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Lectio Divina Wednesday, April 1, 2020

Season of Lent

1) Opening prayer

Lord our God,
 You call us to be free people.
 Help us to give You always
 a response of freedom.
 Set free by Christ's
 liberating word and death,
 may we never again
 shackle ourselves with self-made chains,
 of selfish sin and false attachments.
 We ask You this through Christ our Lord.

2) Gospel Reading - John 8:31-42

Jesus said to those Jews who believed in him, "If you remain in my word, you will truly be my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." They answered him, "We are descendants of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How can you say, 'You will become free'?" Jesus answered them, "Amen, amen, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave of sin. A slave does not remain in a household forever, but a son always remains. So if the Son frees you, then you will truly be free. I know that you are descendants of Abraham. But you are trying to kill me, because my word has no room among you. I tell you what I have seen in the Father's presence; then do what you have heard from the Father." They answered and said to him, "Our father is Abraham." Jesus said to them, "If you were Abraham's children, you would be doing the works of Abraham. But now you are trying to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God; Abraham did not do this. You are doing the works of your father!" So they said to him, "We were not born of fornication. We have one Father, God." Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and am here; I did not come on my own, but he sent me."

3) Reflection

- The reflection on chapter 8 of the Gospel of John continues today. In the form of concentric circles, John deepens the mystery of God which envelopes the person of Jesus. It seems like a repetition, because he always goes back to speak of the same point. In reality, it is the same point, but every time at a more profound level. Today's Gospel treats the theme of the relationship of Jesus with Abraham, the Father of the People of God. John tries to help the communities understand how Jesus places himself within the whole history of the People of God. He helps them to perceive the difference that existed between Jesus and the Jews, and also the Jews and the others, as all of us are sons and daughters of Abraham.

- John 8:31-32: The liberty which comes from fidelity to the word of Jesus. Jesus affirms to the Jews: “If you make My word your home you will indeed be My disciples; 32 you will come to know the truth and the truth will set you free”. To be a disciple of Jesus is the same as opening oneself to God. The words of Jesus are in reality words of God. They communicate the truth, because they make things known as they are in the eyes of God and not in the eyes of the Pharisees. Later, during the Last Supper, Jesus will teach the same thing to the disciples.
- John 8:33-38: What is it to be a son or a daughter of Abraham? The reaction of the Jews is immediate: “We are descended from Abraham and we have never been the slaves of anyone: what do You mean: You will be set free?” Jesus repeats and confirms making a distinction between son and slave and says: “Everyone who commits sin is a slave. The slave has no permanent standing in the household, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will indeed be free”. Jesus is the son and remains in the house of the Father. The slave does not live in the house of the Father. To live outside the house, outside of God means to live in sin. If they would accept the word of Jesus they could become sons and attain liberty. They would no longer be slaves. And Jesus continues: “I know that you are descended from Abraham; but you want to kill Me, because My word finds no place in you”. The distinction is immediately very clear: “What I speak of is what I have seen at My Father’s side, and you too put into action the lessons you have learnt from your father”. Jesus denies to them the right to say that they are sons of Abraham, because their works affirm the contrary.
- John 8:39-41^a: A son of Abraham fulfills the works of Abraham. They insist in affirming: “Our father is Abraham!” as if they wanted to present to Jesus a document of their identity. Jesus repeats: “If you are sons of Abraham do the works of Abraham! 40 Now, instead you are seeking to kill Me, because I have told you the truth heard from God; Abraham has not done this. 41 You do the works of your father”. Between the lines, He suggests that their father is Satan (Jn 8:44). He suggests that they are sons of prostitution.
- John 8:41b-42: If God was your Father, certainly, you would love Me, because I have My origin in God and I come from Him; I did not come of My own accord, but He sent Me”. Jesus repeats the same truth using diverse words: “Whoever comes from God listens to the words of God”. The origin of this affirmation is from Jeremiah who says: “Within them I shall plant My Law, writing it on their hearts. Then I shall be their God and they will be My people. There will be no further need for everyone to teach neighbor or brother, saying: ‘Learn to know Yahweh!’ No, they will all know Me, from the least to the greatest, Yahweh declares, since I shall forgive their guilt and never more call their sin to mind” (Jr 31:33-34). But they will not open themselves to this new experience of God, and because of this they will not recognize Jesus as the one sent by the Father.

4) Personal questions

- This passage talks about slavery in a new way to the Jews. Even today, we often think of slavery in a narrow way and not as Jesus is talking about here. In what ways are we slaves to things of the world which the Father has no need of?
- Which is my deepest experience which leads me to recognize Jesus as the one sent by God?
- There is a strong statement for us to be put together from this passage. "If God were

your Father, you would love Me” and "If you were Abraham's children, you would be doing the works of Abraham.” It can then be said: “ If God were your Father, you would be doing the works of God”. Do we actively do the work of God every day as his children, or just when we have time or when it is convenient?

5) Concluding Prayer

May You be blessed, Lord, God of our ancestors,
be praised and extolled for ever.
Blessed be Your glorious and holy name,
praised and extolled for ever.
Blessed on the throne of Your kingdom,
exalted above all, glorified for ever. (Dn 3,52.54)

Lectio Divina Thursday, April 2, 2020

Season of Lent

1) Opening prayer

Lord God,
in Your son Jesus Christ
You have given us a new name,
the name of Your Son himself.
May we live up to our new destiny,
to be people-for-others
who serve and commit ourselves
together with Jesus,
Your Son and our Lord for ever.

2) Gospel Reading - John 8:51-59

Jesus said to the Jews: "Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever keeps my word will never see death." So the Jews said to him, "Now we are sure that you are possessed. Abraham died, as did the prophets, yet you say, 'Whoever keeps my word will never taste death.' Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? Or the prophets, who died? Who do you make yourself out to be?" Jesus answered, "If I glorify myself, my glory is worth nothing; but it is my Father who glorifies me, of whom you say, 'He is our God.' You do not know him, but I know him. And if I should say that I do not know him, I would be like you a liar. But I do know him and I keep his word. Abraham your father rejoiced to see my day; he saw it and was glad." So the Jews said to him, "You are not yet fifty years old and you have seen Abraham?" Jesus said to them, "Amen, amen, I say to you, before Abraham came to be, I AM." So they picked up stones to throw at him; but Jesus hid and went out of the temple area.

3) Reflection

- Chapter 8 seems an exhibition of works of art, where it is possible to admire and contemplate famous paintings, next to one another. Today’s Gospel presents us a painting, and a dialogue, between Jesus and the Jews. There is not too much connection between one and the other painting. It is the spectator who, thanks to his/her attentive and prayerful observation, succeeds in discovering the invisible thread that binds the

paintings. Thus, we penetrate into the divine mystery which envelops the person of Jesus.

- John 8:51: *Whoever keeps the word of Jesus will not see death.* Jesus makes a solemn affirmation; the prophets said: *Oracle of the Lord!* Jesus says: *“Truly, I say to you!”* And the solemn affirmation is the following: *“Whoever keeps My word will not see death!”* This same theme appears and reappears many times in the Gospel of John. These are words of a great depth. Notice how the prophets speak on behalf of God, but Jesus speaks in the first person with authority *as God!*

- John 8:52-53: *Abraham and the prophets died.* The reaction of the Jews is immediate: “Now we know that you are out of Your mind. Abraham died and the prophets also died. And you say: “Whoever keeps My word will never see death”. Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? The prophets also died. Who are you claiming to be?” They did not understand the importance and significance of the affirmation of Jesus. It was a dialogue of the deaf.

- John, 8:54-56: *I am glorified by My Father.* Once again and as always Jesus hits on the same key: He is so united to the Father that everything that He says or does is His. Everything is the Father’s. And He says: *“The one who glorifies Me is My Father, the one whom you say, ‘He is our God!’ and you do not know Him. But I know Him. And if I were to say, ‘I do not know Him’, I should be a liar, as you yourselves are. But I do know Him and I observe His word. Your father, Abraham, rejoiced to think that he would see My Day; he saw it and was glad”.* These words of Jesus must have been like a sword which wounded the self esteem of the Jews. To tell the religious authority: “You do not know the God whom you say you know. I know Him and you do not know Him!” It is like accusing them of total ignorance exactly regarding the theme on which they think they are specialized doctors. And the final word increases the measure: *“Abraham, your father, rejoiced in the hope of seeing My Day, he saw it and was glad”.*

- John 8:57-59: *“You are not fifty yet, and you have seen Abraham!* They took everything literally, thus showing that they did not understand anything of what Jesus was saying. And Jesus makes another solemn affirmation: "In all truth I tell you: before Abraham ever was, I AM”.

For those who believe in Jesus, here we reach the heart of the mystery of the story. Once again they pick up stones to kill Jesus. But neither this time will they succeed, because His hour has not as yet come. The one who determines the hour is Jesus himself.

4) Personal questions

- It is a dialogue with the deaf between Jesus and the Jews. Have you sometimes had the experience of speaking with a person who thinks exactly the opposite of what you think and is not aware of it?

- How do you react when you are shown your errors? Do you consider the arguments or hold on to your thinking?

5) Concluding Prayer

Seek Yahweh and His strength,
tirelessly seek His presence!

