this joy to others. The salvific action

of God is a source of joy: “Rejoice with me!” (Lk 15:6,9). And from this experience of God’s gratuitousness the sense of feast and joy emerges (Lk 15:32). At the end of the parable, the father asks them to be happy and to celebrate, to feast. The joy is threatened by the older son, who does not want to enter the house. He thinks he has the right to joy only with his own friends and does not want to share joy with all the members of the same human family. He represents those who consider themselves just and observant, and who think that they do not need any conversion, just like the keepers of the Law in Jesus’ time.

4) Personal questions

- What is the image of God that I have had since my childhood? Has it changed as I changed, and why?
- With which of the two sons do I identify with: the younger one or the older one? Why?
- This parable has references to communities (Pharisees/Gentiles) as well as to individuals. Do those references apply today?

5) Concluding Prayer

Bless Yahweh, my soul,
from the depths of my being, His holy name;
bless Yahweh, my soul,
never forget all His acts of kindness. (Ps 103:1-2)

Lectio Divina Sunday, March 15, 2020

The Meeting of Jesus with the Samaritan Woman

A Dialogue that brings new life

John 4:5-42

1. Opening prayer

Lord Jesus, send Your Spirit to help us read the Scriptures in the same way that You read them to the disciples on the road to Emmaus. With the light of the Word in the Bible, You helped them to discover the presence of God in the distressing events surrounding Your condemnation to death. The cross, which seemed to put an end to all hope, was revealed to them as the source of life and resurrection.

Create in us the silence necessary to hear Your voice in creation and in the Scriptures, in the events of daily life and in people, above all in the poor and the suffering. May Your word give us direction, just as it did to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, so that we too will experience the power of Your resurrection and bear witness to others that You are alive in our midst as the source of community, of justice and of peace. We ask this of You, Jesus, son of Mary, You who revealed the Father to us and sent us Your Spirit. Amen.

2. Reading

a) A key for unlocking the text:

The text describes the dialogue between Jesus and the Samaritan woman. It is a very human conversation, which shows how Jesus related to people and how He Himself learned and became enriched in talking with others. While reading the text, try to be aware of what surprises you most about the attitude both of Jesus and the woman.

b) A division of the text to assist a careful reading:

Jn 4:5-6: Sets the scene in which the dialogue takes place

Jn 4:7-26: Describes the dialogue between Jesus and the woman

7-15: about water and thirst

16-18: about the husband and family

19-25: about religion and the place for adoration

Jn 4:27-30: Describes the effect of the conversation on the woman

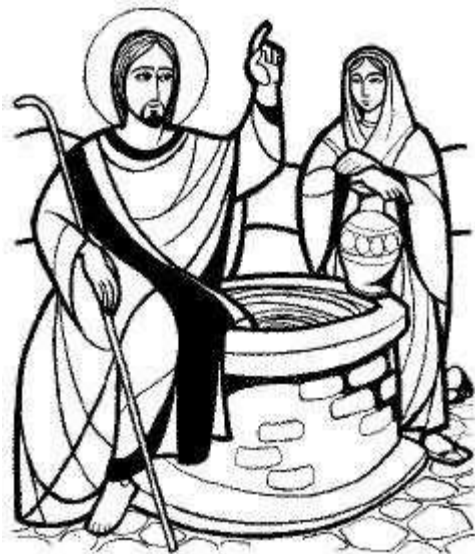
Jn 4:31-38: Describes the effect of the conversation on Jesus

Jn 4:39-42: Describes the effect on the mission of Jesus in Samaria

c) The text:

5-6: So He came to a city of Samaria, called Sychar, near the field that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and so Jesus, wearied as He was from His journey, sat down beside the well. It was about the sixth hour.

7-15: There came a woman of Samaria to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." For His disciples had gone away into the city to buy food. The Samaritan woman said to Him, "How is it that You, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans. Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water." The woman said to Him, "Sir, you have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep; where do you get that living water? Are You greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank from it himself, and his sons, and his cattle?" Jesus said to her, "Every one who drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst; the water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." The woman said to Him, "Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw."



16-18: Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here." The woman answered Him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and he whom you now have is not your husband; this you said truly."

19-26: The woman said to Him, "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain; and you say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship." Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for such the Father seeks to worship Him. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." The woman said to Him, "I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ); when he comes, he will show us all things." Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am He."

27-30: Just then His disciples came. They marvelled that He was talking with a woman, but none said, "What do you wish?" or, "Why are You talking with her?" So the woman left her water jar, and went away into the city, and said to the people, "Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?" They went out of the city and were coming to Him.

31-38: Meanwhile the disciples besought Him, saying, "Rabbi, eat." But He said to them, "I have food to eat of which you do not know." So the disciples said to one another, "Has any one brought Him food?" Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent me, and to accomplish His work. Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, then comes the harvest? I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see how the fields are already white for harvest. He who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor; others have labored, and you have entered into their labor."

39-42: Many Samaritans from that city believed in Him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me all that I ever did." So when the Samaritans came to Him, they asked Him to stay with them; and He stayed there two days. And many more believed because of His word. They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of your words that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world."

3. A moment of silent prayer

so that the Word of God can enter into us and light up our lives.

4. Some questions

to help us in our meditation and prayer.

- a) What most attracted your attention in Jesus' attitude toward the woman during the dialogue? What method did Jesus use to help the woman become aware of a deeper dimension to life?
- b) What most attracted your attention about the attitude of the Samaritan woman during her conversation with Jesus? How did she influence Jesus?
- c) Where in the Old Testament is water associated with the gift of life and the gift of the Holy Spirit?
- d) How does Jesus' attitude during the conversation question me or touch something within me or correct me?
- e) The Samaritan woman led the discussion towards religion. If you could come across Jesus and talk to Him, what would you like to talk about? Why?
- f) Do I adore God in spirit and in truth or do I find my security in rituals and regulations?

5. A key to the reading

for those who wish to go deeper.

a) The symbolism of water:

* Jesus uses the word water in two senses. The first sense is the material, normal sense of water that one drinks; the second is the symbolic sense as the source of life and the gift of the Spirit. Jesus uses a language that people can understand and, at the same time, awakens in them the desire to go deeper and to discover a more profound meaning to life.

* The symbolic sense of water has its roots in the Old Testament, where it is frequently a symbol for the action of the Spirit of God in people. For example, Jeremiah compares running water to water in a cistern (Jer 2:13). The more water is taken from a cistern, the less it has; the more water is taken from a stream of living water, the more it has. Other texts from the Old Testament: Isa 12:3; 49:10; 55:1; Ezek 47:1-3. Jesus knew the traditions of His people and He uses these in His conversation with the Samaritan woman. Suggesting the symbolic meaning of water, He suggests to her (and to the readers) various episodes and verses from the Old Testament.

b) The dialogue between Jesus and the woman:

* Jesus meets the woman at the well, a traditional place for meetings and conversations (Gen 24:10-27; 29:1-14). He starts off from His own very real need because He is thirsty. He does this in such a way that the woman feels needed and she serves Him. Jesus makes Himself needy in her regard. From His question, he makes it possible for the woman to become aware that He depends on her to give Him something to drink. Jesus awakens in her the desire to help and to serve.

* The conversation between Jesus and the woman has two levels.

(i) **The superficial level**, in the material sense of water that quenches someone's thirst, and in the normal sense of husband as the father of a family. At this level the

conversation is tense and difficult and does not flow. The Samaritan woman has the upper hand. At the beginning, Jesus tries to meet her by talking about daily chores (fetching water), but He does not succeed. Then He tries by talking about family (call your husband), and still there is no breakthrough. Finally the woman speaks about religion (the place of adoration). Jesus then gets through to her by the door she herself has opened.

(ii) **The deeper level**, in the symbolic sense of water as the image of the new life brought by Jesus, and of the husband as the symbol of the union of God with the people. At this level, the conversation flows perfectly. After revealing that He Himself is offering the water of new life, Jesus says, "Go and get your husband and then return". In the past, the Samaritans had five husbands, or five idols, attached to the five groups of people who were taken off by the King of Assyria (2 Kings 17:30-31). The sixth husband, the one the woman had at present, was not truly her husband: "the one you have now is not your husband" (Jn 4:18). What the people had did not respond to their deepest desire: union with God, as a husband who unites himself to his spouse (Isa 62:5; 54:5). The true husband, the seventh, is Jesus, as promised by Hosea: "I will espouse you to me forever; I will espouse you in right and in justice, in love and in mercy. I will espouse you in fidelity, and you shall know the Lord." (Hos 2: 21-22). Jesus is the bridegroom who has arrived (Mk 2: 19) to bring new life to the woman who has been searching for it her whole life long, and until now, has never found it. If the people accept Jesus as "husband", they will have access to God wherever they are, both in spirit and in truth (vv. 23-24).

* Jesus declares His thirst to the Samaritan woman but He does not drink. This is a sign that we are talking about a symbolic thirst, which had to do with His mission: the thirst to accomplish the will of His Father (Jn 4:34). This thirst is ever present in Jesus and will be until His death. At the moment of His death, He says, "I am thirsty" (Jn 19: 28). He declares His thirst for the last time and so He can say, "It is accomplished." Then He bowed His head and gave up His spirit. (Jn 19:30). His mission had been accomplished.

c) The importance of women in the Gospel of John:

* In John's Gospel, women feature prominently seven times, which are decisive for the spreading of the Good News. To women are given functions and missions, some of which, in the other Gospels, are attributed to men:

- At the wedding feast in Cana, the mother of Jesus recognizes the limits of the Old Testament and affirms the law of the Gospel, "Do whatever He tells you". (Jn 2:1-11).

- The Samaritan woman is the first person to have revealed to her by Jesus the great secret, that He is the Messiah. "It is I who speak to you." (Jn 4:26). She then becomes the evangelizer of Samaria (Jn 4: 28-30, 39-42).

- The woman, who is called an adulteress, at the moment of receiving the forgiveness of Jesus, becomes the judge of the patriarchal society (or of male power) that seeks to condemn her. (Jn 8:1-11).

- In the other Gospels it is Peter who makes the solemn profession of faith in Jesus (Mt 16: 16; Mk 8:29; Lk 9:20). In the Gospel of John, it is Martha, sister of Mary and Lazarus, who makes the solemn profession of faith (Jn 11:27).

- Mary, the sister of Martha, anoints the feet of Jesus for the day of his burial (Jn. 12:7). At the time of Jesus, the one who died on a cross was not buried nor embalmed. Mary anticipated the anointing of Jesus' body. This means that she accepted Jesus as the Messiah-Suffering Servant, who must die on the cross. Peter did not accept this (Jn.13:8) and sought to dissuade Jesus from this path (Mt. 16:22). In this way, Mary is presented as a model for the other disciples.

- At the foot of the cross, Jesus says, "Woman, behold your son; son, behold your mother" (Jn. 19:25-27). The Church is born at the foot of the cross. Mary is the model for the Christian community.

- Mary Magdalene must announce the Good News to the brothers (Jn. 20:11-18). She receives an order, without which all the other orders given to the apostles would have no effect or value.

* The Mother of Jesus appears twice in John's Gospel: at the beginning, at the wedding feast in Cana (Jn. 2:1-5), and at the end, at the foot of the cross (Jn. 19:25-27). In both cases, she represents the Old Testament that waits for the arrival of the New, and, in both cases, assists its arrival. Mary unites what has gone before with what would come later. At Cana, it is she, the Mother of Jesus, symbol of the Old Testament, who perceives its limits and takes steps so that the New will arrive. At the hour of Jesus' death, it is the Mother of Jesus, who welcomes the "Beloved Disciple". In this case the Beloved Disciple is the new community, which has grown around Jesus. It is the child that has been born from the Old Testament. In response to Jesus' request, the son, the New Testament, welcomes the Mother, the Old Testament, into his home. The two must journey together. The New Testament cannot be understood without the Old. It would be a building without a foundation. The Old without the New would be incomplete. It would be a tree without fruit.

6. Psalm 19 (18)

God speaks to us through nature and through the Bible

The heavens are telling the glory of God;
and the firmament proclaims His handiwork.
Day to day pours forth speech,
and night to night declares knowledge.

There is no speech, nor are there words;
their voice is not heard;
yet their voice goes out through all the earth,
and their words to the end of the world.

In them He has set a tent for the sun,
which comes forth like a bridegroom leaving his chamber,
and like a strong man runs its course with joy.

Its rising is from the end of the heavens,
and its circuit to the end of them;
and there is nothing hid from its heat.

The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul;
the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple;
the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart;
the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes.

The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever;
the ordinances of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether.
More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold;
sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb.

Moreover by them is Thy servant warned;
in keeping them there is great reward.
But who can discern his errors?
Clear thou me from hidden faults.

Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins;
let them not have dominion over me!
Then I shall be blameless,
and innocent of great transgression.

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord,
my rock and my redeemer.

7. Final Prayer

Lord Jesus, we thank You for Your word, which has helped us see better the will of the Father. Let Your Spirit illumine all that we do and give us the strength to carry out what Your Word has made us see. Let us, like Mary, Your Mother, not only listen to the Word but also put it into practice. You who live and reign with the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit forever and ever. Amen.

Lectio Divina Monday, March 16, 2020

Season of Lent

1) Opening prayer

Just and holy God,
our loving Father,
You offered us Your hand in friendship
and You sent us Your Son Jesus
to go with us on the road
of obedience and loyalty. God, we often hurt this friendship;
we act as if we were not Your sons and daughters.
See the look of shame on our faces.

Forgive us, for we count on You.
Accept our thanks
for continuing to take us as we are
and loving us notwithstanding our sins.
We ask You this through Christ our Lord.

2) Gospel Reading - Luke 4:24-30

Jesus said to the people in the synagogue at Nazareth: “Amen, I say to you, no prophet is accepted in his own native place. Indeed, I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah when the sky was closed for three and a half years and a severe famine spread over the entire land. It was to none of these that Elijah was sent, but only to a widow in Zarephath in the land of Sidon. Again, there were many lepers in Israel during the time of Elisha the prophet; yet not one of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian.” When the people in the synagogue heard this, they were all filled with fury. They rose up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town had been built, to hurl him down headlong. But he passed through the midst of them and went away.

3) Reflection

- Today’s Gospel (Lk 4:24-30) forms part of a larger part (Lk 4:14-32). Jesus had presented His program in the synagogue of Nazareth, using a text from Isaiah which spoke about the poor, the prisoners, the blind and the oppressed (Is 61:1-2) and which mirrored the situation of the people of Galilee at the time of Jesus. In the name of God, Jesus takes a stand and defines His mission: to proclaim the Good News to the poor, to proclaim release to prisoners, to give back sight to the blind, to restore liberty to the oppressed. After finishing the reading, He updates the text and says, “Today this text is being fulfilled even while you are listening!” (Lk 4:21). All those present were astonished (Lk 4:16, 22b). But immediately after there was a reaction to discredit. The people in the synagogue were scandalized and did not want to know anything about Jesus. They said, “Is He not the son of Joseph?” (Lk 4:22b). Why were they scandalized? What is the reason for this [unexpected] reaction?
- Because Jesus quoted the text from Isaiah only to the part that says, “to proclaim a year of favor from the Lord,” and He omits the end of the sentence, which says, “to proclaim a day of vengeance for our God” (Is 61:2). The people of Nazareth remained surprised because Jesus omitted the phrase on vengeance. They wanted the Good News of the liberation of the oppressed to be an action of vengeance on the part of God against the oppressors. In this case the coming of the Kingdom would be only a superficial social change, and not a change or conversion of the system. Jesus does not accept this way of thinking. His experience of God the Father helps Him to understand better the significance of the prophecies. He takes away the vengeance. The people of Nazareth do not accept that proposal, and the authority of Jesus begins to diminish: “Is He not Joseph’s son?”
- Luke 4:24: No prophet is ever accepted in his own country. Jesus answers, “No prophet is ever accepted in his own country!” In fact, they did not accept the new image of God which Jesus communicated to them through this new and freer interpretation of Isaiah.

The message of the God of Jesus went beyond the limits of the Jewish people and opened itself to accept the excluded and all humanity.

- Luke 4:25-27: Two stories of the Old Testament. In order to help the community to get beyond the scandal and to understand the universality of God, Jesus uses two well known stories of the Old Testament: one of Elijah and the other one of Elisha. Through these stories He criticized the people of Nazareth who were so closed up in themselves. Elijah was sent to the foreign widow of Zarephah (1 Kg 17:7-16). Elisha was sent to take care of Naaman of Syria (2 Kg 5:14). The people of Nazareth felt threatened by this. Paul makes a similar statement with similar results too (Acts 22:21)

- Luke 4:28-30: They intended to throw Him off the cliff, but He passed straight through the crowd and walked away. What Jesus said did not calm the people down. On the contrary! The use of these two biblical passages caused them to become more angry. The community of Nazareth reached the point of wanting to kill Jesus. And thus, at the moment in which He presented His plan to accept the excluded, Jesus Himself was excluded! But He remained calm! The anger of the others did not make Him change His mind. In this way, Luke indicates that it is difficult to overcome the mentality of privilege which is closed up in itself. And he showed that the polemic attitude of the gentiles had already existed in the time of Jesus. Jesus had the same difficulty which Luke had with the Hebrew community in his time.

4) Personal questions

- How do I carry on the gift of the Good News in the world today?
- Who are the excluded whom we should accept more warmly in our community?
- Does taking on poverty, oppression, or blindness (in all its forms) start on a personal level and spread to my community, or do I wait for the community to act before taking personal action?

5) Concluding Prayer

My whole being yearns
and pines for Yahweh's courts;
My heart and my body cry out
for joy to the living God. (Ps 84:2)

Lectio Divina Tuesday, March 17, 2020

Season of Lent

1) Opening prayer

Lord God,
You want us to live our faith
not so much as a set of rules and practices
but as a relationship from person to person
with You and with people. Keep our hearts turned to You,
that we may live what we believe

and that we may express our love for You
in terms of service to those around us,
as Jesus did, Your Son,
who lives with You and the Holy Spirit
forever and ever. Amen.

2) Gospel Reading - Matthew 18:21-35

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

3) Reflection

- Today's Gospel speaks to us about the need for pardon. It is not easy to forgive, because certain grief and pain continue to burn in the heart. There are people who say, "I forgive, but I do not forget!" Rancor, tensions, diverse opinions, insults, offenses, provocations, all renders pardon and reconciliation difficult. Let us try to meditate on the words of Jesus which speak about reconciliation (Mt 18:21-22) and which speak to us about the parable of pardon without limits (Mt 18:23-35).
- Matthew 18:21-22: To forgive seventy-seven times! Jesus had spoken of the importance of pardon and of the need of knowing how to accept the brothers and sisters to help them to reconcile with the community (Mt 18:15-20) Prior to these words of Jesus, Peter asks, "How often should I forgive my brother if he wrongs me? As often as seven times?" Number seven indicates perfection. In this case, it was synonymous with always. Jesus goes far beyond Peter's proposal. He eliminates any possibility of limitation to pardon: "Not seven, I tell you, but seventy-seven times!" That is, seventy times always! There is no proportion between the pardon which we receive from God and the pardon which we should offer to our brother or sister, as the parable of pardon without limit teaches us.
- The expression seventy-seven times was a clear reference to the words of Lamech who

said, “I killed a man for wounding me, a boy for striking me. Seven fold vengeance for Cain but seventy-seven fold for Lamech” (Gen 4:23-24). Jesus wants to invert the spiral of violence which entered the world because of the disobedience of Adam and Eve, because of the killing of Abel by Cain and for the vengeance of Lamech. When uncontrolled violence invades life, everything goes wrong and life disintegrates.

- Matthew 18:23-35: The parable of pardon without limits. The denarii was the coin in daily use at the time. 1 talent equaled 3,000 shekel or 6,000 denarii. Thus, the debt of ten thousand talents was approximately 60,000,000 denarii! There is no comparison between the two! Even if the debtor together with his wife and children set to work their whole life, they would never be capable of earning this much. Before God’s love, which forgives gratuitously our debt of 60 million, it is more than just on our part to forgive gratuitously the debt of a single coin, seventy times always! The only limit to the gratuity of pardon of God is our incapacity to forgive our brother! (Mt 18:33-34; 6:15)

- The community, an alternative place of solidarity and fraternity: the society of the Roman Empire was hard and without a heart, without any room for the little ones. They sought refuge for the heart and did not find it. The synagogue was also demanding and did not offer them any place. And in the Christian communities, the rigor of some in the observance of the Law made life together difficult because they used the same criteria as the synagogue. Besides this, toward the end of the first century, in the Christian communities, the same divisions which existed in society between rich and poor began to appear (Jas 2:1-9). Instead of making the community a place of acceptance, they ran the risk of becoming a place of condemnation and conflict. Matthew wants to enlighten the communities, so that these may be an alternative space of solidarity and of fraternity. They should be Good News for the poor.

4) Personal questions

- Why is it so difficult to forgive?
- How do we accomplish reconciliation in our community?
- What is the best way to approach forgiveness and forgetting while still protecting the vulnerable in our care or in our community?

5) Concluding Prayer

Direct me in Your ways, Yahweh,
and teach me Your paths.
Encourage me to walk in Your truth
and teach me, since You are the God who saves me.
For my hope is in You all day long. (Ps 25:4-5)

Lectio Divina Wednesday, March 18, 2020

1) Opening prayer

Lord our God,
Your prophets remind us
in season and out of season

of our responsibilities toward You
and toward the world of people.
When they disturb and upset us,
let it be a holy disturbance
that makes us restless, eager to do Your will
and to bring justice and love around us.
We ask You this through Christ our Lord.

2) Gospel Reading - Matthew 5:17-19

Jesus said to his disciples: “Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. Amen, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or the smallest part of a letter will pass from the law, until all things have taken place. Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do so will be called least in the Kingdom of heaven. But whoever obeys and teaches these commandments will be called greatest in the Kingdom of heaven.”

3) Reflection

- Today’s Gospel (Mt 5:17-19) teaches how to observe the law of God in its complete fulfillment (Mt 5:17-19). Matthew writes in order to help the communities of converted Jews overcome the criticism of the brothers of their own race who accused them, saying, “You are unfaithful to the Law of Moses.” Jesus Himself had been accused of infidelity to the Law of God. Matthew has Jesus’ clarifying response to His accusers. Thus, Matthew sheds some light to help the communities solve their problems.
- Using images of daily life, with simple and direct words, Jesus had said that the mission of the community, its reason for being, is that of being salt and light! He had given some advice regarding each one of the two images. Then follow the brief verses of today’s Gospel.
- Matthew 5:17-18: Not one dot, nor one stroke is to disappear from the Law. There were several different tendencies in the first Christian communities. Some thought that it was not necessary to observe the laws of the Old Testament, because we are saved by faith in Jesus and not by the observance of the Law (Rm 3:21-26). Others accepted Jesus, the Messiah, but they did not accept the liberty of spirit with which some of the communities lived the message of Jesus. They thought that, being Jews, they had to continue to observe the laws of the Old Testament (Acts 15:1,5). But there were Christians who lived so fully in the freedom of the Spirit, who no longer looked at the life of Jesus of Nazareth, nor to the Old Testament that they even went so far as to say, “Anathema Jesus!” (1 Cor 12:3). Observing these tensions, Matthew tries to find some balance between both extremes. The community should be a place where the balance can be attained and lived. Jesus’ answer to those who criticized Him continued to be relevant for the communities: “I have not come to abolish the law, but to complete it!” The communities could not be against the Law, nor could they close themselves off in the observance of the Law. Like Jesus, they should advance and show in practice, the objective that the Law wanted to attain in people’s lives, that is, in the perfect practice of love.

• Matthew 5:17-18: Not one dot or stroke will disappear from the Law. It is for those who wanted to get rid of the law altogether that Matthew recalls the other parable of Jesus: “Anyone who breaks even one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be considered the least in the Kingdom of Heaven; but the person who keeps them and teaches them will be considered great in the Kingdom of Heaven.” The great concern in Matthew’s Gospel is to show that the Old Testament, Jesus of Nazareth, and the life in the Spirit cannot be separated. The three of them form part of the same and unique plan of God and communicate to us the certainty of faith: The God of Abraham and of Sarah is present in the midst of the community by faith in Jesus of Nazareth who sends us His Spirit.

4) Personal questions

- How do I see and live God’s law: as a freedom to do anything I please, as an imposition which restricts me, or as a guide to grow in love?
- What can we do today for our brothers and sisters who consider all of this type of discussion as obsolete and not relevant?
- How does this view of the Law and the Commandments affect me? As a line which defines sin, as rules to avoid vice, or as a guide in attaining virtue?

5) Concluding Prayer

Praise Yahweh, Jerusalem,
Zion, praise your God.
For He gives strength to the bars of your gates,
He blesses your children within you. (Ps 145:12-13)

Lectio Divina Thursday, March 19, 2020

Matthew 1:16.18-21.24a

Joseph, the Spouse of Mary, the Mother of Jesus

1. LECTIO

a) Opening prayer:

Spirit who moves over the water,
calm in us all discordance,
the agitated waves, the noise of the words,
the whirlwind of vanity,
and make the Word which recreates,
arise in silence.

Spirit who in a sigh you whisper
to our spirit the Name of the Father,
come and gather together all our desires,
make them grow in a beam of light
which will be a response to Your light,
the Word of the new Day.

Spirit of God, the sap of love
of the immense tree on which you graft us,
so that all our brothers and sisters
will seem to us as a gift
in the great Body in which
the Word of communion matures.
(Frère Pierre-Yves of Taizé)

b) Reading of the Gospel: Matthew 1:16, 18-21, 24a

Jacob was the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary. Of her was born Jesus who is called the Christ. Now this is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about. When his mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found with child through the Holy Spirit. Joseph her husband, since he was a righteous man, yet unwilling to expose her to shame, decided to divorce her quietly. Such was his intention when, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her. She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." When Joseph awoke, he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took his wife into his home.

c) A moment of silence:

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

2. MEDITATIO

a) A key to the reading:

The passage of today's Gospel is taken from the first chapter of the Gospel of Matthew which forms part of the section concerning the conception, birth and infancy of Jesus. The center of all this account is the person of Jesus around which are all the events and the persons mentioned. One must keep in mind that the Gospel reveals a theology of the history of Jesus, and so getting close to the Word of God we should get the message which is hidden under the veils of the account without losing ourselves, as Paul so wisely advises us "in foolish speculations", avoiding "those genealogies and the quibbles and disputes about the Law, they are useless and futile" (Tt 3:9).

In fact, this text is connected to the genealogy of Jesus, which Matthew arranges with the intention of stressing the dynastic succession of Jesus, the Savior of his people (Mt 1:21). To Jesus are conferred all the rights inherited from the lineage of David, of "Joseph, son of David" (Mt 1:20; Lk 2:4-5) His legal father. For the Biblical and Hebrew world legal paternity was sufficient to confer all the rights of the lineage in question (cf.: the law of the levirate and of adoption (Dt 25:5ff). That is why from the beginning of the genealogy, Jesus is designed as "Christ the Son of David" (Mt 1:1) that is, the anointed one of the Lord Son of David, with whom all the promises of God to David His servant, are fulfilled (2 Sam 7:1-16; 2 Cr 7:18; 2 Cr 21:7; Ps 89:30). This is why Matthew adds to the account of the genealogy and of the conception of Jesus the prophecy of Isaiah: "All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken through the

prophet.: The young woman is with child and will give birth to a son whom she will call Immanuel, which means God with us” (Mt 1:21-23 and Is 7:14).

Let us stop to say something, on the spiritual reality of adoption, we can refer to the fact that the elected people possess “the glory, the covenants, the legislation, the cult, the promises”, because “they are Israelites and possess the adoption of sons” (Rm 9:4). But we also, the new people of God in Christ receive the adoption of children because “when the completion of the time came God sent His Son, born of a woman, born a subject of the Law, to redeem the subjects of the Law, so that we could receive adoption as children” (Gal 4:4-5). This is the salvation which Jesus has brought to us. Christ “will save His people from their sins” (Mt 1:21) because He is the “God with us!” (Mt 1:23) who makes us adopted children of God.

Jesus is born from “Mary who was betrothed to Joseph” (Mt 1:18a)) who “was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit” (Mt 1:18b). Matthew does not give the account of the annunciation as Luke does (Lk 1:26-38), but structures the account from the point of view of the experience of Joseph the just man. The Bible reveals to us that God loves the just and many times chooses them for an important mission, protects them and does not join them to the impious (Gen 18:23ff). In the Old Testament we find many persons who are considered just. We think of Noah “a good man, an upright man among his contemporaries” (Gen 6:9). Or also Jehoash who “did what Yahweh regards as right” (2 K 12:3).