Remember the marvels He has done,

His wonders, the judgments He has spoken. (Ps 105:4-5)

Lectio Divina Friday, April 3, 2020

Season of Lent

1) Opening prayer

Lord our God,
You are a loyal God,
ever faithful to Your promises. Strengthen our faith,
that with Jesus we may always keep trusting in You
in spite of prejudices, ridicule or contradiction.
Give us the firm conviction
that You are irrevocably committed to us
in Jesus Christ our Lord.

2) Gospel Reading - John 10:31-42

The Jews picked up rocks to stone Jesus. Jesus answered them, "I have shown you many good works from my Father. For which of these are you trying to stone me?" The Jews answered him, "We are not stoning you for a good work but for blasphemy. You, a man, are making yourself God." Jesus answered them, "Is it not written in your law, 'I said, 'You are gods''? If it calls them gods to whom the word of God came, and Scripture cannot be set aside, can you say that the one whom the Father has consecrated and sent into the world blasphemes because I said, 'I am the Son of God'? If I do not perform my Father's works, do not believe me; but if I perform them, even if you do not believe me, believe the works, so that you may realize and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father." Then they tried again to arrest him; but he escaped from their power. He went back across the Jordan to the place where John first baptized, and there he remained. Many came to him and said, "John performed no sign, but everything John said about this man was true." And many there began to believe in him.

3) Reflection

- We are close to Holy Week, during which we commemorate the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus. Beginning with the fourth week of Lent, the texts of the Gospel of every day are texts taken almost exclusively from the Gospel of John, two chapters which stress the dramatic tension between the progressive revelation, on the one side, which Jesus makes of the mystery of the Father which fills Him completely, and on the other side, the progressive closing up of the Jews who always become more impenetrable to the message of Jesus. The tragic aspect of this closing up is that they claim it is in fidelity to God. They refuse Jesus in the name of God.
- This way in which John presents the conflict between Jesus and the religious authority is not only something which has taken place in the far past. It is also a mirror which

reflects what happens today. In the name of God, some persons transform themselves into bombs and kill other persons. In the name of God, we, members of the three religions of the God of Abraham, Jews, Christians and Muslims, have fought among ourselves throughout history. Ecumenism is difficult and at the same time, necessary. In the name of God, many horrible things have been committed and as a world, we continue to commit them every day. Lent is an important period of time to stop and to ask ourselves: What is the image of God that I have within me?

- John 10:31-33: The Jews want to stone Jesus. The Jews prepare stone to kill Jesus and Jesus asks: “I have shown you many good works from My Father, for which of these are you stoning me?” The answer: “We are stoning you, not for doing a good work, but for blasphemy; though you are only man, you claim to be God”. They want to kill Jesus because He blasphemes. The law ordered that such persons should be stoned.

- John 10:34-36: The Bible calls all sons of God. They want to kill Jesus because He says He is God. Jesus responds in the name of the law of God itself. “Is it not perhaps written in your Law: I said you are gods? Now, if the Law has called gods those to whom the Word of God was addressed (and Scripture cannot be set aside), to those whom the Father has consecrated and sent into the world, and you say: You blaspheme, because I have said: I am the Son of God?”

- Strangely, Jesus says “your law”. He could have said: “our Law”. Why does He speak in this way? The Jews understood the Law as applying the term “gods” to those who were the recipients of God’s Word. There are three ways it could be phrased: 1) the Law, 2) our Law, or 3) your Law. The rabbinic interpretation precludes number 1, as it would only be applied to true Israelites. The second way would indicate a common theological understanding of the Law. His entire ministry had shown their misunderstanding of the Law, so this would not be consistent. So, in option 3, we see He not only is using the Law to explain, but also to emphasize “their” interpretations of the Law versus what He has taught. In other words it could be said: “according to the Law as you have made it out to be”.

- John 10:37-38: At least believe in the works. Jesus again speaks of the works that He does and which are the revelation of the Father. If I do not do the works of the Father, there is no need to believe in me. But if I do them, even if you do not believe in me, at least believe in the works I do, so that you will believe that the Father is in me and I am in the Father. These are the same words that He said at the Last Supper (Jn 14:10-11).

- John 10:39-42: Once again they want to kill Him, but He flees from their clutches. There was no sign of conversion. They continue to say that Jesus blasphemes and insist in killing Him. There is no future for Jesus. His death has been decided, but as yet His hour has not arrived. Jesus goes out and crosses the Jordan going toward the place where

John had baptized. In this way He indicates the continuity of His mission with the mission of John. He helped people to become aware of how God acts in history. The people recognize in Jesus the one whom John had announced.

4) Personal questions

- The Jews condemn Jesus in the name of God, in the name of the image that they have of God. Have I ever condemned someone in the name of God?
- Do you reveal the presence of Jesus within you by the works that you do?

5) Concluding Prayer

Yahweh is my rock and my fortress,
my deliverer is my God.
I take refuge in Him, my rock, my shield,
my saving strength, my stronghold,
my place of refuge. (Ps 18:2)

Lectio Divina Saturday, April 4, 2020

Season of Lent

1) Opening prayer

Lord God, creator and Father of all,
Your sons and daughters
are still scattered and divided: Christians and non-Christians,
various Churches and sects
claiming exclusive rights on Your Son,
and each of them full of factions.
Make us dream again the dream
which You alone can make possible:
that we can all be one
if we believe and follow Him
who died to unite all that is scattered,
Jesus Christ, our Lord for ever.

2) Gospel reading – John 11:45-56

Many of the Jews who had come to Mary and seen what Jesus had done began to believe in him. But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. So the chief priests and the Pharisees convened the Sanhedrin and said, "What are we going to do? This man is performing many signs. If we leave him alone, all will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our land and our nation." But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing, nor do you consider that it is better for you that one man should die instead of the people, so that the whole nation may not perish." He did not say this on his own, but since he

was high priest for that year, he prophesied that Jesus was going to die for the nation, and not only for the nation, but also to gather into one the dispersed children of God. So from that day on they planned to kill him. So Jesus no longer walked about in public among the Jews, but he left for the region near the desert, to a town called Ephraim, and there he remained with his disciples. Now the Passover of the Jews was near, and many went up from the country to Jerusalem before Passover to purify themselves. They looked for Jesus and said to one another as they were in the temple area, "What do you think? That he will not come to the feast?"

3) Reflection

- The Gospel today gives the last part of the long episode of the resurrection of Lazarus in Bethany, in the house of Martha and Mary (Jn 11:1-56). The resurrection of Lazarus is the seventh sign (miracle) of Jesus in John's Gospel and is also the high and decisive point of the revelation which He made of God and of himself.
- The small community of Bethany, where Jesus liked to go, mirrors the situation and the life-style of the small community of the Beloved Disciple at the end of the first century in Asia Minor. Bethany means "The House of the Poor". They were poor communities and a poor people. Martha means "Lady" (coordinator): a woman coordinated the community. Lazarus means "God helps". The community which was poor expected everything from God. Mary means "loved by Yahweh: she was the beloved disciple, image of the community. The episode of the resurrection of Lazarus communicated this certainty: Jesus is the source of life for the community of the poor. Jesus is the source of life for all those who believe in Him.
- John 11:45-46: The repercussion of the Seventh Sign among the people. After the resurrection of Lazarus (Jn 11:1-44), there is the description of the repercussion of this sign among the people. The people were divided; "many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what He did, believed in Him". But some of them went to the Pharisees to tell them what Jesus had done. The latter denounced Him. In order to be able to understand this reaction of one part of the population it is necessary to become aware that half of the population of Jerusalem depended completely on the Temple so as to be able to live and to survive. Because of this, it would have been difficult for them to support an unknown prophet from Galilee who criticized the Temple and the authority. This also explains why some even were ready to inform the authority.
- John 11:47-53: The repercussion of the Seventh Sign among those in authority. The news of the resurrection of Lazarus increased the popularity of Jesus. This is why the religious leaders convoked a council meeting, the Sanhedrin, the maximum authority, to discern getting rid of Him; because "this man works many signs. If we let Him go on this way everybody will believe in Him and the Romans will come and suppress the Holy Place and our nation". They were afraid of the Romans, because in the past it had been shown many times, by the Roman invasions in the year 64 before Christ until the time of Jesus, that the Romans repressed with great violence any attempt of popular rebellion. (Cf. Ac 5:35-37). In the case of Jesus, the Roman reaction could have lead to the loss of everything, even of the Temple and of the privileged position of the priests. Because of this, Caiaphas, the High Priest, decides: "It is better that one man should die for the people, rather than that the whole nation should perish". And the Evangelist comments: "He did not speak this in His own person, but as high priest of that year, he

was prophesying that Jesus was to die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but also to gather together into one the scattered children of God". Thus, beginning at that moment, because the chief priests were concerned Jesus' authority was growing, and being motivated by the fear of the Romans, they decided to kill Jesus.

- John 11:54-56: The repercussion of the seventh sign in the life of Jesus. The final result is that Jesus had to live apart. "So Jesus no longer went about openly among the Jews; He left the district and went to a region near the desert, to a city called Ephraim and stayed there with His disciples". The Jewish Passover was drawing near. At this time of the year, the population of Jerusalem tripled because of the great number of pilgrims. The conversation was all around Jesus: "What do you think, will He come to the festival or not?" In the same way, at the time that the Gospel was written at the end of the first century, the time of the persecution of the Emperor Domitian (from 81 to 96), the Christian communities who lived in the service of others were obliged to live clandestinely.