A constant idea in the Bible is the “dream” as a privileged place where God makes His plans and designs known, and sometimes reveals the future. The dreams of Jacob at Bethel are well known (Gen 28:10ff) and Joseph his son, as also those of the cup-bearer and the chief baker imprisoned in Egypt with him (Gen 37:5ff; Gen 40:5ff) and the dreams of Pharaoh which revealed the future years of plenty and of famine and want (Gen 41:1ff).

“An Angel of the Lord“ appeared to Joseph (Mt 1:20) to reveal to him God’s design. In the Gospels of the infancy frequently the Angel of the Lord is mentioned as the heavenly messenger (Mt 1:20.24; 2:13.19; Lk 1:11; 2:9) and also on other occasions the angel appears to calm, to reveal the plans of God, to heal and to liberate from slavery (cf. Mt 28:2; Jn 5:4; Acts 5:19; 8:26; 12:7.23). Many are the references to the Angel of the Lord in the Old Testament where originally the angel represented the Lord himself who guided and protected His people being close to them (cf. Gen 16:7-16; 22:12; 24:7; Ex 3:3; 23:20; Tb 5:4).

b) Questions to orient the meditation and make it relevant:

- What is the most important thing to you in this passage? Why?
- In the key to the reading, consideration is given to some terms (adoption, angel, dream, just). What thoughts did these raise in your heart? What relevance can they have for your journey of spiritual maturation?

3. ORATIO

a) Psalm 92

It is good to give thanks to Yahweh,
to make music for Your name, Most High,
to proclaim Your faithful love at daybreak,
and Your constancy all through the night,
on the lyre, the ten-stringed lyre,
to the murmur of the harp.
You have brought me joy, Yahweh,
by Your deeds, at the work of Your hands I cry out,
'How great are Your works, Yahweh,
immensely deep Your thoughts!'

Stupid people cannot realize this,
fools do not grasp it.
The wicked may sprout like weeds,
and every evil-doer flourish,
but only to be eternally destroyed;
whereas You are supreme for ever, Yahweh.

Look how Your enemies perish,
how all evil-doers are scattered!
You give me the strength of the wild ox,
You anoint me with fresh oil;
I caught sight of the ambush against me,
overheard the plans of the wicked.

The upright will flourish like the palm tree,
will grow like a cedar of Lebanon.
Planted in the house of Yahweh,
they will flourish in the courts of our God.
In old age they will still bear fruit,
will remain fresh and green,
to proclaim Yahweh's integrity;
my rock, in whom no fault can be found.

b) Moments for a prayerful silence

4. CONTEMPLATIO

The Christian contemplation of God's dream, of the plan which God cherishes for the history of humanity does not produce alienation but keeps the consciences vigilant and active and stimulates us to face with courage and altruism the responsibilities which life gives us.

Lectio Divina Friday, March 20, 2020

Season of Lent

1) Opening prayer

God, we do not want to die;
we want to live.
We want to be happy
but without paying the price.
We belong to our times,
when sacrifice and suffering are out of fashion.
God, make life worth the pain of living it.
Give us back the age-old realization
that life means to be born
again and again in pain,
that it may become again
a journey of hope to You,
together with Christ Jesus our Lord.

2) Gospel Reading - Mark 12:28-34

One of the scribes came to Jesus and asked him, "Which is the first of all the commandments?" Jesus replied, "The first is this: Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is Lord alone! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is this: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these." The scribe said to him, "Well said, teacher. You are right in saying, He is One and there is no other than he. And to love him with all your heart, with all your understanding, with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is worth more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices." And when Jesus saw that he answered with understanding, he said to him, "You are not far from the Kingdom of God." And no one dared to ask him any more questions.

3) Reflection

- In today's Gospel (Mk 12:28b-34), the scribes and the doctors of the Law want to know from Jesus which is the greatest commandment of all. Even today, many people want to know what is more important in religion. Some say that it is to be baptized. Others say that it is to go to church and to participate in the Sunday Mass. Others still say to love our neighbor and to struggle for a more just world! Others are concerned only with appearances and with tasks in the Church.
- Mark 12:28: The question of the doctor of the Law. Some time before the question of the scribe, the discussion was with the Sadducees concerning faith in the resurrection (Mk 12:23-27). The doctor who had participated in the debate was pleased with Jesus' answer. He perceived in it His great intelligence and wished to take advantage of the occasion to ask a question to clarify something: "Which is the greatest commandment of all?" At that time, the Jews had many norms to regulate the observance of the Ten

Commandments of the Law. Some said, “All these norms have the same value, because they all come from God. It is not up to us to introduce any distinction in the things of God.” Others said, “Some laws are more important than others, and for this reason, they oblige more!” The doctor wants to know what Jesus thinks.

- Mark 12:29-31: Jesus’ response. Jesus responds quoting a passage from the Bible which says that the greatest among the commandments is “to love God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength!” (Dt 6:4-5). At the time of Jesus, pious Jews recited this phrase three times a day: in the morning, at noon and in the evening. It was so well known among them just as the Our Father is among us. The Pharisees would even wear Tefillin (phylacteries) which were tiny scrolls with these words written on them. And Jesus adds, quoting the Bible again, “The second one is: You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Lev 19:18). There is no other greater commandment than these two.” A brief but very profound response! It is the summary of everything that Jesus teaches on God and His life (Mt 7:12).

- Mark 12:32-33: The response of the doctor of the Law. The doctor agrees with Jesus and concludes, “Well said, to love your neighbor as yourself, this is far more important than any burnt offering or sacrifice.” That is, the commandment to love is more important than the commandments which concern the worship and sacrifices of the Temple. The Prophets of the Old Testament already had affirmed this (Hos 6:6; Ps 40:6-8; Ps 51:16-17). Today we would say that the practice of love is more important than novenas, promises, sermons and processions.

- Mark 12:34: The summary of the Kingdom. Jesus confirms the doctor’s conclusion and says, “You are not far from the Kingdom of God!” In fact, the Kingdom of God consists in the union of two loves: love toward God and love toward neighbor. Because if God is Father/Mother, we are all brothers and sisters, and we should show this in practice, living in community. “On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets!” (Mt 22:40). We, disciples, should keep this law in our mind, in our intelligence, in our heart, in our hands and feet, because one cannot reach God without giving oneself totally to one’s neighbor!

- Jesus had said to the doctor of the law, “You are not far from the Kingdom of God!” (Mk 12:34). The doctor was already close, but in order to be able to enter the Kingdom he still had to go a step forward. In the Old Testament the criterion of love toward neighbor was: “Love your neighbor as yourself”. In the New Testament Jesus extends the sense of love: “This is My commandment: love one another as I have loved you! (Jn 15:12-23). Then the criterion will be “Love your neighbor as Jesus has loved us.” This is the sure path to being able to live together in a more just and fraternal way.

4) Personal questions

- What is the most important priority for you in exercising your religion?
- Are we (personally, our close community, our society) closer to the Kingdom of God nowadays or farther away from it than the doctor of the Law who was praised by Jesus?

5) Concluding Prayer

Among the gods there is none to compare with You,
for You are great and do marvellous deeds;
You, God, and none other. (Ps 86:8,10)

Lectio Divina Saturday, March 21, 2020

Season of Lent

1) Opening prayer

Lord our God,
You yourself remind us through Your holy people
that all our religious practices,
even the eucharistic sacrifice,
are not worth anything
if we use them to bend You our way.
God, may we come to You
in humility and repentance,
ready to encounter You in love
and to turn toward You.
Accept us as Your sons and daughters,
together with Jesus Christ,
your Son and our Lord for ever.

2) Gospel Reading - Luke 18:9-14

Jesus addressed this parable to those who were convinced of their own righteousness and despised everyone else. “Two people went up to the temple area to pray; one was a Pharisee and the other was a tax collector. The Pharisee took up his position and spoke this prayer to himself, ‘O God, I thank you that I am not like the rest of humanity — greedy, dishonest, adulterous — or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week, and I pay tithes on my whole income.’ But the tax collector stood off at a distance and would not even raise his eyes to heaven but beat his breast and prayed, ‘O God, be merciful to me a sinner.’ I tell you, the latter went home justified, not the former; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”

3) Reflection

- In today’s Gospel, Jesus, in order to teach us to pray, tells the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector. Jesus has a different way of seeing things. He saw something positive in the tax collector, of whom everybody said, “He does not know how to pray!” Jesus, through prayer, lived so united to the Father that everything became an expression of prayer for Him.
- The way of presenting the parable is very didactic. Luke gives a brief introduction which serves as the key for reading. Then Jesus tells the parable and at the end Jesus Himself applies the parable to life.

- Luke 18:9: The introduction. The parable is introduced in this way: “He spoke the following parable to some people who prided themselves on being upright and despised everyone else!” This statement is Luke’s. It refers to the time of Jesus, but it also refers to our own time. There are always people and groups of people who consider themselves upright and faithful and who despise others, considering them ignorant and unfaithful.
- Luke 18:10-13: The Parable. Two men went up to the Temple to pray: one a Pharisee, the other a tax collector. According to popular opinion at that time, the tax collectors were not esteemed at all, and they could not address themselves to God because they were impure. In the parable, the Pharisee thanks God because he is better than others. His prayer is nothing other than a praise of himself, an exaltation of his good qualities and contempt for others and for the tax collector. The tax collector does not even raise his eyes, but he beats his breast and says, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner!” He puts himself in his own place, where he stands before God.
- Luke 18:14: The application. If Jesus had allowed people to express their opinion and say which of the two went home justified, all would have answered, “the Pharisee!” At that time, this was the common opinion. Jesus thinks in a different way. For Him, the one who returns home justified, in a good relationship with God, is not the Pharisee, but rather the tax collector. Jesus turns all things upside down. It is certain that the religious authorities of that time were not pleased with Jesus’ application of the parable.
- Jesus prays. Luke informs us, especially, about Jesus’ prayer life. He presents Jesus in constant prayer. The following is a list of texts of Luke’s Gospel, in which Jesus appears in prayer: Lk 2:46-50; 3:21; 4:1-12; 4:16; 5:16; 6:12; 9:16,18,28; 10:21; 11:1; 22:32; 22:7-14; 22:40-46; 23:34; 23:46; 24:30). In reading Luke’s Gospel you can find other texts which speak about the prayer of Jesus. Jesus lived in contact with the Father. To do the will of the Father was the breathing of His life (Jn 5:19). Jesus prayed very much and insisted that people and His disciples do the same, because from union with God springs truth, and the person is able to discover and find self, in all reality and humility. In Jesus prayer was intimately bound to concrete facts of life and to the decisions which He had to make. In order to be faithful to the Father’s plan, He sought to remain alone with Him in order to listen to Him. Jesus prayed the psalms. He did it like any other pious Jew and He knew them by heart. Jesus even succeeded in composing His own psalm. It is the Our Father. His whole life was constant prayer: “By himself the Son can do nothing; He can do only what He sees the Father doing!” (Jn 5:19,30). To Him can be applied what the psalm says: “All I can do is pray!” (Ps 109:4).

4) Personal questions

- Looking into the mirror of this parable, am I like the Pharisee or like the tax collector?
- Do we “pray always” or do we turn everything we do into prayer? Which is more sincere?
- There are people who say that they do not know how to pray, but they speak with God all the time. Do you know any people like this?
- The Eastern Church has the “Jesus Prayer”, which would be based on this passage, and is used to “pray always”. Do I pray with the same intent: “Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on me, a sinner.”

5) Concluding Prayer

Have mercy on me, O God, in Your faithful love,
in Your great tenderness wipe away my offenses;
wash me clean from my guilt,
purify me from my sin. (Ps 51:1-2)

Lectio Divina Sunday, March 22, 2020

A blind man sees the light
Our eyes open when we live with Jesus
John 9:1-41

1. Opening prayer

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

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

2. Reading

a) A key to the reading:

The text of the Gospel of the fourth Sunday of Lent invites us to meditate on the healing of a man born blind. It is a short but lively text. It is a concrete example of the way the Fourth Gospel reveals the deep hidden meaning of the events in Jesus' life. The story of the healing of the blind man helps us open our eyes to the picture of Jesus that we each carry within ourselves. We often think of a Jesus who looks like a glorious king, removed from the life of ordinary people! In the Gospels, Jesus is presented as a Servant of the poor, friend of sinners. The picture of the Messiah-King that the Pharisees had in mind, kept us from recognizing Jesus the Messiah-Servant. As we read the Gospel, let us try to pay attention to two things: (i) the expert and free way the blind man reacts to the provocations of the authorities, and (ii) the way the blind man himself opens his eyes concerning Jesus.

b) A division of the text as a help to the reading:

John 9:1-5: Blindness before the evil that exists in the world

John 9:6-7: The sign of the "One sent by God" who will provoke various reactions

John 9:8-13: The reaction of the neighbours

John 9:14-17: The reaction of the Pharisees

John 9:18-23: The reaction of the parents

John 9:24-34: The final judgement of the Pharisees

John 9:35-38: The final attitude of the man born blind

John 9:39-41: A closing reflection

c) Text:

1 As He went along, He saw a man who had been blind from birth. 2 His disciples asked Him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he should have been born blind?' 3 'Neither he nor his parents sinned,' Jesus answered, 'he was born blind so that the works of God might be revealed in him. 4 'As long as day lasts we must carry out the work of the one who sent me; the night will soon be here when no one can work. 5 As long as I am in the world I am the light of the world.'

6 Having said this, he spat on the ground, made a paste with the spittle, put this over the eyes of the blind man, 7 and said to him, 'Go and wash in the Pool of Siloam' (the name means 'one who has been sent'). So he went off and washed and came back able to see.

8 His neighbors and the people who used to see him before (for he was a beggar) said, 'Isn't this the man who used to sit and beg?' 9 Some said, 'Yes, it is the same one.' Others said, 'No, but he looks just like him.' The man himself said, 'Yes, I am the one.' 10 So they said to him, 'Then how is it that your eyes were opened?' 11 He answered, 'The man called Jesus made a paste, daubed my eyes with it and said to me, "Go off and wash at Siloam"; so I went, and when I washed I gained my sight.' 12 They asked, 'Where is he?' He answered, 'I don't know.' 13 They brought the man who had been blind to the Pharisees.

14 It had been a Sabbath day when Jesus made the paste and opened the man's eyes, 15 so when the Pharisees asked him how he had gained his sight, he said, 'He put a paste on my eyes, and I washed, and I can see.' 16 Then some of the Pharisees said, 'That man cannot be from God: he does not keep the Sabbath.' Others said, 'How can a sinner produce signs like this?' And there was division among them. 17 So they spoke to the blind man again, 'What have you to say about Him yourself, now that He has opened your eyes?' The man answered, 'He is a prophet.'