- A key to understand the seventh sign of the resurrection of Lazarus. Lazarus was sick. His sisters Martha and Mary sent someone to call Jesus: "The one whom you love is sick!" (Jn 11:3. 5). Jesus responds to the request and explains to the disciples: "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" (Jn 11:4) In John's Gospel, the glorification of Jesus comes through His death (Jn 12:23; 17:1). One of the causes of His condemnation to death was the resurrection of Lazarus (Jn 11:50; 12:10). Many Jews were in the house of Martha and Mary to console them because of the loss of their brother. The Jews, representatives of the Ancient Covenant, only know how to console. They do not give new life.... Jesus is the one who brings new life! Thus, on one side, the threat of death against Jesus! On the other, Jesus who overcomes death! In this context of conflict between life and death the seventh sign of the resurrection of Lazarus takes place. Martha says that she believes in the resurrection. The Pharisees and the majority of the people say that they believe in the Resurrection (Ac 23:6-10; Mk 12:18). They believed, but they did not reveal it. It was only faith in the resurrection at the end of time and not in the present resurrection in history, here and now. This ancient faith did not renew life. It is not enough to believe in the resurrection which will come at the end of time, but it is necessary to believe in the Resurrection already present here and now in the person of Jesus and in those who believe in Jesus. On these people, death no longer has any power, because Jesus "is the resurrection and the life". Even without seeing the concrete sign of the resurrection of Lazarus, Martha confesses her faith: "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of the living God who was to come into the world" (Jn 11:27).

Jesus orders that the stone be removed. Martha reacts: "Lord, by now He will smell! This is the fourth day since He died!" (Jn 11:39). Once again Jesus presents the challenge asking to believe in the resurrection, here and now, as a sign of the glory of God: "Have I not told you that if you believe you will see the glory of God?" (Jn 11:40). They removed the stone. Before the open tomb and before the unbelief of the persons, Jesus addresses himself to the Father. In His prayer, first of all, He gives thanks: "Father, I thank you for hearing My prayer. I myself know that you hear me always!" (Jn 11:41-42). Jesus knows the Father and trusts Him. But now He asks for a sign because of the multitude which is around Him, so that the people can believe that He, Jesus, has been sent by the Father. Then He cried out in a loud voice: "Lazarus, come out!" Lazarus

came out (Jn 11:43-44). This is the triumph of life over death, of faith over unbelief. A farmer once commented: "It is up to us to remove the stone. And it is up to God to resurrect the community. There are people who do not know how to remove the stone, and because of this their community has no life!"

4) Personal questions

- What does it mean for me to believe in the resurrection?
- Have I ever "sacrificed" someone rather than protect them in order to preserve the status quo?

5) Concluding prayer

For You are my hope, Lord, my trust, Yahweh, since my youth.
On You I have relied since my birth,
since my mother's womb You have been my portion,
the constant theme of my praise. (Ps 71:5-6)

Lectio Divina Sunday, April 5, 2020

The narrative of the passion and death of Jesus
Rediscovering one's first love
Matthew 26:14-27; 27:1-66

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. Suggestions for Holy Week

Palm Sunday is the beginning of Holy Week, a week that is different from all others. We are confronted with the deepest of all mysteries of our faith, the supreme revelation of the love of God manifested in Jesus (Rom 8:38-39).

In the Old Testament, at times of crisis, the people went back to meditating on and re-reading Exodus. In the New Testament we go back to the exodus represented by the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus. For the community of Christians of all times,



the narrative of the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus is the source where we renew our faith, hope and love.

Many times, from the time of the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5-7), Matthew's Gospel states that the aim of the New Law is love and mercy (Mt 5:43-48; 7:12; 9:13; 12:7; 22:34-40). Now, in this final section of the passion, death and resurrection, he describes how Jesus put love into practice, bringing the Law to fulfilment (Mt 5:17).

3. A reading of the Passion and Death of Jesus

A key to the reading:

In Holy Week, during the reading of the Passion and Death of Jesus, it is not fitting to take an attitude of research and rational investigation. It is more fitting to remain silent. Read the text several times, taking as only guide the short titles which seek to be a key to help us feel the text and experience again the love of God revealed in the attitude of Jesus towards those who capture Him, insult Him, torture Him and kill Him. As we read, let us not think only of Jesus, but also of the millions and millions of human beings who today are imprisoned, tortured, insulted and killed.

Matthew 26:14-16: Judas' betrayal

Love of money leads a friend to betray Jesus

14 Then one of the Twelve, the man called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests 15 and said, 'What are you prepared to give me if I hand Him over to you?' They paid him thirty silver pieces, 16 and from then onwards he began to look for an opportunity to betray Him.

Matthew 26:17-19: The preparation for the Paschal Supper

Preparing well the last meeting with friends

17 Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus to say, 'Where do you want us to make the preparations for You to eat the Passover?' 18 He said, 'Go to a certain man in the city and say to him, "The Master says, My time is near. It is at your house that I am keeping Passover with My disciples."' 19 The disciples did what Jesus told them and prepared the Passover.

Matthew 26:20-25: The proclamation of Judas' betrayal

Even though Jesus knows everything, He sits at table with the betrayer

20 When evening came He was at table with the Twelve. 21 And while they were eating He said, 'In truth I tell you, one of you is about to betray Me.' 22 They were greatly distressed and started asking Him in turn, 'Not me, Lord, surely?' 23 He answered, 'Someone who has dipped his hand into the dish with Me will betray Me. 24 The Son of man is going to His fate, as the scriptures say He will, but alas for that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! Better for that man if he had never been born!' 25 Judas, who was to betray Him, asked in his turn, 'Not me, Rabbi, surely?' Jesus answered, 'It is you who say it.'

Matthew 26:26-29: The institution of the Eucharist

Between the betrayal of the one and the denial of the other, glows a sign of love

26 Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when He had said the blessing He broke it and gave it to the disciples. 'Take it and eat,' He said, 'this is My body.' 27 Then

He took a cup, and when He had given thanks He handed it to them saying, 'Drink from this, all of you, 28 for this is My blood, the blood of the covenant, poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. 29 From now on, I tell you, I shall never again drink wine until the day I drink the new wine with you in the kingdom of My Father.'

Matthew 26:30-35: The denial by Peter

Even though Peter breaks away from Jesus, Jesus does not break away from Peter

30 After the psalms had been sung they left for the Mount of Olives. 31 Then Jesus said to them, 'You will all fall away from Me tonight, for the scripture says: I shall strike the shepherd and the sheep of the flock will be scattered, 32 but after My resurrection I shall go ahead of you to Galilee.' 33 At this, Peter said to Him, 'Even if all fall away from You, I will never fall away.' 34 Jesus answered Him, 'In truth I tell you, this very night, before the cock crows, you will have disowned Me three times.' 35 Peter said to Him, 'Even if I have to die with You, I will never disown You.' And all the disciples said the same.

Matthew 26:36-46: The agony in the Garden of Olives

Jesus chooses fidelity rather than flight

36 Then Jesus came with them to a plot of land called Gethsemane; and He said to His disciples, 'Stay here while I go over there to pray.' 37 He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee with Him. And He began to feel sadness and anguish. 38 Then He said to them, 'My soul is sorrowful to the point of death. Wait here and stay awake with Me.' 39 And going on a little farther He fell on his face and prayed. 'My Father,' He said, 'if it is possible, let this cup pass Me by. Nevertheless, let it be as You, not I, would have it.' 40 He came back to the disciples and found them sleeping, and He said to Peter, 'So you had not the strength to stay awake with me for one hour? 41 Stay awake, and pray not to be put to the test. The spirit is willing enough, but human nature is weak.' 42 Again, a second time, He went away and prayed. 'My Father,' He said, 'if this cup cannot pass by, but I must drink it, Your will be done!' 43 And He came back again and found them sleeping, their eyes were so heavy. 44 Leaving them there, He went away again and prayed for the third time, repeating the same words. 45 Then He came back to the disciples and said to them, 'You can sleep on now and have your rest. Look, the hour has come when the Son of man is to be betrayed into the hands of sinners. 46 Get up! Let us go! Look, My betrayer is not far away.'

Matthew 26:47-56: Jesus' capture in the Garden

Even though He was innocent and good, Jesus is considered a bandit and criminal

47 And suddenly while He was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, appeared, and with him a large number of men armed with swords and clubs, sent by the chief priests and elders of the people. 48 Now the traitor had arranged a sign with them saying, 'The one I kiss, He is the man. Arrest Him.' 49 So he went up to Jesus at once and said, 'Greetings, Rabbi,' and kissed Him. 50 Jesus said to Him, 'My friend, do what you are here for.' Then they came forward, seized Jesus and arrested Him. 51 And suddenly, one of the followers of Jesus grasped his sword and drew it; he struck the high priest's servant and cut off his ear. 52 Jesus then said, 'Put your sword back, for all who draw the sword will die by the sword. 53 Or do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father, who would promptly send more than twelve legions of angels to My defense? 54 But then, how would the scriptures be fulfilled that say this is the way it must be?' 55 It was

at this time that Jesus said to the crowds, 'Am I a bandit, that you had to set out to capture Me with swords and clubs? I sat teaching in the Temple day after day and you never laid a hand on Me.' 56 Now all this happened to fulfill the prophecies in scripture. Then all the disciples deserted Him and ran away.