18 However, the Jews would not believe that the man had been blind without first sending for the parents of the man who had gained his sight and 19 asking them, 'Is this man really the son of yours who you say was born blind? If so, how is it that he is now able to see?' 20 His parents answered, 'We know he is our son and we know he was born blind, 21 but how he can see, we don't know, nor who opened his eyes. Ask him. He is



old enough: let him speak for himself.' 22 His parents spoke like this out of fear of the Jews, who had already agreed to ban from the synagogue anyone who should acknowledge Jesus as the Christ. 23 This was why his parents said, 'He is old enough; ask him.'

24 So the Jews sent for the man again and said to him, 'Give glory to God! We are satisfied that this man is a sinner.' 25 The man answered, 'Whether he is a sinner I don't know; all I know is that I was blind and now I can see.' 26 They said to him, 'What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?' 27 He replied, 'I have told you once and you wouldn't listen. Why do you want to hear it all again? Do you want to become His disciples yourselves?' 28 At this they hurled abuse at him, 'It is you who are His disciple, we are disciples of Moses: 29 we know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this man, we don't know where He comes from.' 30 The man replied, 'That is just what is so amazing! You don't know where He comes from and He has opened my eyes! 31 We know that God doesn't listen to sinners, but God does listen to people who are devout and do his will. 32 Ever since the world began it is unheard of for anyone to open the eyes of someone born blind; 33 if this man were not from God, He wouldn't have been able to do anything.' 34 They retorted, 'Are you trying to teach us, and you a sinner through and through ever since you were born!' And they ejected him.

35 Jesus heard they had ejected him, and when He found him He said to him, 'Do you believe in the Son of man?' 36 'Sir,' the man replied, 'tell me who he is so that I may believe in Him.' 37 Jesus said, 'You have seen Him; He is speaking to you.' 38 The man said, 'Lord, I believe,' and worshipped Him.

39 Jesus said, 'It is for judgement that I have come into this world, so that those without sight may see and those with sight may become blind.' 40 Hearing this, some Pharisees who were present said to Him, 'So we are blind, are we?' 41 Jesus replied, 'If you were blind, you would not be guilty, but since you say, "We can see," your guilt remains.'

3. A moment of prayerful silence

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

4. Some questions

to help us in our personal reflection.

- a) What part of this text touched me most? Why?
- b) A popular saying goes, "None so blind as those who will not see!" How does this apply to the conversation between the blind man and the Pharisees?
- c) By what titles is Jesus hailed in the text? Who pronounces these? What do they mean?
- d) Which title do I like best? Why? Or, what picture of Jesus do I carry in my mind and my heart? Where does this picture come from?
- e) How can I purify my eyes to see the true Jesus of the Gospels?

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

- a) **The context within which the Gospel of John was written:**

As we meditate on the story of the healing of the blind man, it is good to keep in mind the context of the Christian communities in Asia Minor towards the end of the first century for whom the Gospel of John was written and who identified with the blind man and his healing. Because of a legalistic view of the Law of God, they were blind from birth. But, as happened with the blind man, they too were able to see the presence of God in the person of Jesus of Nazareth and were converted. It was a painful process! In describing the steps and conflicts of the healing of the blind man, the author of the Fourth Gospel recalls the spiritual journey of the community, from the darkness of blindness to the full light of faith enlightened by Jesus.

b) A commentary on the text:

John 9:1-5: Blindness before the evil that exists in the world

When the disciples see the blind man, they ask: “Rabbì, who sinned, this man or his parents, for him to have been born blind?” In those days, a physical defect or sickness was thought to be a punishment from God. Associating physical defects with sin was the way the priests of the Old Testament kept their power over people’s consciences. Jesus helps his disciples to correct their ideas: “Neither he nor his parents sinned...he was born blind so that the works of God might be displayed in him!” The works of God is the same as Sign of God. Thus, that which in those days was a sign of God’s absence, is now a sign of his brilliant presence in our midst. Jesus says: “As long as the day lasts I must carry out the work of the one who sent me; the night will soon be here when no one can work. As long as I am in the world I am the light of the world.” The **Day** of signs begins to manifest itself when Jesus, “on the third day” (Jn 2:1), makes present the “first sign” in Cana (Jn 2:11). But the day is about to end. The night is about to fall, because it is already “the seventh day”, the Sabbath, and the healing of the blind man is now the sixth sign (Jn 9:14). The **Night** is the death of Jesus. The seventh sign will be the victory over death at the resurrection of Lazarus (Jn 11). In John’s Gospel there are only seven signs, miracles, that announce the great sign, namely the Death and Resurrection of Jesus.

John 9:6-7. The sign of the “One sent by God” who will provoke various reactions

Jesus spits on the ground, forms mud with his saliva, puts the mud on the eyes of the blind man and tells him to wash in the pool of Siloam. The man goes and comes back healed. This is the sign! John comments saying that Siloam means sent. Jesus is the **One sent** by the Father who works the works of God, the signs of the Father. The sign of this ‘sending’ is that the blind man begins to see.

John 9:8-13: The first reaction: that of the neighbors

The blind man is well known. The neighbors have doubts: “Is this he?” And they ask: “How do your eyes come to be open?” The man who was blind testifies, “The **Man** called Jesus opened my eyes”. The basis of our faith in Jesus is to accept that He is a human being like us. The neighbors ask: “Where is he?” - “I don’t know!” They are not satisfied with the answer of the blind man and, to clarify matters, they bring the man before the Pharisees, the religious authorities.

John 9:14-17: The second reaction: that of the Pharisees

That day was a Sabbath and on the Sabbath it was forbidden to heal. When asked by the Pharisees, the man tells everything once more. Some Pharisees, blind in their observance of the law, say, “This man cannot be from God, He does not keep the Sabbath!” They could not admit that Jesus could be a sign of God because He healed the blind man on a Sabbath. But other Pharisees, faced by the sign, answer, “How could a sinner produce signs like this?” They were divided among themselves! So they asked the blind man, “What have you to say about him yourself, now that He has opened your eyes?” And he gives witness: “He is a **Prophet!**”

John 9:18-23: The third reaction: that of the parents

The Pharisees, now called the Jews, did not believe that he was blind. They thought that it was a matter of deception. So they called his parents and asked, “Is this man really your son who you say was born blind? If so, how is it that he is now able to see?” Very carefully the parents reply: “We know he is our son and we know he was born blind, but we don’t know how it is that he can see now, or who opened his eyes. He is old enough: let him speak for himself!” The blindness of the Pharisees before the evidence of the healing produces fear among the people. And anyone who professed faith in Jesus **Messiah** was excluded from the synagogue. The conversation with the parents of the blind man reveals the truth, but the religious authorities will not accept it. Their blindness is greater because of the witness given, now they will not accept the law that says that the witness of two persons is valid (Jn 8:17).

John 9:24-34: The final judgement of the Pharisees concerning Jesus

They call the blind man again and say, “Give glory to God! For our part we know that this man is a sinner.” Here: “give glory to God” meant, “Ask pardon for the lie you just pronounced!” The blind man had said, “He is a prophet!” According to the Pharisees he should have said, “He is a sinner!” But the blind man is intelligent. He replies, “I don’t know if he is a sinner; I only know that I was blind and now I can see!” There are no arguments against this fact! Again the Pharisees ask, “What did He do to you? How did He open your eyes?” The blind man answers with a touch of irony: “I have told you once.... Do you want to become His disciples too?” Then they insulted him and said, “You can be His disciple, we know that God spoke to Moses, but for this man, we don’t know where He comes from”. Again with a touch of irony the blind man replies, “Now here is an astonishing thing! He has opened my eyes, and you don’t know where He comes from! If this man were not from God, He couldn’t do a thing”. Faced with the blindness of the Pharisees, the light of faith grows in the blind man. He does not accept the logic of the Pharisees and confesses that Jesus **comes from the Father**. This profession of faith costs him his expulsion from the synagogue. The same was happening in the communities of the end of the first century. Those who professed faith in Jesus had to break all family and community ties. This happens today: those who decide to be faithful to Jesus run the risk of being excluded.

John 9:35-38: The attitude of faith of the blind man towards Jesus

Jesus does not abandon those who are persecuted for His sake. When Jesus hears of the expulsion and meets the man again, He helps him to take a further step by inviting him to take on his faith and asks, “Do you believe in the **Son of Man?**” He replies, “Sir...tell

me who He is that I may believe in Him?” Jesus said to Him, “You are looking at Him; He is speaking to you”. The blind man exclaims, “**Lord**, I believe!” And he worships Jesus. The faith attitude of the blind man before Jesus is one of absolute trust and total acceptance. He accepts everything from Jesus. It is this faith that sustained the Christian communities of Asia towards the end of the first century, and that sustains us today.

John 9:39-41: A final reflection

The blind man who could not see ends up seeing better than the Pharisees. The communities of Asia Minor who were once blind, discover the light. The Pharisees who thought that they saw well are more blind than the man born blind. Bound by an ancient observance, they lie when they say they can see. None more blind than those who will not see!

c) A broader view:

- The Names and Titles given to Jesus

Throughout the story of the healing of the blind man, the Evangelist registers various titles, adjectives and names given to Jesus by a host of people, the disciples, the Evangelist himself, the blind man, the Pharisees and Jesus Himself. This way of describing the events in the life of Jesus was part of the catechesis of the time. It was a way of helping people to clarify their own ideas concerning Jesus and to identify themselves in His regard. Here are some of the names, adjectives and titles. The list shows the growth of the blind man in faith and how his vision becomes clear.

- * Rabbi (master) (Jn 9:1): the disciples
- * Light of the world (Jn 9:5): Jesus
- * The One sent (Jn 9:7): the Evangelist
- * Man (Jn 9:11): the healed man
- * Jesus: (Jn 9:11): the healed man
- * Does not come from God (Jn 9:16): some Pharisees
- * Prophet (Jn 9:17): the healed man
- * Christ (Jn 9:22): the people
- * Sinner (Jn 9:24): some Pharisees
- * We do know where he comes from (Jn 9:31): the healed man
- * Religious (Jn 9:31): the healed man
- * Does the will of God (Jn 9:31): the healed man
- * Son of man (Jn 9:35): Jesus
- * Lord (Jn 9:36): the healed man
- * Lord, I believe! (Jn 9:30): the healed man

- The Name: “I AM”

To reveal the deep meaning of the healing of the blind man, the Fourth Gospel records the words of Jesus: “I am the light of the world” (Jn 9:5). In several places, in answer to questions people put to Jesus, the Gospel repeats this same statement “I AM”:

- * I am the bread of life (Jn 6:34-48)
- * I am the living bread come down from heaven (Jn 6:51)
- * I am the light of the world (Jn 8:12; 9:5)

- * I am the gate (Jn 10: 7,9)
- * I am the good shepherd (Jn 10:11,25)
- * I am the resurrection and the life (Jn 11:25)
- * I am the way, the truth and the life (Jn 14:6)
- * I am the vine (Jn 15:1)
- * I am king (Jn 18:37)
- * I am (Jn 8:24,27,58)

This self revelation of Jesus reaches its peak in His conversation with the Jews, when Jesus says, “When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He” (Jn 8:27). The name I am is the same as Yahweh, the name God gave in Exodus, an expression of the liberating presence between Jesus and the Father (Ex 3:15). The repeated affirmation I AM reveals the deep identity between Jesus and the Father. The face of God shines in Jesus of Nazareth: “To have seen Me is to have seen the Father!” (Jn 14:9)

6. Prayer: Psalm 117 (116)

A resume of the Bible in one prayer
 Alleluia! Praise Yahweh,
 all nations, extol Him, all peoples,
 for His faithful love is strong
 and His constancy never-ending.

7. Final Prayer

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

Lectio Divina Monday, March 23, 2020

Season of Lent

1) Opening prayer

Lord our God, almighty Father,
 You want us not to turn to the past
 to regret it and to mourn over it
 but to hope in the future,
 in the new earth and the new heaven.
 Give us a firm faith
 in Your Son Jesus Christ,
 that notwithstanding the shortcomings of our time
 we may have faith in the future,
 which You want us to build up
 with Your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

2) Gospel Reading - John 4:43-54.

At that time Jesus left [Samaria for Galilee. For Jesus himself testified that a prophet has no honor in his native place. When he came into Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him, since they had seen all he had done in Jerusalem at the feast; for they themselves had gone to the feast. Then he returned to Cana in Galilee, where he had made the water wine. Now there was a royal official whose son was ill in Capernaum. When he heard that Jesus had arrived in Galilee from Judea, he went to him and asked him to come down and heal his son, who was near death. Jesus said to him, “Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will not believe.” The royal official said to him, “Sir, come down before my child dies.” Jesus said to him, “You may go; your son will live.” The man believed what Jesus said to him and left. While the man was on his way back, his slaves met him and told him that his boy would live. He asked them when he began to recover. They told him, “The fever left him yesterday, about one in the afternoon.” The father realized that just at that time Jesus had said to him, “Your son will live,” and he and his whole household came to believe. Now this was the second sign Jesus did when he came to Galilee from Judea.

3) Reflection

- Jesus had left Galilee and set forth toward Judah in order to arrive in Jerusalem on the occasion of the festival (Jn 4:45) and, passing through Samaria, He was returning again to Galilee (Jn 4:3-4). The observant Jews were forbidden to pass through Samaria, and they could not even speak with the Samaritans (Jn 4:9). When the Assyrians conquered Israel, the Jews there ended up scattered throughout the area and the Assyrians adopted the the God of Israel, Yahweh, and their practices. The Jews within Judah denied that any non-Hebrew had a right to worship Yahweh, or to worship outside of Jerusalem. Jesus did not care about these norms which prevented friendship and dialogue. He remained several days in Samaria and many people were converted (Jn 4:40). After that, He decided to return to Galilee.
- John 4:43-46^a: The return to Galilee. Even though Jesus knew that the people of Galilee had certain reservations about Him, He wished to return to His own home town. John refers to how badly Jesus was received in Nazareth of Galilee. Jesus himself had declared that “No prophet is honored in his own home town” (Lk 4:24). But now, given the evidence of what He had done in Jerusalem, the Galileans change their opinion and receive Him well. Jesus then returns to Cana where He had worked the first “sign” (Jn 2:11).
- John 4:46b-47: The petition of the court official. It is the case of a gentile. A short time before, in Samaria, Jesus had spoken with a Samaritan woman, a heretical person according to the Jews, to whom Jesus revealed His condition of Messiah (Jn 4:26). And now, in Galilee, He receives a gentile, the official of the king, who was seeking help for his sick son. Jesus does not limit Himself to help those of His race only, nor those of His own religion. He is ecumenical and receives all.
- John 4:48: Jesus’ answer to the court official. The official wanted Jesus to go with him to his house to cure his son. Jesus answered, “Unless you see signs and portents you will not believe!” A harsh and strange answer. Why does Jesus answer in this way? What was wrong with the the official’s request? What did Jesus want to accomplish through this response? Jesus wants to explain how our faith should be. The official

would believe only if Jesus went with him to his house. He wanted to see Jesus curing. In general, this is the attitude that we all have. We are not aware of the deficiency of our faith. We often expect God to accomplish His work in the way we think it should be done.