Matthew 26:57-68: Jesus before the Sanhedrin

The decision, which has already been made, of sentencing Jesus to death, is given a semblance of legality

57 The men who had arrested Jesus led Him off to the house of Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were assembled. 58 Peter followed Him at a distance right to the high priest's palace, and he went in and sat down with the attendants to see what the end would be. 59 The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for evidence against Jesus, however false, on which they might have Him executed. 60 But they could not find any, though several lying witnesses came forward. Eventually two came forward 61 and made a statement, 'This man said, "I have power to destroy the Temple of God and in three days build it up." ' 62 The high priest then rose and said to Him, 'Have you no answer to that? What is this evidence these men are bringing against You?' 63 But Jesus was silent. And the high priest said to Him, 'I put you on oath by the living God to tell us if You are the Christ, the Son of God.' 64 Jesus answered him, 'It is you who say it. But, I tell you that from this time onward you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of the Power and coming on the clouds of heaven.' 65 Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, 'He has blasphemed. What need of witnesses have we now? There! You have just heard the blasphemy. 66 What is your opinion?' They answered, 'He deserves to die.' 67 Then they spat in His face and hit Him with their fists; others said as they struck Him, 68 'Prophecy to us, Christ! Who hit You then?'

Matthew 26:69-75: Peter's denial

At the moment of trial, Peter, the leader, denies knowing Jesus

69 Meanwhile Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard, and a servant-girl came up to him saying, 'You, too, were with Jesus the Galilean.' 70 But he denied it in front of them all. 'I do not know what you are talking about,' he said. 71 When he went out to the gateway another servant-girl saw him and said to the people there, 'This man was with Jesus the Nazarene.' 72 And again, with an oath, he denied it, 'I do not know the man.' 73 A little later the bystanders came up and said to Peter, 'You are certainly one of them too! Why, your accent gives you away.' 74 Then he started cursing and swearing, 'I do not know the man.' And at once the cock crowed, 75 and Peter remembered what Jesus had said, 'Before the cock crows you will have disowned Me three times.' And he went outside and wept bitterly.

Matthew 27:1-2: Jesus is led before Pilate

It is not the Jewish people but it is the élite who lead Jesus to His death

1 When morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people met in council to bring about the death of Jesus. 2 They had Him bound and led Him away to hand Him over to Pilate, the governor.

Matthew 27:3-10: The death of Judas

A little of Judas lives in each one of us

3 When he found that Jesus had been condemned, then Judas, His betrayer, was filled

with remorse and took the thirty silver pieces back to the chief priests and elders 4 saying, 'I have sinned. I have betrayed innocent blood.' They replied, 'What is that to us? That is your concern.' 5 And flinging down the silver pieces in the sanctuary he made off, and went and hanged himself. 6 The chief priests picked up the silver pieces and said, 'It is against the Law to put this into the treasury; it is blood-money.' 7 So they discussed the matter and with it bought the potter's field as a graveyard for foreigners, 8 and this is why the field is still called the Field of Blood. 9 The word spoken through the prophet Jeremiah was then fulfilled: And they took the thirty silver pieces, the sum at which the precious One was priced by the children of Israel, 10 and they gave them for the potter's field, just as the Lord directed me.

Matthew 27:11-26: Jesus before Pilate

Like the Servant of Yahweh, Jesus remains silent before those who accuse Him

11 Jesus, then, was brought before the governor, and the governor put to Him this question, 'Are You the king of the Jews?' Jesus replied, 'It is you who say it.' 12 But when He was accused by the chief priests and the elders He refused to answer at all. 13 Pilate then said to Him, 'Do you not hear how many charges they have made against You?' 14 But to the governor's amazement, He offered not a word in answer to any of the charges. 15 At festival time it was the governor's practice to release a prisoner for the people, anyone they chose. 16 Now there was then a notorious prisoner whose name was Barabbas. 17 So when the crowd gathered, Pilate said to them, 'Which do you want me to release for you: Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?' 18 For Pilate knew it was out of jealousy that they had handed Him over. 19 Now as he was seated in the chair of judgement, his wife sent him a message, 'Have nothing to do with that upright man; I have been extremely upset today by a dream that I had about Him.' 20 The chief priests and the elders, however, had persuaded the crowd to demand the release of Barabbas and the execution of Jesus. 21 So when the governor spoke and asked them, 'Which of the two do you want me to release for you?' they said, 'Barabbas.' 22 Pilate said to them, 'But in that case, what am I to do with Jesus who is called Christ?' They all said, 'Let Him be crucified!' 23 He asked, 'But what harm has he done?' But they shouted all the louder, 'Let Him be crucified!' 24 Then Pilate saw that he was making no impression, that in fact a riot was imminent. So he took some water, washed his hands in front of the crowd and said, 'I am innocent of this man's blood. It is your concern.' 25 And the people, every one of them, shouted back, 'Let His blood be on us and on our children!' 26 Then he released Barabbas for them. After having Jesus scourged he handed Him over to be crucified.

Matthew 27:27-31: Jesus is crowned with thorns

To undress, torture and strike someone is what humiliates that person most

27 Then the governor's soldiers took Jesus with them into the Praetorium and collected the whole cohort around Him. 28 And they stripped Him and put a scarlet cloak around Him, 29 and having twisted some thorns into a crown they put this on His head and placed a reed in His right hand. To make fun of Him they knelt before Him saying, 'Hail, king of the Jews!' 30 And they spat on Him and took the reed and struck Him on the head with it. 31 And when they had finished making fun of Him, they took off the cloak and dressed Him in His own clothes and led Him away to crucifixion.

Matthew 27:32-38: Jesus is crucified

The law says that the one hanging on a cross is "cursed by God" (Deut 21:23)

32 On their way out, they came across a man from Cyrene, called Simon, and enlisted him to carry His cross. 33 When they had reached a place called Golgotha, that is, the place of the skull, 34 they gave Him wine to drink mixed with gall, which He tasted but refused to drink. 35 When they had finished crucifying Him they shared out His clothing by casting lots, 36 and then sat down and stayed there keeping guard over Him. 37 Above His head was placed the charge against Him; it read, 'This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.' 38 Then two bandits were crucified with Him, one on the right and one on the left.

Matthew 27:39-44: Jesus is insulted

Hanging, naked, bared before all, defenseless, without any right

39 The passers-by jeered at Him; they shook their heads 40 and said, 'So You would destroy the Temple and in three days rebuild it! Then save Yourself if You are God's son and come down from the cross!' 41 The chief priests with the scribes and elders mocked Him in the same way, 42 with the words, 'He saved others; He cannot save Himself. He is the king of Israel; let Him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in Him. 43 He has put His trust in God; now let God rescue Him if He wants Him. For He did say, "I am God's son." ' 44 Even the bandits who were crucified with Him taunted Him in the same way.

Matthew 27:45-56: The death of Jesus

"My God! Why have you forsaken Me?" He dies letting out a cry

45 From the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. 46 And about the ninth hour, Jesus cried out in a loud voice, 'Eli, eli, lama sabachthani?' that is, 'My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?' 47 When some of those who stood there heard this, they said, 'The man is calling on Elijah,' 48 and one of them quickly ran to get a sponge which he filled with vinegar and, putting it on a reed, gave it to Him to drink. 49 But the rest of them said, 'Wait! And see if Elijah will come to save Him.' 50 But Jesus, again crying out in a loud voice, yielded up His spirit. 51 And suddenly, the veil of the Sanctuary was torn in two from top to bottom, the earth quaked, the rocks were split, 52 the tombs opened and the bodies of many holy people rose from the dead, 53 and these, after His resurrection, came out of the tombs, entered the holy city and appeared to a number of people. 54 The centurion, together with the others guarding Jesus, had seen the earthquake and all that was taking place, and they were terrified and said, 'In truth this man was son of God.' 55 And many women were there, watching from a distance, the same women who had followed Jesus from Galilee and looked after Him. 56 Among them were Mary of Magdala, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of Zebedee's sons.

Matthew 27:57-61: Jesus is buried

Jesus is not even buried decently

57 When it was evening, there came a rich man of Arimathaea, called Joseph, who had himself become a disciple of Jesus. 58 This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate ordered it to be handed over. 59 So Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean shroud 60 and put it in his own new tomb which he had hewn out of the

rock. He then rolled a large stone across the entrance of the tomb and went away. 61 Now Mary of Magdala and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the sepulcher.

Matthew 27:62-66: The guard of the tumult

Darkness, even the most intense, cannot extinguish life

62 Next day, that is, when Preparation Day was over, the chief priests and the Pharisees went in a body to Pilate 63 and said to him, 'Your Excellency, we recall that this impostor said, while He was still alive, "After three days I shall rise again." 64 Therefore give the order to have the sepulcher kept secure until the third day, for fear His disciples come and steal Him away and tell the people, "He has risen from the dead." This last piece of fraud would be worse than what went before.' 65 Pilate said to them, 'You may have your guard; go and make all as secure as you know how.' 66 So they went and made the sepulcher secure, putting seals on the stone and mounting a guard.

4. Some thoughts

to help us meditate and pray.

a) The death of Jesus:

From midday to three in the afternoon, it is dark over the whole earth. Even nature feels the effect of the agony and death of Jesus! Hanging on the cross, deprived of everything, a lament escapes from his lips: "Eli! Eli! Lama Sabachthani?" That is: "My God! My God! Why have You forsaken Me?" This is the first sentence of Psalm 22(21). Jesus goes into His death praying, expressing the forsakenness He feels. He prays in Hebrew. The soldiers who were standing by and who were guarding Him, say: "He is calling on Elijah!" The soldiers were foreigners, mercenaries on contract to the Romans. They did not understand the language of the Jews. They thought that **Eli** meant Elijah. Hanging on the cross, Jesus feels totally isolated. Even if He wanted to say something to someone, it was not possible. He was completely alone: Judas betrayed Him, Peter denied Him, the disciples ran away, friends kept themselves apart (v.55), the authorities derided Him, the passers by insulted Him, God himself abandoned Him, and His language was useless for communicating. This is the price He paid for being faithful to His decision to follow at all times the way of love and service in order to redeem His brothers and sisters. "The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give His life for the redemption of many" (Mt 20:28). In the midst of abandonment and darkness, Jesus lets out a loud cry and dies. He dies letting out the cry of the poor because He knows that God listens to the cry of the poor (Ex 2:24; 3:7; 22:22,26). With this belief, Jesus enters into death, certain of being heard. The letter to the Hebrews says, "He offered up prayer and entreaty, with loud cries and with tears, to the One who had the power to save Him from death, and, winning a hearing by His reverence, He learned obedience. (Heb 5:7). God heard His cry and "exalted Him" (Phil 2:9). The resurrection is God's answer to prayer and to the offering Jesus made of His life. With the resurrection of Jesus, the Father proclaims to the whole world this Good News: Those who live like Jesus *serving the brothers and sisters*, are victorious and will live forever, even though they may die and even though they may be killed! This is the Good News of the Kingdom born from the cross!

b) The significance of the death of Jesus:

On Calvary, we are before a tortured human being, one excluded from society, completely isolated, condemned as a heretic and subversive by the civil, military and religious courts. At the foot of the cross the religious authorities confirm for the last time a failed rebellion, and publicly renounce Him (Mt 27:41-43). And it is at this hour of death that a new significance comes to life again. The identity of Jesus is revealed by a pagan: "In truth this man was son of God!" (Mt 27:54). From this point on, if you *really* wish to meet the Son of God, do not seek Him up above in the far away heavens, nor in the Temple whose veil was torn, but seek Him close to you, in the excluded, disfigured, ugly human being. Seek Him in those who, like Jesus, give their lives for their brothers and sisters. It is there that God hides Himself and reveals Himself, and it is there that we can meet Him. There we find the disfigured image of God, of the Son of God. "*Greater love than this no one has than to give one's life for the brothers and sisters!*"

5. The prayer of a Psalm

The psalms that Jesus recites on the Cross:

Psalm 22 (21): 2: "My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?"

Psalm 31 (30): 6: "Into Your hands I commend My spirit."

6. 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, April 6, 2020

Season of Lent

1) Opening prayer

Lord our God,
You have called Your people
to be the servants of one another
in the cause of justice and mercy. You showed us in Jesus, Your Son,
what it means to serve
and how much this may cost us.
Fill us with the Spirit of Jesus,
that we too may not break those who are weak
nor repel those groping in the dark.
Let Him teach us to serve and to love
with compassion for the helpless

and respect for the least and the poorest,
together with Jesus Christ our Lord.

2) Gospel Reading - John 12:1-11

Six days before Passover Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. They gave a dinner for him there, and Martha served, while Lazarus was one of those reclining at table with him. Mary took a liter of costly perfumed oil made from genuine aromatic spikenard and anointed the feet of Jesus and dried them with her hair; the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil. Then Judas the Iscariot, one of his disciples, and the one who would betray him, said, "Why was this oil not sold for three hundred days' wages and given to the poor?" He said this not because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief and held the money bag and used to steal the contributions. So Jesus said, "Leave her alone. Let her keep this for the day of my burial. You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me." The large crowd of the Jews found out that he was there and came, not only because of him, but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. And the chief priests plotted to kill Lazarus too, because many of the Jews were turning away and believing in Jesus because of him.

3) Reflection

- We have entered into Holy Week, the week of the Passover of Jesus, of His passing from this world to the Father (Jn 13:1). Liturgy today places before us the beginning of chapter 12 of the Gospel of John, which serves as a link between the Book of the Signs (cc 1-11) and the Book of the Glorification (cc 13-21). At the end of the "Book of Signs" there appears, very clearly, the tension between Jesus and the religious authority of the time (Jn 10:19-21.39) and the danger which Jesus was facing. Several times they had tried to kill Him (Jn 10:31; 11:8. 53; 12,:10). It was such that Jesus was obliged to lead a clandestine life, because He could be arrested at any moment (Jn 10:40; 11:54).
- John 12:1-2: Jesus persecuted by the Jews, goes to Bethany. Six days before the Passover, Jesus went to Bethany to the house of His friends Martha and Mary and of Lazarus. Bethany means, House of Poverty. The police were looking for Him (Jn 11:57). They wanted to kill Him (Jn 11:50). But even now that the police were looking for Jesus, Mary, Martha and Lazarus received Him in their house and offered Him something to eat. Because love overcomes fear.
- John 12:3: Mary anoints Jesus. During the meal, Mary anoints the feet of Jesus with a pound of perfume of pure spikenard (cf. Lk 7:36-50). It was a very costly perfume, so very expensive that it cost three hundred denarii. Then she dried His feet with her hair.

The whole house was filled with the scent of the ointment. Mary does not speak during this whole episode. She only acts. The gesture filled with symbolism speaks for itself. In washing the feet, Mary becomes a servant. Jesus will repeat the gesture at the Last Supper (Jn 13:5).

- John 12:4-6: Reaction of Judas. Judas criticizes the gesture of Mary. He thinks that it is a waste. In fact, three hundred denarii were the wages of three hundred days! The wages of almost a whole year spent in one time alone! Judas thinks that the money should have been given to the poor. The Evangelist comments and says that Judas had no concern at all for the poor, but that he was a thief. They had a common fund and he stole the money. A strong judgment which condemns Judas. It does not condemn the concern for the poor, but the hypocrisy which uses the poor for self promotion and to enrich oneself. Judas, in his own egoistic interests, thought only about money. This is why he was not aware of what Mary kept in her heart. Jesus reads the heart and defends Mary.

- John 12:7-8: Jesus defends the woman, Judas thinks only of the waste and criticizes the woman. Jesus thinks of the gesture and defends the woman: “Leave her alone; so that she can keep it for the day of My burial!” And immediately Jesus says: “You have the poor with you always; you will not always have Me!” Which of the two lived closer to Jesus: Judas or Mary? Judas, the disciple, lived together with Jesus for almost three years, twenty-four hours a day. He was part of the group. Mary saw Him once or twice a year, on the occasion of some feast, when Jesus went to Jerusalem and visited her in her house. But to live together with, not having any love does not help us to know others. Rather it blinds people. Judas was blind. Many people live together with Jesus and praise Him even with many hymns, but do not truly know Him and do not reveal Him (cf. Mt 7:21). Two affirmations of Jesus merit a more detailed comment: (a) “You have the poor with you always” and (b) “let her keep it for the day of My burial”.

(a) “You have the poor with you always “. Is it perhaps that Jesus wants to say that we should not be concerned about the poor, given the fact that there will always be poor? Or does He want to say that poverty is the destiny imposed by God? How is this phrase to be understood? At that time, people knew the Old Testament by heart. It sufficed for Jesus to begin quoting a phrase of the Old Testament and persons already knew the rest. The beginning of the phrase said: “There will never cease to be poor people in the country” (Dt 15:11^a). The rest of the phrase which people already knew and which Jesus wants to remind is the following: “And this is why I am giving you this command: always be open handed with your brother, and with anyone in your country who is in need and is poor!” (Dt 15:11b). According to this Law, the community should accept the poor and share its goods with them. But, Judas instead of “opening his hand to help the poor” and to share his goods with them, wanted to do charity with the money of

others! He wanted to sell the perfume of Mary for three hundred denarii and use it to help the poor. Jesus quotes the Law of God which taught the contrary. Anyone, who like Judas, carries out a campaign with the money from the sale of the goods of another, does not disturb or trouble. But, the one who, like Jesus, insists on the obligation to accept the poor and to share with them one's own goods, this one disturbs, troubles and runs the risk of being condemned.

(b) John 12:9-11: The crowds and the authority. To be the friend of Jesus could be dangerous. Lazarus is in danger of death because of the new life received from Jesus. The Jews had decided to kill Him. Lazarus alive was a living proof that Jesus was the Messiah. This is why the crowd was looking for Him, because people wanted to experience closely the living proof of the power of Jesus. A living community runs the risk of its life because it is the living proof of the Good News of God!

4) Personal questions

- Mary was misinterpreted by Judas. Have you been misinterpreted sometimes?
- Do I actually serve the poor, or do I just share the goods of others?
- Are lavish expenses on church buildings and decorations a case of worshiping Jesus as Mary did, or is taking from the poor?

5) Concluding Prayer

Yahweh is my light and my salvation,
whom should I fear?

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

Lectio Divina Tuesday, April 7, 2020

Season of Lent

1) Opening prayer

Lord our God,
Your Son Jesus Christ
had to undergo the humiliation
of being betrayed and denied
by those He called His friends. But He made His suffering and death
into instruments of love and reconciliation.
Make us with Him, people-for-others,
who accept difficulties, even betrayals
and misunderstanding of our best intentions,
and turn them into sources of life and joy
for those around us.