- John 4:49-50: The official repeats his petition and Jesus repeats the response. In spite of Jesus' answer, the man does not keep silence and repeats the same petition: "Sir, come down before my child dies!" Jesus continues to stand His ground. He does not respond to the petition and does not go with the man to his house and repeats the same response, but formulated in a different way: "Go home! Your son will live!" Both in the first as well as in the second response, Jesus asks for faith, much faith. He asks that the official believe that his son has already been cured. And the true miracle takes place! Without seeing any sign, nor any portent, the man believes in Jesus' word and returns home. It could not have been easy. This is the true miracle of faith: to believe without any other guarantee, except the Word of Jesus. The ideal is to believe in the word of Jesus, even without seeing (cf. Jn 20:29).

- John 4:51-53: The result of faith in the word of Jesus. When the man was on the way home, his servants saw him and ran to meet him to tell him that his son had been cured, that he was alive. He asked them when the boy had begun to recover and discovered that it was exactly the time when Jesus had said, "Your son will live!" He was confirmed in his faith.

- John 4:54: A summary presented by John, the Evangelist. John ends by saying, "This new sign, the second, Jesus performed." John prefers to speak of sign and not of miracle. The word sign connotes something which I see with my eyes, but only faith can make me discover its profound sense. Faith is like an X-Ray: it enables one to see what the naked eye cannot see.

4) Personal questions

- How do you live your faith? Do you have faith in God's word or do you only believe in miracles and in perceptible experiences?

- Jesus accepts heretics and foreigners in a way that fosters conversion. How do I relate with people who are different from me? How do I foster their conversion through that relationship?

- These early cultures, like the Assyrians adopting the religion of the Hebrews over time, mixed their beliefs as they assimilated. That was probably one reason there was such resistance to outsiders among the Jews in Judah. This is true among cultures today. How should different cultures be welcomed within and into the Church, while preserving the Church's teachings, doctrine, and culture?

5) Concluding Prayer

Make music for Yahweh,
all you who are faithful to Him,
praise His unforgettable holiness.
His anger lasts but a moment,
His favor throughout life;
In the evening come tears,
but with dawn cries of joy. (Ps 30:4-5)

Lectio Divina Tuesday, March 24, 2020

Season of Lent †

1) Opening prayer

Lord our God,
You have quenched our thirst for life
with the water of baptism.
Keep turning the desert of our arid lives
into a paradise of joy and peace,
that we may bear fruits
of holiness, justice and love.
Lord, hear our prayer
through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

2) Gospel Reading - John 5:1-16

There was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now there is in Jerusalem at the Sheep Gate a pool called in Hebrew Bethesda, with five porticoes. In these lay a large number of ill, blind, lame, and crippled. One man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had been ill for a long time, he said to him, "Do you want to be well?" The sick man answered him, "Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; while I am on my way, someone else gets down there before me." Jesus said to him, "Rise, take up your mat, and walk." Immediately the man became well, took up his mat, and walked. Now that day was a sabbath. So the Jews said to the man who was cured, "It is the sabbath, and it is not lawful for you to carry your mat." He answered them, "The man who made me well told me, 'Take up your mat and walk.'" They asked him, "Who is the man who told you, 'Take it up and walk'?" The man who was healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had slipped away, since there was a crowd there. After this Jesus found him in the temple area and said to him, "Look, you are well; do not sin any more, so that nothing worse may happen to you." The man went and told the Jews that Jesus was the one who had made him well. Therefore, the Jews began to persecute Jesus because he did this on a sabbath.

3) Reflection

- Today's Gospel describes Jesus curing the paralytic who had waited 38 years for someone to help him get to the water of the pool so as to be healed! Thirty-eight years! Faced with this total absence of solidarity, what does Jesus do? He transgresses the law of Saturday and cures the paralytic. Today, in poor countries, assistance to sick people is lacking; people experience the same lack of solidarity. They live in total abandonment, without help or solidarity from anyone.
- John 5:1-2: Jesus goes to Jerusalem. On the occasion of the Jewish festival, Jesus goes to Jerusalem. There, close to the Temple, was a pool with five porticos or corridors. At that time, worship in the Temple required much water because of the numerous animals which were sacrificed, especially during the great festivals. This is why near the Temple there were several cisterns where rain water was gathered. Some could contain over one

thousand litres. Close by, because of the abundance of water, there was a public bathing resort, where crowds of sick people gathered waiting for help or to be healed. Archeology has shown that in the same precincts of the Temple, there was a place where the Scribes taught the Law to students. On one side, the teaching of the Law of God. On the other, the abandonment of the poor. The water purified the Temple, but it did not purify the people.

- John 5:3-4: The situation of the sick. These sick people were attracted by the water of the bathing resort. They said that an angel would disturb the water, and the first one who would enter after the angel disturbed the water, would be cured. In other words, the sick people were attracted by a false hope – a superstition. Healing was only for one person. Just like the lottery today. Only one person gets the prize! The majority pays and wins nothing. In this situation of total abandonment, in the public baths, Jesus meets sick people.

- John 5:5-9: Jesus cures a sick man on Saturday. Very close to the place where the observance of the Law was taught, a paralytic had been waiting for 38 years for someone who would help him to go down to the water to be cured. This fact reveals the total lack of solidarity and of acceptance of the excluded! Number 38 indicated the duration of a whole generation (Dt 2:14). It is a whole generation which does not experience solidarity or mercy. Religion at that time was not able to reveal the welcoming and merciful face of God. In the face of this dramatic situation Jesus transgresses the law of Saturday and takes care of the paralytic, saying, “Get up, pick up your sleeping-mat and walk around!” The man picked up his mat and started to walk around among the people.

- John 5:10-13: Discussion of the cured man with the Jews. Immediately after, some Jews arrived and criticized the man who was carrying his sleeping mat on the Sabbath. The man did not know who the one who had cured him was. He did not know Jesus. This means that Jesus, passing by that place where the poor and the sick were, saw that person; He noticed the dramatic situation in which the man found himself and cured him. He did not cure him to convert him, neither so that he would believe in God. He cured him because He wanted to help him. He wanted the man to experience love and solidarity through His help and loving acceptance.

- John 5:14-16: The man meets Jesus again. Going to the Temple, in the midst of the crowds, Jesus meets the same man and tells him, “Now, you are well again, do not sin any more, or something worse may happen to you.” In that age, people thought and said, “Sickness is a punishment from God. God is with you!” Once the man is cured, he has to keep from sinning again, so that nothing worse will happen to him! But in his naïveté, the man went to tell the Jews that Jesus had cured him. The Jews began to ask Jesus why He did those things on the Sabbath. In tomorrow’s Gospel we have what follows.

4) Personal questions

- If I were the cured man, and told not to say anything, would I be silent or not?
- By proclaiming what had been done for him, despite his instruction, did he sin again?
- Have I ever had an experience similar to that of the paralytic: to remain for some time without any help? How is the situation regarding assistance to the sick in the place where you live? Do you see any signs of solidarity?
- Do I show the same compassion and help others without expecting a return and in a significant way every day?

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,
and its waters roar and seethe,
and the mountains totter as it heaves. (Ps 46:1-3)

Lectio Divina Wednesday, March 25, 2020

God's covenant with humanity

Mary's yes and our yes

Luke 1:26-38

1. Opening prayer

Merciful Father, in this holy time of prayer and of listening to Your Word, send also to me Your holy angel that I may receive the proclamation of salvation and that, after opening my heart, I may offer my yes to Love. Let, I beg You, the Holy Spirit overshadow me as an overwhelming power. From now on, Father, I do not wish to express anything other than my "Yes!" and to say to You: "Behold, I am here for You. Do unto me whatever pleases You." Amen.

2. Reading

a) The context of the passage:

The story of the annunciation takes us from the temple, a holy place par excellence, to the house, to the intimacy of a personal meeting of God with His creature; it leads us into ourselves, into the deepest part of our being and our story, where God alone can reach and touch us. The announcement of the birth of John the Baptist had opened the sterile womb of Elizabeth, thus overcoming the absolute powerlessness of humankind and transforming it into the ability to collaborate with God. On the other hand, the announcement of the birth of Jesus, knocks on the door of a fertile womb of the one who is "full of grace" and awaits a reply: it is God who waits for our yes so as to work everything in us.

b) An aid to the reading of this passage:

vv. 26-27: The first two verses place us at the time and sacred space of the event on which we are meditating and which we relive: we are in the sixth month from the conception of John the Baptist and in Nazareth, a city in Galilee, the land of the marginalized and unclean. Here God has come down to speak with a virgin, to speak to our hearts.

The people involved in this unsettling event are presented to us: Gabriel, the messenger of God, a young woman called Mary and her spouse Joseph of the royal house of David. We too are made welcome into this company and are called to enter into the mystery.

vv. 28-29: These are the very first words of the dialogue between God and His creature: just a few words, a mere breath, but all-powerful words that disturb the heart, that question deeply the meaning of human life, plans and expectations. The angel announces joy, grace and the presence of God; Mary is disturbed and asks herself how can any of this be happening to her. Where can such a joy come from? How can such a great grace, that can change her very being, be hers?

vv. 30-33: These are the central verses of the excerpt: it is the explosion of the announcement, the manifestation of the gift of God, of His omnipotence in the life of human beings. Gabriel, the strong, speaks of Jesus: the eternal king, the Savior, the God made child, the humble all-powerful. He speaks of Mary, of her womb, of her life that she was chosen to be the gateway to welcoming God in this world and into the lives of all people. Even at this stage of the events, God begins to draw near, to knock. He stands, attentive, by the door of the heart of Mary, and even now by our house, our hearts...

v. 34: Mary, faced with God's proposal, allows herself to stand naked. She allows herself to be read to her very depths. She speaks of herself, her heart, her wishes. She knows that for God the impossible is possible; she does not doubt or harden her heart and mind; she does not count the cost; she only wants to be fully available, open, and allows herself to be reached by that humanly impossible touch, but one already written, already realized in God. In a gesture of utter poverty, she places before God her virginity, her not knowing man. This is a complete and absolute surrender of self, full of faith and trust. It is her preliminary yes.

vv. 35-37: God, most humble, gives an answer; the all-powerful bends over the fragility of this woman, who represents each one of us. The dialogue continues; the covenant grows and is strengthened. God reveals the how. He speaks of the Holy Spirit, of the fruitful overshadowing, which does no violence, does not break, but preserves intact. He speaks of the human experience of Elizabeth. He reveals another impossible thing made possible; almost like a guarantee or security. And then comes the last word when one must make a choice: to say yes or no, believe or doubt, dissolve or harden oneself, to open the door or close it. "Nothing is impossible for God."

v. 38: The last verse seems to contain an infinity. Mary says her "Here I am." She opens herself wide to God and then the meeting, the union takes place forever. God enters into the human and the human becomes the place of God: these are the most sublime nuptials possible on earth. And yet, the Gospel ends on a sad and hard note: Mary stays alone;

the angel leaves. What remains, however, is the yes pronounced to God and God's presence; what remains is real life.

c) The Text:

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

3. A moment of prayerful silence

I have read and listened to the words of the Gospel. Now I stand in silence ... God is present, at the door, and asks for shelter, yes, even from me and from my poor life ...

4. A few questions

a) God's announcement, His angel, enters my life, stands before me and speaks to me. Am I prepared to welcome Him, to give Him space, to listen to Him attentively?

b) Suddenly I receive an upsetting announcement. God speaks to me of joy, grace and presence: all the things that I have been seeking for so long, always. Who can make me really happy? Am I willing to trust in His happiness and His presence?

c) Not much is needed, just a movement of the heart, of my being; He is already aware of this. He is already overwhelming me with light and love. He says to me, "You have found favor in My sight." So, I please God? He finds me pleasant, loveable? Yes, that is how it really is. Why is it that I would not believe it before? Why have I not listened to Him?

d) The Lord Jesus wants to come into this world also through me; He wants to reach my brothers and sisters through the paths of my life, of my being. Would I lead Him astray?

Would I refuse Him, keep Him at a distance? Would I wipe Him out of my story, my life?

5. A key to the reading

Some important and strong words that resonate in this Gospel passage.

- Rejoice!

This is a really strange greeting from God to His creature; it seems hard to explain and perhaps even senseless. And yet, for centuries it resonated in the pages of Sacred Scripture and thus also on the lips of the Hebrew people. Rejoice, be glad, exult! Many times the prophets had repeated this gentle breath of God and had shouted the silent beat of His heart for His people, His remnant. I read this in Joel: “Land, do not be afraid; be glad, rejoice, for Yahweh has done great things... (2:21-23); in Zephaniah: “Shout for joy, daughter of Zion, Israel, shout aloud! Rejoice, exult with all your heart, daughter of Jerusalem! Yahweh has repealed your sentence” (3:14); in Zechariah: “Sing, rejoice, daughter of Zion, for now I am coming to live among you – Yahweh declares!” (2, 14). I read and listen to it today; I say it also in my heart, in my life; a joy is announced to me, a new happiness, never before experienced. I rediscover the great things that the Lord has done for me; I experience the freedom that comes from His pardon: I am no longer sentenced, but graced forever; I live the experience of the presence of the Lord next to me, in me. Yes, He has come to dwell in our midst; He is once more setting up His tent in the land of my heart, of my existence. Lord, as the psalm says, You rejoice in Your creatures (Ps 104:31); and I too rejoice in You, give thanks to You; my joy is in You (Ps 104:34).

- The Lord is with you

These simple and enlightened words, pronounced by the angel to Mary, release an all-powerful force; I realize that these words alone would suffice to save my life, to lift me up again from whatever fall or humiliation, to bring me back when I go astray. The fact that He, my Lord, is with me, keeps me alive, gives me courage and trust to go on being. If I am, it is because He is with me. Who knows but that the experience of Isaac told in Scripture might not be valid for me, when one day Abimelech came to Isaac with his men to tell him, “It became clear to us that Yahweh was with you” (Gen 26:28) and then asked to become friends and form an alliance. Would that the same thing might be said of me; would that I could show that the Lord is truly with me, in my life, in my desires, in my affections, in my choices and actions; would that others might meet Him through me. Perhaps for this, it is necessary for me to absorb more of the presence of God, for me to eat and drink of Him.