Keep us faithful to You and to one another
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

2) Gospel Reading - John 13:21-33, 36-38

Reclining at table with his disciples, Jesus was deeply troubled and testified, "Amen, amen, I say to you, one of you will betray me." The disciples looked at one another, at a loss as to whom he meant. One of his disciples, the one whom Jesus loved, was reclining at Jesus' side. So Simon Peter nodded to him to find out whom he meant. He leaned back against Jesus' chest and said to him, "Master, who is it?" Jesus answered, "It is the one to whom I hand the morsel after I have dipped it." So he dipped the morsel and took it and handed it to Judas, son of Simon the Iscariot. After Judas took the morsel, Satan entered him. So Jesus said to him, "What you are going to do, do quickly." Now none of those reclining at table realized why he said this to him. Some thought that since Judas kept the money bag, Jesus had told him, "Buy what we need for the feast," or to give something to the poor. So Judas took the morsel and left at once. And it was night. When he had left, Jesus said, "Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him. If God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and he will glorify him at once. My children, I will be with you only a little while longer. You will look for me, and as I told the Jews, 'Where I go you cannot come,' so now I say it to you." Simon Peter said to him, "Master, where are you going?" Jesus answered him, "Where I am going, you cannot follow me now, though you will follow later." Peter said to him, "Master, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you." Jesus answered, "Will you lay down your life for me? Amen, amen, I say to you, the cock will not crow before you deny me three times."

3) Reflection

- This is the third day of Holy Week. The texts of the Gospel of these days place before us the terrible facts which will lead to the imprisonment and condemnation of Jesus. The texts not only present the decisions of the religious and civil authority against Jesus, but also the betrayal and the negotiations of the disciples which rendered it possible for the authority to arrest Jesus and contributed enormously to the suffering of Jesus.
- John 13:21: The announcement of the betrayal. After having washed the feet of the disciples (Jn 13:2-11) and having spoken about the obligation that we have of washing each other's feet (Jn 13:12-16), Jesus is profoundly touched. And it is no wonder. He was fulfilling that gesture of service and total gift of self, while at His side one of the disciples was planning how to betray Him that same night. Jesus expresses His emotion saying: "In all truth I tell you one of you is going to betray Me!" He does not say: "Judas will betray Me", but "one of you". It is one of His group who will betray Him.
- John 13:22-25: The reaction of the disciples. The disciples are frightened. They did not expect that declaration, that is, that one of them would be the traitor. Peter makes a sign to John to ask Jesus which of the twelve would be the traitor. This is a sign that they did not know one another well, they could not succeed in understanding who could be the traitor. A sign, that is, that the friendship among them had not as yet reached the same transparency that Jesus had with them (cf. Jn 15:15). John reclined near Jesus and asked Him: "Who is it?"
- John 13:26-30: Jesus indicates Judas. Jesus says: "It is the one to whom I give the piece of bread that I dip in the dish." He took a piece of bread, dips it in the cup and

hands it over to Judas. This was a common and normal gesture which the participants at a supper used to do among themselves. And Jesus tells Judas: “What you are going to do, do quickly!” Judas had charge of the common fund. He was in charge of buying things and of giving the alms to the poor. This is why no one perceived anything special in the gesture and in the words of Jesus. In this description of the announcement of the betrayal is evoked the Psalm in which the psalmist complains about the friend who betrays Him: “Even My trusted friend on whom I relied, who shared My table takes advantage of Me” (Ps 41:10; cf. Ps 55:13-15). Judas becomes aware that Jesus knew everything (cf. Jn 13:18). But even knowing it, he does not change his mind but keeps the decision to betray Jesus. This is the moment in which the separation between Judas and Jesus takes place. John says at this moment Satan entered him. Judas rises and leaves. He places himself at the side of the enemy (Satan). John comments: “It was night”. It was dark.

- John 13:31-33: The glorification of Jesus begins. It is as if history had waited for this moment of separation between light and darkness. Satan (the enemy) and darkness entered into Judas when he decides to carry out what he was planning. In that moment the light was made in Jesus who declares: “Now the son of man has been glorified, and in Him God has been glorified also. 32 If God has been glorified in Him, God will in turn glorify Him in Himself, and will glorify Him very soon!” The decisions had already been taken by Jesus (Jn 12:27-28) and now by Judas. The facts follow one another hastily. And, Jesus announces it: “Little children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for Me, and, as I told the Jews, where I am going you cannot come”. There is little time left before the Passover.

- John 13:34-35: The new commandment. Today’s Gospel omits these two verses on the new commandment of love, and begins to speak about the announcement of the denial of Peter.

- John 13:36-38: Announcement of the denial of Peter. Together with the betrayal of Judas, the Gospel also speaks of the denial of Peter. These are the two facts which contribute the most to Jesus’ suffering and pain. Peter says that he is ready to give his life for Jesus. Jesus recalls and reminds him of reality: “You are ready to lay down your life for Me? In all truth I tell you, before the cock crows you will have disowned Me three times”. Mark had written: “Before the cock crows twice, you will have disowned Me three times” (Mk 14:30). Everybody knows that the cock crows rapidly. When in the morning the first cock begins to sing, almost at the same time all the cocks crow together. Peter is more rapid in his denial than the cock in crowing.

4) Personal questions

- Do I love so much as to protect someone who betrays me too?
- Satan prowls like a lion looking to devour souls. It happened to Judas. What do I do to prevent Satan from entering me?

5) Concluding Prayer

You are my hope, Lord,
my trust, Yahweh, since boyhood.
On You I have relied since my birth,
since my mother's womb You have been my portion,
the constant theme of my praise. (Ps 71:5-6)

Lectio Divina Wednesday, April 8, 2020

Season of Lent

1) Opening prayer

God our Father,
when the hour of Your Son Jesus had come
to accept suffering and death
out of love of You
and His saving love for us, He did not refuse that suffering and deep pain.
In the hour of trial
that we may have to pass through,
do not let us become rebellious
but keep us trusting in You,
for You save us
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

2) Gospel Reading - Matthew 26:14-25

One of the Twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, "What are you willing to give me if I hand him over to you?" They paid him thirty pieces of silver, and from that time on he looked for an opportunity to hand him over. On the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the disciples approached Jesus and said, "Where do you want us to prepare for you to eat the Passover?" He said, "Go into the city to a certain man and tell him, 'The teacher says, my appointed time draws near; in your house I shall celebrate the Passover with my disciples.'" The disciples then did as Jesus had ordered, and prepared the Passover. When it was evening, he reclined at table with the Twelve. And while they were eating, he said, "Amen, I say to you, one of you will betray me." Deeply distressed at this, they began to say to him one after another, "Surely it is not I, Lord?" He said in reply, "He who has dipped his hand into the dish with me is the one who will betray me. The Son of Man indeed goes, as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed. It would be better for that man if he had never been born." Then Judas, his betrayer, said in reply, "Surely it is not I, Rabbi?" He answered, "You have said so."

3) Reflection

- Yesterday the Gospel spoke of the betrayal of Judas and of the denial of Peter. Today, it speaks once again of the betrayal of Judas. In the description of the Passion of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew, the failure of the disciples is strongly stressed. In spite of having lived three years together with Jesus, not one of them defends Jesus. Judas betrays Him, Peter denies Him, and the others flee. Matthew narrates everything, not to criticize or to condemn, neither to discourage the readers, but in order to underline that acceptance and the love of Jesus exceed the defeat and the failure of the disciples! This way of describing the attitude of Jesus was a help for the Communities at the time of Matthew. Because of the frequent persecutions, many were discouraged and had abandoned the community and asked themselves: "Will it be possible to return? Will God accept and forgive us?" Matthew responds by suggesting that we can break the relationship with Jesus, but Jesus never breaks it with us. His love is greater than our

infidelity. This is a very important message which we get from the Gospel during Holy Week.

- Matthew 26:14-16: The Decision of Judas to betray Jesus. Judas took the decision after Jesus did not accept the criticism of the disciples concerning the woman who wastes a very expensive perfume only to anoint Jesus (Mt 26:6-13). He went to the chief priest and asked: “What are you prepared to give Me if I hand Him over to you?” They agreed on the sum of thirty silver pieces. Matthew recalls the words of the Prophet Zechariah to describe the price agreed upon (Zc 11, 12). At the same time, the betrayal of Jesus for thirty silver coins recalls the sale of Joseph by his brothers, decided by the buyers for twenty coins (Gn 37:28). It also is reminiscent of the price of thirty coins to be paid for the wounding of a slave (Ex 21:32).

- Matthew 26:17-19: The preparation for the Passover. Jesus was coming from Galilee. He did not have a house in Jerusalem. He spent the night in the Garden of Olives (cf. Jn 8:1). In the days of the feast of the Passover the people of Jerusalem increased three times in number because of the enormous number of pilgrims who went there from all parts. For Jesus it was not easy to find a big room to celebrate the Passover together with the pilgrims coming from Galilee. He ordered His disciples to find a person in whose house He had decided to celebrate the Passover. The Gospel does not offer any other information and allows the imagination to complete what is missing in the information. Was this a person known by Jesus? A relative? A disciple? Throughout the centuries the imagination of the Apocrypha has tried to complete this information, but with little credibility.

- Matthew 26:20-25: The announcement of the betrayal of Judas. Jesus knew that He will be betrayed. In spite of the fact that Judas did things secretly. Jesus knew. But in spite of that, He wants to act fraternally with the group of friends to which Judas belongs. When all were together for the last time, Jesus announces who is the traitor “Someone who has dipped his hand into the dish with Me will betray Me”. This way of announcing the betrayal renders even clearer the contrast. For the Jews, the communion around the table, to dip the hand together in the same dish, was the maximum expression of intimacy and trust. In this way, Matthew suggests that in spite of the betrayal made by someone who was a friend, the love of Jesus is greater than the betrayal!

- What strikes us in the way in which Matthew describes these facts? Between the denial and the betrayal there is the institution of the Eucharist (Mt 26:26-29): the betrayal of Judas first (Mt 26:20-25); the denial of Peter and the flight of the disciples, afterwards (Mt 25:30-35). Thus, he stressed for us the incredible love of Jesus, which exceeds the betrayal, the denial, and the flight of the friends. His love does not depend on what others do for Him.

4) Personal questions

- It seems obvious that Judas will betray Jesus from our reading the Gospel, but put yourself there at the time. Would you have suspected one of your close group to do this? How would you interpret the indications Jesus was giving at the time?

- In Holy Week it is important to reserve some moments to become aware of the unbelievable gratuity of God’s love for me.

5) Concluding Prayer

Sing to God, play music to His name,
build a road for the Rider of the Clouds,
rejoice in Yahweh, dance before Him.
Father of orphans, defender of widows,
such is God in His holy dwelling. (Ps 68:4-5)

Lectio Divina Thursday, April 9, 2020

John 13:1-15

The Washing of the Feet

1. LECTIO

a) Initial Prayer

“When You speak, Lord, the nothingness beats in life: the dry bones become living persons, the desert flourishes... When I get ready to pray I feel dry, I do not know what to say. Evidently, I am not in harmony with Your will, my lips are not in tune with my heart, my heart does not make an effort to get in tune with yours. Renew my heart, purify my lips so that I can speak with You as You want me to, so that I can speak with others as You wish, so that I can speak with myself, with my interior world, as You wish”. (L. Renna).

b) The Reading of the Gospel

Before the feast of Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to pass from this world to the Father. He loved his own in the world and he loved them to the end. The devil had already induced Judas, son of Simon the Iscariot, to hand him over. So, during supper, fully aware that the Father had put everything into his power and that he had come from God and was returning to God, he rose from supper and took off his outer garments. He took a towel and tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and dry them with the towel around his waist. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Master, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus answered and said to him, "What I am doing, you do not understand now, but you will understand later." Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "Unless I wash you, you will have no inheritance with me." Simon Peter said to him, "Master, then not only my feet, but my hands and head as well." Jesus said to him, "Whoever has bathed has no need except to have his feet washed, for he is clean all over; so you are clean, but not all." For he knew who would betray him; for this reason, he said, "Not all of you are clean." So when he had washed their feet and put his garments back on and reclined at table again, he said to them, "Do you realize what I have done for you? You call me 'teacher' and 'master,' and rightly so, for indeed I am. If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet. I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do."

c) Moments of prayerful silence

In a loving listening, words are not necessary, because silence also speaks and communicates love.

2. MEDITATIO

a) Preamble to the Passover of Jesus

The passage of the Gospel of today is inserted in a literary whole which includes chapters 13-17. At the beginning we have the account of the Last Supper which Jesus shares with His disciples, during which He fulfills the gesture of the washing of the feet (13:1-30). Then Jesus interweaves a long dialogue of farewell with His disciples (13:31 – 14, 31). Chapters 15-17 have the function to further deepen the previous discourse of the Master. Immediately after this, Jesus is arrested (18:1-11). In any case, these events narrated in 13:17,26 are joined in 13:1 with the Passover of Jesus. It is interesting to note this last annotation: from 12:1 the Passover is no longer called the Passover of the Jews, but of Jesus. From now on, it is He, the Lamb of God who will liberate people from sin. The Passover of Jesus is one that aims to liberate us: a new exodus which permits us to go from darkness to light (8:12), and which will bear life and feast in humanity (7:37).

Jesus is aware that He is about to conclude His journey toward the Father and, therefore He is about to bring to an end His personal and definitive exodus. Such a passage, going to the Father, takes place through the Cross, the central moment in which Jesus will surrender His life for the good of all humanity.

It is striking when the reader becomes aware how the Evangelist John knows how to present the person of Jesus well, while He is aware of the last events of His life and therefore, of His mission. So as to affirm that Jesus is not crushed or overcome by the events which threaten His life, but that He is ready to give His life. Before, the Evangelist has remarked that His hour had not arrived; but now in the account of the washing of the feet He says that He is aware that His hour is close at hand. Such a conscience is at the basis of the expression of John: “After having loved those who were His in the world, He loved them to the end” (v. 1). Love for “His own”, for those who form the new community, has been evident while He was with them, but it will shine in an eminent way in His death. Jesus shows such a love in the gesture of the washing of the feet, which in its symbolical value shows the continuous love which is expressed in service.

b) The washing of the feet

Jesus is at an ordinary supper with His disciples. He is fully conscious of the mission which the Father has entrusted to Him: the salvation of humanity depends on Him. With such an awareness He wishes to show “to His own”, through the washing of the feet, how the work of salvation of the Father is fulfilled and to indicate in such a gesture the surrender of His life for the salvation of all. It is the will of Jesus that we be saved, and a longing desire leads Him to give up His life and to surrender. He is aware that the Father gives Jesus complete freedom of action.

Besides, Jesus knows that His true provenance and the goal of His itinerary is God; He knows that His death on the Cross, the maximum expression of His love, is the last moment of His journey of salvation. His death is an “exodus”; it is the climax of His victory over death, in His surrender (giving His life) Jesus reveals to us the presence of God as the fullness of life and exemption from death.

With this full consciousness of His identity and of His complete liberty Jesus is prepared to fulfill the great and humble gesture of the washing of the feet. Such a gesture of love is described with a great number of verbs (eight) which render the scene absorbing, enthralling and full of significance. The Evangelist, in presenting the last action of Jesus toward His own, uses this rhetorical figure of the accumulation of verbs without

repeating himself in order that such a gesture remains impressed in the heart and mind of His disciples and of every reader and in order that a commandment may always be remembered, not forgotten. The gesture fulfilled by Jesus intends to show that true love is expressed in tangible actions of service. Jesus removes His garments and ties around His waist a towel or apron, a symbol of service. He shows them that love is expressed in service, in giving one's life for others as He has done.

At the time of Jesus the washing of the feet was a gesture which expressed hospitality and welcome towards the guests. In an ordinary way it was done by a slave or also by the wife, and also the daughters toward their father. Besides, it was the custom that such a rite of the washing of the feet should be done before they sat at table and not during the meal. Such an insertion of Jesus' action intends to stress or underline how singular or significant His gesture was.

And thus, Jesus gets down to wash the feet of His disciples. The repeated use of the apron which Jesus tied around His waist underlines the attitude of service which is a permanent attribute of the person of Jesus. In fact, when He finishes the washing of the feet, Jesus does not take off the towel which He used as an apron. Such a detail intends to underline that the service-love does not end with His death. This minute detail shows the intention of the Evangelist to underline the significance and importance of the gesture of Jesus. By washing the feet of His disciples Jesus intends to show them His love, which is one with that of the Father (10:30.38). This image with which Jesus reveals God is really shocking: He is not a sovereign who resides exclusively in Heaven, but He presents himself as the servant of humanity in order to raise it to the divine level. From this divine service flows, for the community of believers, that liberty which comes from the love which renders all its members as "lords" (free) because they are servants. It is like saying that only liberty creates the true love. From now on, service which the believers will render to others will have the purpose of restoring the relationship among people in whom equality and liberty are a consequence of the practice of reciprocal service. Jesus, with His gesture intends to show that any domination over another is contrary to the attitude of God who, instead, serves people to raise them to himself. The pretension of superiority of one person over another no longer has any sense, because the community founded by Jesus does not have any pyramidal characteristics, but horizontal dimensions, in which each one is at the service of others, following the example of God and of Jesus.

In synthesis, the gesture which Jesus fulfilled expresses the following values: the love toward brothers and sisters demands expression in fraternal acceptance, hospitality, and permanent service.

c) Peter's Resistance

The reaction of Peter before the gesture of Jesus is expressed in attitudes of surprise and protest. There is also a change in the way in which he related to Jesus: Peter calls Him "Lord" (13:6). In such a title Jesus is recognized as having a level of superiority which is in conflict with the "washing" of the feet, an action which belongs, instead, to an inferior subject. The protest is expressed energetically by the words: "Are You going to wash my feet?" In Peter's eyes this humiliating gesture of the washing of the feet seemed to him as an inversion of values which regulate the relationship between Jesus and others: the first one is the Master, Peter is a subject. Peter disapproves the equality which Jesus wants to create among people.

To such misunderstanding Jesus responds inviting Peter to accept the sense of washing his feet as a witness of His love toward him. More precisely, He wants to offer him a concrete proof of how He and the Father love him.

But Peter in his reaction does not give in: he categorically refuses that Jesus should get down at his feet. It is not acceptable that Jesus abandons His position of superiority to render himself equal to His disciples. Such an idea of the Master disorients Peter and leads him to protest. Not accepting the service of love of his Master, he neither accepts that He dies on the cross for him (12:34; 13:37). It seems to say that Peter is far away from understanding what is true love, and such an obstacle is an impediment so that Jesus can show it to him by His action.