Let me go to the school of Scripture, to read and re-read some passages where the voice of the Lord tells me again and again of this truth and, while He speaks, to be transformed, ever more in-dwelt. “Remain for the present in that country; I shall be with you and bless you” (Gen 26:3). “To Joshua son of Nun, Yahweh gave this order: Be strong and stand firm, for you are to be the one to bring the Israelites into the country which I have promised them on oath, and I myself shall be with you” (Deut 31:23). “They will fight against you but will not overcome you, because I am with you to save you and rescue you” (Jer 15:20). “The angel of Yahweh appeared to him and said: Yahweh is with you, valiant warrior!” (Judg 6:12). “Yahweh appeared to him the same night and said, ‘I am the God of your father Abraham. Do not be afraid, for I am with you. I shall bless you and multiply your offspring for My servant Abraham’s sake’” (Gen 26:24). “Be sure, I am with you; I shall keep you safe wherever you go, and bring you back to this country, for I shall never desert you until I have done what I have promised you” (Gen 28:15). “Do not be afraid, for I am with you; do not be alarmed, for I am your God. I give you strength, truly I help you, truly I hold you firm with my saving right hand” (Is 41:10)

- Do not be afraid

The Bible is packed with this pronouncement full of kindness; like a river of mercy, these words are found throughout the sacred books, from Genesis to the Apocalypse. It is the Father who repeats to His children not to be afraid, because He is with them; He will not abandon them; He will not forget them; He will not leave them in the hands of their enemies. It is like a declaration of love from God to humanity, to each one of us; it is a pledge of fidelity that is relayed from hand to hand, from heart to heart, and finally comes down to us. Abraham heard these words and after him his son Isaac, then the patriarchs, Moses, Joshua, David, Solomon and, with them, Jeremiah and all the prophets. No one is excluded from this embrace of salvation that the Father offers His children, even those farthest from Him, most rebellious against Him. Mary knows how to listen to these words and knows how to believe full of faith, in an attitude of absolute surrender. She listens and believes, welcomes and lives for us too. She is the strong and courageous woman who opens herself to the coming of God, letting go of all fears, incredulity and a closed spirit. She repeats these same words of God in our lives and invites us to believe like her.

- You enjoy God’s favor

“Lord, if I enjoy favor in your sight...”. This is the prayer that time and time again comes out of the lips and hearts of those who seek refuge in the Lord. The Scriptures tell us about such people. We come across them in our crossroads when we know not where to go, when we feel hounded by solitude or by temptation, when we experience abandonment, betrayals, heavy defeats of our own existence. When we no longer have

anyone and we fail to find even ourselves, then we too, like them, find ourselves praying by repeating these same words: “Lord, if I enjoy favor in your sight...”. Who knows how often we have repeated these words, even alone and in silence. But today, here in this simple passage of the Gospel, we are forestalled, we are welcomed in anticipation; we need no longer plead, because we have already found everything that we always sought and much more. We have received freely. We are overwhelmed and now we can overflow!

- Nothing is impossible to God

I have nearly come to the end of this strong journey of grace and liberation; I now come across a word that shakes me in my depths. My faith is being sifted; the Lord is testing me, scrutinizing me, testing my heart. What the angel says here in front of Mary, had already been proclaimed many times in the Old Testament; now the time has come for the fulfilment; now all the impossible things come to pass. God becomes man; the Lord becomes friend, brother; the distant is very close. And I, even I, small and poor as I am, am given to share in the immensity of this gift, this grace; I am told that in my life too the impossible becomes possible. I only have to believe, to give my consent. But this means that I have to allow myself to be shattered by the power of God; to surrender to Him, who will transform me, free me and renew me. Not even this is impossible. Yes, I can be reborn today, here and now, by the grace of the voice that has spoken to me, that has reached me even to the very depths of my heart. I seek and transcribe the passages of Scripture that repeat this truth. And as I write them, as I re-read them and say them slowly, devouring every word, and what they say takes place in me... Genesis 18:14; Job 42:2; Jeremiah 32:17; Jeremiah 32:27; Zechariah 8:6; Matthew 19:26; Luke 18:27.

- Here I am

Now I cannot escape, nor can I avoid the conclusion. I knew from the beginning that here, in this word, so small and yet so full, so final, that God was waiting for me. The appointment of love, of the covenant between Him and me had been fixed precisely on this word, just a gentle voice, just a kiss. I am unsettled by the richness of the presence I feel in this “Here I am!”; I need not make much effort to recall the number of times that God first pronounced and repeated these words to me. He is the ‘Here I am’ made man, absolutely faithful, unforgettable. I only need to tune into Him, only find His footprints in the sand of my poverty, of my desert; I only need to welcome His infinite love that never ceases to seek me, to stay close to me, to walk with me wherever I go. The “Here I am” has already been pronounced and realized. It is already real. How many before me and how many today have experienced this! I am not alone. I still remain silent, listening before I reply...

“Here I am!” (Is 65:1) God repeats; Mary replies, “Here I am, I am the servant of the Lord”; and Christ says, “I come to do Your will” (Ps 39:8)...

6. A time of prayer: Psalm 138

Father, into Your hands I commend my life.

Yahweh, You examine me and know me,
You know when I sit, when I rise,
You understand my thoughts from afar.
You watch when I walk or lie down,
You know every detail of my conduct.
A word is not yet on my tongue before You,
Yahweh, know all about it.
You fence me in, behind and in front,
You have laid Your hand upon me.
Such amazing knowledge is beyond me,
a height to which I cannot attain.
Where shall I go to escape Your spirit?
Where shall I flee from Your presence?
If I scale the heavens You are there,
if I lie flat in Sheol, there You are.

You created my inmost self,
knit me together in my mother's womb.
For so many marvels I thank You;
a wonder am I, and all Your works are wonders.
You knew me through and through,
How hard for me to grasp Your thoughts,
how many, God, there are!
If I count them, they are more than the grains of sand;
if I come to an end, I am still with You.
God, examine me and know my heart,
test me and know my concerns.
Make sure that I am not on my way to ruin,
and guide me on the road to eternity.

7. Closing prayer

Father, You came down to me; You have come to me; You have touched my heart; You have spoken to me and promised joy, presence and salvation. By the grace of the Holy Spirit, who overshadows me, I, together with Mary, have been able to say to You yes, the “Here I am” of my life for you. Now there remains only the force of Your promise,

of Your truth: "You are to conceive and bear Jesus." Lord, here is the womb of my life, of my being, of all that I am and have, open before You. I place all things in You, in Your heart. Enter, come, come down again, I beg You, and make me fruitful, make me one who gives birth to Christ in this world. May the overflowing love I receive from You find its fullness and truth in touching the brothers and sisters that You place beside me. May our meeting, Father, be open, a gift to all. May Jesus be the Savior. Amen.

Lectio Divina Thursday, March 26, 2020

Season of Lent

1) Opening prayer

Lord our God, we know,
perhaps more in theory than in practice,
that You are with us,
that You are our God and we Your people. Forgive us, Lord, when we fashion
our own gods made in our own image -
honor, power, prestige,
things to which we are attached and enslaved.
Remind us again and again
that You are our loyal God,
who made us in Your own indelible image
and who shows us Your perfect likeness
in Jesus Christ, Your Son and our Lord.

2) Gospel Reading - John 5:31-47

Jesus said to the Jews: "If I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is not true. But there is another who testifies on my behalf, and I know that the testimony he gives on my behalf is true. You sent emissaries to John, and he testified to the truth. I do not accept human testimony, but I say this so that you may be saved. He was a burning and shining lamp, and for a while you were content to rejoice in his light. But I have testimony greater than John's. The works that the Father gave me to accomplish, these works that I perform testify on my behalf that the Father has sent me. Moreover, the Father who sent me has testified on my behalf. But you have never heard his voice nor seen his form, and you do not have his word remaining in you, because you do not believe in the one whom he has sent. You search the Scriptures, because you think you have eternal life through them; even they testify on my behalf. But you do not want to come to me to have life. "I do not accept human praise; moreover, I know that you do not have the love of God in you. I came in the name of my Father, but you do not accept me; yet if another comes in his own name, you will accept him. How can you believe, when you accept praise from one another and do not seek the praise that comes from the only God? Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father: the one who will accuse you is Moses, in whom you have placed your hope. For if you had believed

Moses, you would have believed me, because he wrote about me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?"

3) Reflection

- John, interpreter of Jesus. John is a good interpreter of the words of Jesus. A good interpreter must have two-fold fidelity: fidelity to the words of the one who speaks, and fidelity to the language of the one who listens. In John's Gospel, the words of Jesus are not transmitted materially or literally; rather they are translated and transferred to the language of the people of the Christian communities of the first century in Asia Minor. For this reason, the reflections in the Gospel of John are not always easy to understand, because in them are mixed the words of God and the words of the Evangelist himself, who mirrors the language of faith of the communities of Asia Minor. The scholarly or scientific study of Jesus is not sufficient for this. It is also necessary that we have the lived experience of faith in the community. Today's Gospel is a typical example of the spiritual and mystical depth of the Gospel of the Beloved Disciple.
- Reciprocal enlightenment between life and faith. Here it is well to repeat what John Cassian says regarding the discovery of the full and profound sense of the psalms: "Instructed by that which we ourselves feel, let us not consider the text as something which we have only heard, but rather like something which we have experienced and which we touch with our hands; not like a strange and unheard of story, but rather like something that we bring out to light from the deepest part of our heart, as if these were sentiments which form part of our being. Let us repeat them; it is not the reading (the study) what makes us penetrate into the sense or meaning of the words, but rather our own experience which has previously been acquired in the life of every day." (Collationes X, 11). Life enlightens the text; the text enlightens life. If, at times, the text says nothing, it is not because of lack of study or because of lack of prayer, but simply because of lack of depth in one's own life.
- John 31-32: The value of the witness of Jesus. The witness of Jesus is true because He does not promote or exalt Himself. "There is another witness who speaks on My behalf," that is, the Father. And His witness is true and deserves to be believed.
- John 5:33-36: The value of the witness of John the Baptist and of the works of Jesus. John the Baptist also gave witness to Jesus and presents Him to the people as the One sent by God who has to come to this world (cf. Jn 1:29, 33-34; 3:28-34). For this reason, even if the witness of John the Baptist is very important, Jesus does not depend on him. He has a witness in His favor who is greater than the witness of John, that is, the works which the Father carries out through Him (Jn 14:10-11).
- John 5:37-38: The Father bears witness to Jesus. Previously, Jesus had said, "Whoever is from God listens to the words of God" (Jn 8:47). The Jews who accused Jesus did not have a mind open to God. And for this reason, they do not perceive the witness of the Father which reaches them through Jesus.
- John 5:39-41: Scripture itself gives testimony of Jesus. The Jews say that they have faith in the Scriptures, but, in reality, they do not understand Scripture, because the Scripture speaks of Jesus (cf. Jn 5:46; 12:16,41; 20:9).
- John 5:42-47: The Father does not judge but entrusts His judgment to the Son. The Jews say that they are faithful to the Scripture of Moses and, because of this, they condemn Jesus. In reality, Moses and the Scripture speak about Jesus and ask us to believe in Him.

4) Personal questions

- Life enlightens the text; the text enlightens life. How does one use this to gain an authentic understanding of each?
- The Jews of the time were following their hardened beliefs and not open to Jesus' teaching. What is the proper balance between keeping old beliefs and accepting new ones? How does one discern what to keep and what to adopt, and how does this apply to Church doctrine and ritual?

5) Concluding Prayer

Yahweh, 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. (Ps 145:13-14)

Lectio Divina Friday, March 27, 2020

Season of Lent

1) Opening prayer

Our God and Father,
we claim to be Your sons and daughters,
who know that You love us,
and that You call us to live
the life of Jesus, Your Son.
Give us the courage
to live this life consistently
not to show off, not to reprove others,
but simply because we know
that You are our Father
and we Your sons and daughters,
brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ, our Lord.

2) Gospel Reading - John 7: 1-2.10.25-30

Jesus moved about within Galilee; he did not wish to travel in Judea, because the Jews were trying to kill him. But the Jewish feast of Tabernacles was near. But when his brothers had gone up to the feast, he himself also went up, not openly but as it were in secret. Some of the inhabitants of Jerusalem said, "Is he not the one they are trying to kill? And look, he is speaking openly and they say nothing to him. Could the authorities have realized that he is the Christ? But we know where he is from. When the Christ comes, no one will know where he is from." So Jesus cried out in the temple area as he was teaching and said, "You know me and also know where I am from. Yet I did not come on my own, but the one who sent me, whom you do not know, is true. I know

him, because I am from him, and he sent me." So they tried to arrest him, but no one laid a hand upon him, because his hour had not yet come.

3) Reflection

- Throughout the chapters from 1 to 12 of the Gospel of John, one discovers the progressive revelation which Jesus makes of himself to the disciples and to the people. At the same time and in the same proportion, the closing up and the opposition of the authority against Jesus increases, up to the point of deciding to condemn Him to death (Jn 11:45-54). Chapter 7, on which we are meditating in today's Gospel, is a type of evaluation in the middle of the journey. It helps to foresee what will be the implication at the end.
- John 7:1-2.10: Jesus decides to go to the feast of the Tabernacles in Jerusalem. The geography of the life of Jesus in the Gospel of John is different from the geography in the other three Gospels. It is more complete. According to the other Gospels, Jesus went only once to Jerusalem, the time when He was taken and condemned to death. According to the Gospel of John He went at least two or three times to Jerusalem for the feast of the Passover. This is why we know that the public life of Jesus lasted approximately three years. Today's Gospel informs us that Jesus directed himself more than once to Jerusalem, but not publicly, but hidden, because in Judah the Jews wanted to kill Him.
- In this chapter 7 as well as in the other chapters, John speaks about the "Jews" and of "you Jews", as if he and Jesus were not Jews. This way of speaking shows the situation of a tragic breaking which took place at the end of the first century between the Jews (Synagogue) and the Christians (Ecclesia). Throughout the centuries, this way of speaking in the Gospel of John contributes to anti-Semitism. Today, it is very important to keep away from this type of division so as not to foster anti-Semitism. We can never forget that Jesus is a Jew. He was born a Jew, lives as a Jew and dies as a Jew. He received all His formation from the Jewish religion and culture.
- John 7:25-27: Doubts of the people of Jerusalem regarding Jesus. Jesus is in Jerusalem and He speaks publicly to those who want to listen to Him. People remain confused. They know that the authorities want to kill Jesus and He does not hide from them. Would it be that the authorities have come to believe in Him and recognize that He is the Messiah? But how could Jesus be the Messiah? Everybody knows that He comes from Nazareth, but nobody knows the origin of the Messiah, from where He comes. In reality, they did not know or acknowledge where He came from, which was from God, thus fulfilling their own definition of the origin of the Messiah, even though they did not see it!
- John 7:28-29: Clarification on the part of Jesus. Jesus speaks about His origin. "You know me and you know where I come from". But what people do not know is the vocation and the mission which Jesus received from God. He did not come on His own accord, but like any prophet He has come to obey a vocation, which is the secret of His life. "Yet, I have not come of My own accord but He who sent Me is true, and you do not know Him. But I know Him, because I have My being from Him and it was He who sent Me".
- John 7:30: His hour had not yet come. They wanted to arrest Him, but no one laid a hand on Him, "because His hour had not yet come". In John's Gospel the one who determines the hour and the events which will take place are not those who have the

power, but it is Jesus. He is the one who determines the hour (cf. Jn 2:4; 4:23; 8:20; 12:23.27; 13:1; 17:1). Even up to the time when He was nailed to the Cross, it is Jesus who determines the hour of His death (Jn 19:29-30).

4) Personal questions

- How do I live my relationship with the Jews? What have I done to study or become informed about the Jewish tradition Jesus lived?
- As Christians we are sent to proclaim the Word. Do we do it openly, or travel in secret out of fear?

5) Concluding Prayer

Yahweh ransoms the lives of those who serve Him,
and there will be no penalty
for those who take refuge in Him. (Ps 34,24)

Lectio Divina Saturday, March 28, 2020

Season of Lent

1) Opening prayer

Almighty God,
when people encountered Your Son,
He became a source of division:
He affected their lives
one way or another. May we accept Him fully
and empty ourselves to make room for Him
in our everyday life, even when it hurts.
Help us, that with Him
we may always seek and do Your will.
We ask You this through Christ our Lord.

2) Gospel Reading - John 7:40-53

Some in the crowd who heard these words of Jesus said, "This is truly the Prophet." Others said, "This is the Christ." But others said, "The Christ will not come from Galilee, will he? Does not Scripture say that the Christ will be of David's family and come from Bethlehem, the village where David lived?" So a division occurred in the crowd because of him. Some of them even wanted to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him. So the guards went to the chief priests and Pharisees, who asked them, "Why did you not bring him?" The guards answered, "Never before has anyone spoken like this man." So the Pharisees answered them, "Have you also been deceived? Have any of the authorities or the Pharisees believed in him? But this crowd, which does not know the law, is accursed." Nicodemus, one of their members who had come to him earlier, said to them, "Does our law condemn a man before it first hears him and finds out what he is doing?" They answered and said to him, "You are not from Galilee also, are you? Look and see that no prophet arises from Galilee." Then each went to his own house.

3) Reflection

- In chapter 7, John confirms that there were diverse opinions and much confusion among the people regarding Jesus. The relatives thought something (Jn 7:2-5) and the people thought something different (Jn 7:12). Some said: “He is a prophet!” (Jn 7:40). Others said: “He leads the people astray!” (Jn 7:12). Some praised Him: “He is a good man!” (Jn 7:12). Others criticized Him: “He has not been educated, has not studied!” (Jn 7:15). Each one had his own arguments, taken from the Bible or from Tradition. But nobody remembered the Messiah Servant, announced by Isaiah (Is 42:1-9; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; 52:13; 53:12; 61:1-2). Today, too, there is much discussion on religion, and all take their arguments from the Bible. As in the past, it happens many times that little ones are deceived by the discourses of the great ones and, some times, even by the discourses of those who belong to the Church. It is important to understand the full picture, and not be led astray by personal interpretations or the person sitting next to us. It is a personal responsibility to seek and learn every day, while discerning the authenticity, history, and meaning of what we see, hear, or find.
- John 7:40-44: The confusion among the people. The reaction of the people is very diverse. Some say: He is the prophet. Others: He is the Messiah; the Christ. Others claim: He cannot be because the Messiah will come from Bethlehem and He comes from Galilee! These diverse ideas on the Messiah produce division and confrontation. There were some who wanted to take Him, to arrest Him, but they did not do it. Perhaps because they were afraid of the people (cf. Mt 14:2). There were many sources of authority at the time, both formal and informal, from the Roman occupation, to the Elders, the priests and religious leaders, and even to the people themselves who were able to demand and obtain Jesus’ execution despite there not being cause.
- John 7:45-49: The arguments of the authority. Previously, before the reaction of the people who were in favor of Jesus, the Pharisees had sent some guards to arrest Him (Jn 7:32). But the guards returned without Jesus. They had been greatly impressed in hearing people speak so well: “No one has ever spoken like this man!” The Pharisees reacted: “Have you also been led astray?” According to the Pharisees who said: “This rabble knows nothing about the Law” and allows itself to be deceived by Jesus. It is as if they said: “No, we the chief priests know things better and we do not allow ourselves to be led astray!” and they say that the people are “damned”! The religious authority of that time treated people with great contempt.
- John 7, 50-52: The defense of Jesus by Nicodemus. Before this stupid argument, the honesty of Nicodemus emerges and he raises his voice to defend Jesus: “But surely our Law does not allow us to pass judgment on anyone without first giving him a hearing and discovering what He is doing?” The reaction of the others is that Nicodemus is mocking them: “Nicodemus are you also from Galilee? Look at the Bible and you will see for yourself that prophets do not arise in Galilee!” They are sure! Holding the book of the past, they defend themselves against the future which arrives and disturbs them.

4) Personal questions

- Today, what are the diverse opinions that people have about Jesus? In your community, are there different opinions which cause confusion? What are they? Name them, describe them.
- There are people who accept only the new which agree with their own ideas and their

past. There are others today that accept every new idea no matter how crazy. How do you discern authentic change and not be tossed about by every new idea?

5) Concluding Prayer

Have mercy on me, O God,
in Your faithful love,
in Your great tenderness wipe away my offenses;
wash me clean from my guilt,
purify me from my sin. (Ps 51:1-2)

Lectio Divina Sunday, March 29, 2020

Season of Lent

The resurrection of Lazarus

In the "House of the Poor"

Jesus reveals himself as the source of life

John 11: 1-45

1. Opening prayer

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

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

2. Reading: John 11:1-45

a) A key to guide the reading:

Let us read the text, which describes the resurrection of Lazarus. During the reading, try to follow the group, the disciples who follow Jesus from Galilee to Bethany. You must follow attentively all the events, from the time that the announcement of the sickness of Martha and Mary's brother was sent to Jesus who was in Galilee, to the time of the resurrection of Lazarus.

b) A division of the text to assist a careful reading:

John 11:1-16: Jesus hears the news and sets out for Bethany to raise Lazarus.

John 11:17-31: Jesus meets the two sisters and Martha's profession of faith.

John 11:32-45: The great sign of the resurrection of Lazarus.

c) The text:

1-16: There was a man named Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister, Martha, and he was ill. It was the same Mary, the sister of the sick man Lazarus, who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped His feet with her hair. The sisters sent this message to Jesus: 'Lord, the man you love is ill.' On receiving the message, Jesus said, 'This sickness will not end in death, but it is for God's glory so that through it the Son of God may be glorified.' Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, yet when He heard that he was ill He stayed where He was for two more days before saying to the disciples, 'Let us go back to Judaea.' The disciples said, 'Rabbi, it is not long since the Jews were trying to stone You; are You going back there again?' Jesus replied, 'Are there not twelve hours in the day? No one who walks in the daytime stumbles, having the light of this world to see by; anyone who walks around at night stumbles, having no light as a guide.' He said that and then added, 'Our friend Lazarus is at rest; I am going to wake him.' The disciples said to Him, 'Lord, if he is at rest he will be saved.' Jesus was speaking of the death of Lazarus, but they thought that by 'rest' he meant 'sleep'; so Jesus put it plainly, 'Lazarus is dead; and for your sake I am glad I was not there because now you will believe. But let us go to him.' Then Thomas -- known as the Twin -- said to the other disciples, 'Let us also go to die with Him.'



17-31: On arriving, Jesus found that Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days already. Bethany is only about two miles from Jerusalem, and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them about their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming she went to meet Him. Mary remained sitting in the house. Martha said to Jesus, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died, but even now I know that God will grant whatever You ask of Him.' Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again.' Martha said, 'I know he will rise again at the resurrection on the last day.' Jesus said, 'I am the resurrection. Anyone who believes in Me, even though that person dies, will live, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?' 'Yes, Lord,' she said, 'I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, the one who was to come into this world.' When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying in a low voice, 'The Master is here and wants to see you.' Hearing this, Mary got up quickly and went to Him. Jesus had not yet come into the village; He was still at the place where Martha had met Him. When the Jews who were in the house comforting Mary saw her get up so quickly and go out, they followed her, thinking that she was going to the tomb to weep there.

32-45: Mary went to Jesus, and as soon as she saw Him she threw herself at His feet, saying, 'Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died.' At the sight of her tears, and those of the Jews who had come with her, Jesus was greatly distressed, and with a profound sigh He said, 'Where have you put him?' They said, 'Lord, come

and see.' Jesus wept; and the Jews said, 'See how much He loved him!' But there were some who remarked, 'He opened the eyes of the blind man. Could he not have prevented this man's death?' Sighing again, Jesus reached the tomb: it was a cave with a stone to close the opening. Jesus said, 'Take the stone away.' Martha, the dead man's sister, said to Him, 'Lord, by now he will smell; this is the fourth day since he died.' Jesus replied, 'Have I not told you that if you believe you will see the glory of God?' So they took the stone away. Then Jesus lifted up His eyes and said, 'Father, I thank You for hearing my prayer. I myself knew that You hear me always, but I speak for the sake of all these who are standing around Me, so that they may believe it was You who sent Me. When He had said this, He cried in a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out!' The dead man came out, his feet and hands bound with strips of material, and a cloth over his face. Jesus said to them, 'Unbind him, let him go free.' Many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what he did, believed in Him.

3. A moment of prayerful silence

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

4. Some questions

to help us in our personal reflection.

- a) What drew your attention most in this very detailed account? Why?
- b) What is the central and most important point of the whole narrative? Why?
- c) What was the attitude of the disciples? What did they say and do?
- d) What was the attitude of Martha and Mary? What did they say and do?
- e) What was the attitude of the Jews? What did they say, do and plan?
- f) With whom can you identify yourself most: the disciples, the sisters, the Jews, or none of these?
- g) Have you ever experienced times when despair and hope, life and death got confused in your thought? In times such as these, what kept up your faith?
- h) How does Lazarus rise to life today? How does resurrection take place today, giving new life to the poor?

5. A key to the reading

for those who wish to go deeper into the text.

The difference between the Gospel of John and that of the other three Evangelists.

* A comparison in order to understand the difference. Photo and X-Ray. You are in wonder at the beauty of nature before a sunrise. You see and contemplate what your eyes look at. This is the photo! Next to you, a friend says to you, "Have you noticed how that small cloud changed into a deeper color? Our friendship is like this!" She saw more than that which the eyes were looking at. This is the X-Ray. Love for and faith in one another have expanded her vision. The Gospel of John is like this; it is the Gospel of the beloved disciple. He teaches us how to read the other Gospels and to discover in them a deeper dimension. The other three Gospels take photos of the miracles. John takes an X-Ray and reveals his deep sense of the divine, that which only faith can see by the working of the Spirit (John 14:26; 16:19).

* For instance, the synoptics mention twenty-eight different miracles. John only mentions seven and he calls them "signs". Of the seven, only three are found in the synoptics. The other four are exclusive to John: the marriage feast in Cana (Jn 2:1-11), the healing of the paralytic at the pool of Siloe (Jn 5:1-9), the healing of the man born blind (Jn 9:1-7) and the resurrection of Lazarus (Jn 11:1-44). In the way he presents these "signs", John does much more than simply tell the miracle. He expands the facts so that they manifest Jesus as the revelation of the Father. John's Gospel tries to throw light on Jesus' saying, "To have seen Me is to have seen the Father" (Jn 14:9). When we hold up to the light the X-Ray of Jesus in John's Gospel, we see the face of the Father.

Lazarus' resurrection in the scheme of John's Gospel

* The scheme of the seven signs:

1st Sign: the marriage feast of Cana (Jn 2:1-12)

2nd Sign: the healing of the nobleman's son (Jn 4:46-54)

3rd Sign: the healing of the paralytic (Jn 5:1-18)

4th Sign: the multiplication of the bread (Jn 6:1-15)

5th Sign: Jesus walks on the water (Jn 6:16-21)

6th Sign: the healing of the blind man (Jn 9:1-40)

7th Sign: the raising of Lazarus (Jn 11:1-44)

The great sign is the HOUR of Jesus' glorification.

* The seven signs are seven prefigurations of the glorification of Jesus, which will take place at the Hour of His passion, death and resurrection. Each sign symbolizes one aspect of the meaning of the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus for us. It is in "meditating day and night" through Lectio Divina or Prayerful Reading that we shall discover this meaning, which will enrich our lives.

* The resurrection of Lazarus, the seventh sign, opens the way for the coming of the Hour, the glorification, which takes place through death (Jn 12:23; 17:1). One of the reasons why Jesus is condemned will be the resurrection of Lazarus (Jn 11:50; 12:10). Thus, the seventh sign will be in order to manifest the glory of God (Jn 11:4): "This sickness will end not in death but in God's glory and through it the Son of God will be glorified". The disciples cannot understand this (Jn 11:6-8). But even though they do not understand, they are ready to go and die with Jesus (Jn 11:16). Their understanding is slight, but their faith is right.

The meaning of Lazarus' resurrection

* In Bethany: Everything happens in Bethany, a small village at the foot of the Mount of Olives, near Jerusalem. In the story, Lazarus' family, where Jesus liked to go, is the mirror of the community of the Beloved Disciple at the end of the first century. Mirror also of our communities. Bethany means "House of the Poor". Martha means "Lady" (coordinator); a lady who coordinates the community. Lazarus means "God helps" the

poor community, which hoped for everything from God. Mary means "beloved of Yahweh", the image of the community. The story of the resurrection of Lazarus wants to communicate this certainty: Jesus brings life to the community of the poor; He is the source of life for those who believe in Him.

* Between life and death: Lazarus is dead. Many Jews are at Martha and Mary's house to comfort them for the loss of their brother. Those who represent the Old Testament do not bring new life. They just console. Jesus is the one who brings new life! In John's Gospel, the Jews are also the enemies who wish to kill Jesus (Jn 10:31). So we have on one side the threat of death against Jesus, and on the other Jesus who comes to conquer death! It is in this context of conflict between life and death that the seventh sign of the resurrection of Lazarus, of victory over death, takes place.

* Two ways of believing in the resurrection: The central point is the contrast between the old way of believing in the resurrection at the end of times, and the new brought by Jesus, which until now conquers death. Martha, the Pharisees and the majority of the people believed in the resurrection (Acts 23:6-10; Mk 12:18). They believed, but did not reveal it, because their faith was only in the resurrection at the end of times and not in the present resurrection of the story, here and now. That resurrection did not renew life. A link was missing. The new life of the resurrection comes with Jesus.

* Profession of faith in Jesus and profession of faith in life: Jesus challenges Martha to take that step. It is not enough to believe in the resurrection at the end of times. We must believe that Resurrection is already here today in the person of Jesus and in those who believe in Him. Death no longer holds power over these, because Jesus is the "resurrection and the life". And, Martha, even though she has not yet seen the concrete sign of the resurrection of Lazarus, professes her faith: "Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, the one who was to come into this world".

* Human, very human, equal to us in all things: After her profession of faith, Martha calls Mary, her sister. Mary goes to meet Jesus, who was still where Martha had met him. She repeats Martha's expression: "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died" (Jn 11:21). Mary weeps, everyone weeps. Jesus is moved. When the poor weep, Jesus is moved and weeps. When they see Jesus weeping, the others say, "See how much He loved him!" This is the characteristic of the community of the Beloved Disciple: love between Jesus and the members of the community. Some do not believe and still doubt: "He opened the eyes of the blind; could He not have prevented this man's death?" For the third time, Jesus is moved (Jn 11:33,35,38). Thus, John stresses Jesus' humanity against those who, at the end of the first century, spiritualized the faith and denied the humanity of Jesus.

* For us, there only remains to remove the stone so that God may give life back to us: Jesus orders the stone to be removed. Martha reacts: "Lord, by now he will smell; this is the fourth day!" Once more, Jesus challenges her recalling her faith in the resurrection, here and now, as a sign of God's glory: "Have I not told you that if you believe you will see the glory of God?" They removed the stone. Before the open tomb and before the incredulity of those standing there, Jesus turns to the Father. First, He thanks the Father, "Father, I thank You for hearing my prayer. I knew indeed that You always hear Me". The Father of Jesus is the same God who always hears the cry of the

poor (Ex 2:24; 3:7). Jesus knows the Father and trusts Him. But now He asks for a sign for the sake of those who stand there, so that they may believe that He, Jesus, was sent by the Father. Then, He shouts aloud, "Lazarus, here. Come out!" And Lazarus comes out. This is the victory of life over death, of faith over unbelief! A farmer in the interior of Brazil commented, "It is up to us to remove the stone! And so God resurrects the community. There are those who do not want to remove the stone, and so in their community there is no life!"

6. Psalm 16 (15)

God is our birthright forever
Protect me, O God, in You is my refuge.
To Yahweh I say, 'You are my Lord,
my happiness is in none of the sacred spirits of the earth.'
They only take advantage of all who love them.
People flock to their teeming idols.
Never shall I pour libations to them!
Never take their names on my lips.

My birthright, my cup is Yahweh;
You, You alone, hold my lot secure.
The measuring-line marks out for me a delightful place,
my birthright is all I could wish.

I bless Yahweh who is my counsellor,
even at night my heart instructs me.
I keep Yahweh before me always,
for with Him at my right hand, nothing can shake me.

So my heart rejoices, my soul delights,
my body too will rest secure,
for You will not abandon me to Sheol,
You cannot allow Your faithful servant to see the abyss.
You will teach me the path of life,
unbounded joy in Your presence,
at Your right hand delight for ever.

7. Final Prayer

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

Lectio Divina Monday, March 30, 2020

Season of Lent

1) Opening prayer

Just and merciful God,
You take pity even on sinners
and You continue with them
a dialogue of grace and hope. Help us too never to condemn,
never to give up on people,
but to be patient, understanding and forgiving,
together with You and Jesus Your Son
who lives with You and the Holy Spirit
for ever and ever.

2) Gospel Reading - John 8: 1-11

Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. At daybreak he appeared in the Temple again; and as all the people came to Him, He sat down and began to teach them.

The scribes and Pharisees brought a woman along who had been caught committing adultery; and making her stand there in the middle they said to Jesus, 'Master, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery, and in the Law Moses has ordered us to stone women of this kind. What do You have to say?'

They asked Him this as a test, looking for an accusation to use against Him. But Jesus bent down and started writing on the ground with His finger. As they persisted with their question, He straightened up and said, 'Let the one among you who is guiltless be the first to throw a stone at her.' Then He bent down and continued writing on the ground. When they heard this they went away one by one, beginning with the eldest, until the last one had gone and Jesus was left alone with the woman, who remained in the middle. Jesus again straightened up and said, 'Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?' 'No one, sir,' she replied. 'Neither do I condemn you,' said Jesus. 'Go away, and from this moment sin no more.'

3) Reflection

- In today's Gospel, we will meditate on the encounter of Jesus with the woman whom was going to be stoned. Because of His preaching and His way of acting Jesus disturbs and troubles the religious authority. Because of this, they tried, by all possible means, to accuse Him and to get rid of Him. Thus, they bring before Him a woman, caught committing adultery. Under the appearance of fidelity to the Law, they use the woman in order to have an argument against Jesus. Today also, under the appearance of fidelity to the Laws of the Church, many persons are marginalized. Divorcés/divorcées, prostitutes, sick with AIDS, single mothers, homosexuals, etc. Let us see how Jesus reacts:

- John 8:1-2: Jesus and the people. After the discussion on the origin of the Messiah, described at the end of chapter 7 (Jn 7:37-52), "They all went home" (Jn 7:53). Jesus

did not have a house in Jerusalem. This is the reason why He went to the Mount of Olives. There was a garden there, where He usually spent the night in prayer (Jn 18:1). The following day, before dawn, before the rising of the sun, Jesus was again in the Temple. People came very close to Him to be able to listen to Him. They sat on the ground, around Jesus and He taught them. What did Jesus teach? It must have been very beautiful because people went there before sunrise to listen to Him!

- John 8:3-6^a: The Scribes prepare the ambush. Unexpectedly, the Scribes and Pharisees arrive, with a woman caught committing adultery. They make her stand in the middle. According to the law, the woman would have to be stoned (Lev 20: 20; Deut 22: 22,24). They ask, “What is your opinion, what do you have to say?” It was a trap. If Jesus had said, “Apply the Law”, they would have said, “He is not as good as He seems, because He has said to kill the poor woman!” If He had said, “Do not kill her”, they would have said, “He is not as good as He seems, because He does not even observe the law!” Under appearances of fidelity to God, they manipulate the law using the person of the woman in order to be able to accuse Jesus.

- John 8: 6b-8: Reaction of Jesus: He writes on the ground. It seemed to be a dead alley without an exit. But Jesus is not frightened, nor does He get nervous. Instead, calmly, He bends down and begins to write on the ground with His finger. His enemies are those who get nervous. They insist and they want Jesus to give His opinion. Then Jesus rises and says, “Let the one among you who is guiltless be the first to throw a stone at her!” Then bending down again He continued to write on the ground. Jesus does not discuss the law. But He changes the objective of the judgment. Instead of allowing them to place the law above the woman to condemn her, He asks them to examine themselves in the light of what the law demands from them. The symbolical action of writing on the ground clarifies everything. The word of the Law of God has its own consistency. A word written on the ground has no consistency. The rain and the wind carry it away. The forgiveness of God takes away sin identified and denounced by the law.

- John 8:9-11: Jesus and the woman. The gesture and response of Jesus make His enemies go away; they are conquered. The Pharisees and the Scribes go away full of shame, one after the other, beginning with the eldest. This is the opposite of what they expected to take place. The person condemned by the law was not the woman, but rather they who believed themselves to be faithful to the law. At the end, Jesus remained alone with the woman who stood in the middle. Jesus straightened up and said, “Woman, where are they who condemned you? Has no one condemned you?!” She replied: “No one, Sir!” And Jesus concludes, “Neither do I condemn you! Go away, and from this moment sin no more!”

- Jesus does not allow anyone to use the Law of God to condemn the brother or the sister when the person who condemns is himself/herself a sinner. This episode, better than any other teaching, reveals that Jesus is the light which makes truth shine. He opens up what exists in the secret of persons, in the intimate depth of each one of us. In the light of His word, those who seemed to be the defenders of the law reveal themselves being full of sin and they themselves recognize it, and they leave, beginning by the eldest. And the woman considered to be guilty and deserving of death, remains standing up before God, absolved, redeemed and with her dignity recovered (cf. Jn 3:19-21).

4) Personal questions

- Try to put yourself in the woman's place: What were her feelings at that moment?
- What are the steps which our community can and should take to accept those who are excluded?

5) Concluding Prayer

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. (Ps 51:1-3)

Lectio Divina Tuesday, March 31, 2020

Season of Lent

1) Opening prayer

Our saving, merciful God,
wandering in our deserts of injustice and lack of love,
we cry out with fear
or are stunned into silence,
some into doubt or despair.
Give us enough trusting faith
to look up to Him
who took our evil and doubts upon himself,
suffered for them on a cross, and rose from them,
Jesus Christ, our Savior and our Lord.

2) Gospel Reading - John 8:21-30

Jesus said to the Pharisees: "I am going away and you will look for me, but you will die in your sin. Where I am going you cannot come." So the Jews said, "He is not going to kill himself, is he, because he said, 'Where I am going you cannot come'?" He said to them, "You belong to what is below, I belong to what is above. You belong to this world, but I do not belong to this world. That is why I told you that you will die in your sins. For if you do not believe that I AM, you will die in your sins." So they said to him, "Who are you?" Jesus said to them, "What I told you from the beginning. I have much to say about you in condemnation. But the one who sent me is true, and what I heard from him I tell the world." They did not realize that he was speaking to them of the Father. So Jesus said to them, "When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will realize that I AM, and that I do nothing on my own, but I say only what the Father taught me. The one who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, because I always do what is pleasing to him." Because he spoke this way, many came to believe in him.

3) Reflection

- Last week, the Liturgy led us to meditate on chapter five of the Gospel of John. This week it confronts us with chapter 8 of the same Gospel. Like chapter 5, chapter 8 also contains profound reflections on the mystery of God which surrounds the person of Jesus. It is a dialogue between Jesus and the Pharisees (Jn 8:13). The Pharisees want to know who Jesus is. They criticize Him because He gives testimony of himself without any proof or witness to legitimize himself before the people (Jn 8:13). Jesus responds by saying that He does not speak in His own name, but always for the Father and in the name of the Father (Jn 8:14-19).
- In reality, the dialogues are also an expression of how the faith was transmitted in the catechesis in the communities of the beloved disciple toward the end of the first century. They show the prayerful reading of the word of Jesus that the Christians did, considering it Word of God. The method of question and answer helped to find the response to the problems which the Jews raised to the Christians toward the end of the first century. It was a concrete way to help the community to deepen its faith in Jesus and in His message.
- John 8:21-22: Where I am going, you cannot come. Here John presents a new theme or another aspect which surrounds the person of Jesus. Jesus speaks about His departure and says that where He is going the Pharisees cannot follow Him. “I am going away; you will look for Me and you will die in your sin“. They will look for Jesus, but will not find Him, because they do not know Him and will look for Him with mistaken criteria. They live in sin and will die in sin. To live in sin is to live far away from God. They imagine God in a certain way, but God is different from what they imagine. This is why they are not capable to recognize the presence of God in Jesus. The Pharisees do not understand what Jesus wants to say and they take everything just literally: “Is He going to kill himself?”
- John 8:23-24: You are from here below; I am from above. The Pharisees consider everything according to the criteria of this world. “You are from this world; I am not from this world!” The framework of reference which guides Jesus in everything which He says and does is the world above, that is, God, Father, and the mission which He has received from the Father. The framework of reference of the Pharisees is the world below, without openness, closed up in its own criteria. This is why they live in sin. To live in sin is not to have the gaze of Jesus on their life. The look of Jesus is totally open toward God up to the point that God himself is in Him in all His fullness (cf. Col 1:19). We say: “Jesus is God”. John invites us to say: “God is Jesus!”. This is why Jesus says: “If you do not believe that I AM HE, you will die in your sins”. I AM is the affirmation with which God presents himself to Moses at the moment of liberating His people from the oppression of Egypt (Ex 3:13-14). This is the maximum expression of the absolute certainty of the fact that God is in our midst in the person of Jesus. Jesus is the definitive proof of the fact that God is with us. Emmanuel.
- John 8:25-26: Who are you? The mystery of God in Jesus does not fit into the criteria with which the Pharisees judge Jesus. Once again they ask: “who are you?” They did not understand because they do not understand Jesus’ language. Jesus was very careful to speak to them according to all that He experienced and lived in union with the Father and for the knowledge and awareness of His mission. Jesus does not promote himself.

He only says and expresses what He hears from the Father. He is the pure revelation because He is pure and total obedience.

- John 8:27-30: When you have lifted up the Son of man, then you will know that I AM HE. The Pharisees did not understand that Jesus, in everything He says and does, is the expression of the Father. They will understand it only after the Son of man will be lifted up. “Then you will know that I AM HE”. The word lifted up has a double sense, to be lifted up on the Cross and to be lifted up to the right hand of the Father. The Good News of the death and resurrection reveals who Jesus is, and they will know that Jesus is the presence of God in our midst. The foundation of this certainty of our faith is twofold: on the one side, the certainty that the Father is always with Jesus and He never remains alone and, on the other side, the radical and total obedience of Jesus to the Father, which becomes total openness and total transparency of the Father for us.

4) Personal questions

- The one who wraps up in his own rules and thinks that he already knows everything, will never be capable of understanding others. This is the way the Pharisees were before Jesus. How do I accept the new while not losing the truths in doctrine and tradition?
- Jesus is radical obedience to the Father, and because of this, He is total revelation of the Father. What is the image of God which I show and which comes from me?

5) Concluding Prayer

Yahweh, hear my prayer,
let my cry for help reach You.
Do not turn away Your face from me
when I am in trouble;
bend down and listen to me, when I call,
be quick to answer me! (Ps 102:1-2)