In the mean time, if Peter is not ready to share the dynamics of love which manifests itself in reciprocal service he cannot share the friendship with Jesus and truly runs the risk of excluding himself.

Following the admonition of Jesus “If I do not wash you, you can have no share with Me” (v. 8), Peter adheres to the threatening words of the Master, but without accepting the profound sense of the action of Jesus. He shows himself open, ready to let Jesus wash his feet, not only the feet, but also his hands and head. It seems that it is easier for Peter to accept Jesus’ gesture as an action of purification or ablution rather than as a service. But Jesus responds that the disciples have become pure (“clean”) at the moment when they accepted to allow themselves to be guided by the Word of the Master, rejecting that of the world. Peter and the disciples no longer need the Jewish rite of the purification but to allow themselves to have their feet washed by Jesus; or rather to allow themselves to be loved by Him, conferring them dignity and liberty.

d) The Memorial of Love

At the end of the washing of the feet Jesus intends to give His action a permanent validity for His community and at the same time to leave to it a memorial or commandment which should always regulate the fraternal relationships.

Jesus is the Lord, not in domination, but in so far as He communicates the love of the Father (His Spirit) which makes us children of God and qualified to imitate Jesus who freely gives His love to His own. Jesus intended to communicate such an interior attitude to His own, a love which does not exclude anyone, not even Judas who is about to betray Him. Therefore, if the disciples call Him Lord, they have to imitate Him; if they consider Him Master, they have to listen to Him.

e) Some questions to meditate on

- He got up from the table: How do you live the Eucharist? In a sedentary way or do you allow yourself to be moved to action by the fire of the love which you receive? Do you run the risk that the Eucharist in which you participate is lost in contemplative Narcissism, without leading to the commitment of solidarity and sharing?

- He removed His outer garments: when you go from the Eucharist to daily life, do you know how to remove the garments of your own benefit, your calculations, personal interests to allow yourself to be guided by an authentic love toward others?

- Taking a towel He wrapped it around His waist: this is the image of the “Church of the apron”. In the life of your family, of your ecclesial community, do you walk on the street of service? Are you directly involved in the service to the poor and to the least? Do you know how to see the face of Christ who asks to be served and loved in the poor?

3. ORATIO

a) Psalm 116 (114-115), 12-13; 15-16; 17-18

The Psalmist who finds himself in the time and in the presence of the liturgical assembly sings his sacrifice of thanksgiving. Voltaire who had a special predilection for v. 12 expressed himself as follows: “What can I offer to the Lord for all the gifts which He has given me?”

What return can I make to Yahweh
for His generosity to me?

I shall take up the cup of salvation
and call on the name of Yahweh.

Costly in Yahweh's sight
is the death of His faithful.

I beg You, Yahweh!

I am Your servant,

I am Your servant and my mother was Your servant;

You have undone my fetters.

I shall offer You a sacrifice of thanksgiving
and call on the name of Yahweh.

I shall fulfill my vows to Yahweh,
witnessed by all His people

b) Final Prayer

Fascinated with the way in which God expressed His love toward His own, Origin prayed as follows:

Jesus, come, my feet are dirty.

Become a servant for me, pour the water in the basin;
come, wash my feet.

I know it, what I am saying is daring,
but I fear the threat of Your words:

“If I do not wash you,
you can have no share with me”.

Wash then my feet,
so that I may have a share with you.

(Homily 5 on Isaiah)

And Saint Ambrose having an ardent desire to correspond to the love of Jesus, expresses himself as follows:

Oh, my Lord Jesus,

allow me to wash Your sacred feet;

You got them dirty when You walked in my soul...

But where will I take the water from the fountain
to wash Your feet?

In lacking that

I only have the eyes to weep:

bathing Your feet with my tears,

do in such a way that I myself remain purified.

(Treatise on penance).

Lectio Divina Friday, April 10, 2020

The Passion of Jesus according to John
John 18:1 – 19:42

1. Recollection in prayer – *Statio*

Come, You who refresh us,
the soul's delightful guest,
come take away all that is mine,
and pour into me all that is yours.
Come, You who are the nourishment of every chaste thought,
source of all mercies, sum of all purity.
Come and burn away all that in me is cause
of my not being able to be consumed by You.
Come, Spirit,
who are ever with the Father and the Bridegroom,
and rest over the brides of the Bridegroom.
(St. Mary Magdalene de' Pazzi, O.Carm.,
in *La Probatione* ii, 193-194.)

2. A prayerful reading of the Word – *Lectio*

From the Gospel according to John

Jesus went out with his disciples across the Kidron valley to where there was a garden, into which he and his disciples entered. Judas his betrayer also knew the place, because Jesus had often met there with his disciples. So Judas got a band of soldiers and guards from the chief priests and the Pharisees and went there with lanterns, torches, and weapons. Jesus, knowing everything that was going to happen to him, went out and said to them, "Whom are you looking for?" They answered him, "Jesus the Nazorean." He said to them, "I AM." Judas his betrayer was also with them. When he said to them, "I AM," they turned away and fell to the ground. So he again asked them, "Whom are you looking for?" They said, "Jesus the Nazorean." Jesus answered, "I told you that I AM. So if you are looking for me, let these men go." This was to fulfill what he had said, "I have not lost any of those you gave me." Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it, struck the high priest's slave, and cut off his right ear. The slave's name was Malchus. Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword into its scabbard. Shall I not drink the cup that the Father gave me?" So the band of soldiers, the tribune, and the Jewish guards seized Jesus, bound him, and brought him to Annas first. He was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year. It was Caiaphas who had counseled the Jews that it was better that one man should die rather than the people. Simon Peter and another disciple followed Jesus. Now the other disciple was known to the high priest, and he entered the courtyard of the high priest with Jesus. But Peter stood at the gate outside. So the other disciple, the acquaintance of the high priest, went out and spoke to the gatekeeper and brought Peter in. Then the maid who was the gatekeeper said to Peter, "You are not one of this man's disciples, are you?" He said, "I am not." Now the slaves and the guards were standing around a charcoal fire that they had made, because it was cold, and were warming themselves. Peter was also standing there keeping warm. The high priest

questioned Jesus about his disciples and about his doctrine. Jesus answered him, "I have spoken publicly to the world. I have always taught in a synagogue or in the temple area where all the Jews gather, and in secret I have said nothing. Why ask me? Ask those who heard me what I said to them. They know what I said." When he had said this, one of the temple guards standing there struck Jesus and said, "Is this the way you answer the high priest?" Jesus answered him, "If I have spoken wrongly, testify to the wrong; but if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?" Then Annas sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest. Now Simon Peter was standing there keeping warm. And they said to him, "You are not one of his disciples, are you?" He denied it and said, "I am not." One of the slaves of the high priest, a relative of the one whose ear Peter had cut off, said, "Didn't I see you in the garden with him?" Again Peter denied it. And immediately the cock crowed. Then they brought Jesus from Caiaphas to the praetorium. It was morning. And they themselves did not enter the praetorium, in order not to be defiled so that they could eat the Passover. So Pilate came out to them and said, "What charge do you bring against this man?" They answered and said to him, "If he were not a criminal, we would not have handed him over to you." At this, Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves, and judge him according to your law." The Jews answered him, "We do not have the right to execute anyone, " in order that the word of Jesus might be fulfilled that he said indicating the kind of death he would die. So Pilate went back into the praetorium and summoned Jesus and said to him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus answered, "Do you say this on your own or have others told you about me?" Pilate answered, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests handed you over to me. What have you done?" Jesus answered, "My kingdom does not belong to this world. If my kingdom did belong to this world, my attendants would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not here." So Pilate said to him, "Then you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say I am a king. For this I was born and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice." Pilate said to him, "What is truth?" When he had said this, he again went out to the Jews and said to them, "I find no guilt in him. But you have a custom that I release one prisoner to you at Passover. Do you want me to release to you the King of the Jews?" They cried out again, "Not this one but Barabbas!" Now Barabbas was a revolutionary. Then Pilate took Jesus and had him scourged. And the soldiers wove a crown out of thorns and placed it on his head, and clothed him in a purple cloak, and they came to him and said, "Hail, King of the Jews!" And they struck him repeatedly. Once more Pilate went out and said to them, "Look, I am bringing him out to you, so that you may know that I find no guilt in him." So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple cloak. And he said to them, "Behold, the man!" When the chief priests and the guards saw him they cried out, "Crucify him, crucify him!" Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and crucify him. I find no guilt in him." The Jews answered, "We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God." Now when Pilate heard this statement, he became even more afraid, and went back into the praetorium and said to Jesus, "Where are you from?" Jesus did not answer him. So Pilate said to him, "Do you not speak to me? Do you not know that I have power to release you and I have power to crucify you?" Jesus answered him, "You would have no power over me if it had not been given to you from above. For this reason the one who handed me over to you has

the greater sin.” Consequently, Pilate tried to release him; but the Jews cried out, “If you release him, you are not a Friend of Caesar. Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar.” When Pilate heard these words he brought Jesus out and seated him on the judge’s bench in the place called Stone Pavement, in Hebrew, Gabbatha. It was preparation day for Passover, and it was about noon. And he said to the Jews, “Behold, your king!” They cried out, “Take him away, take him away! Crucify him!” Pilate said to them, “Shall I crucify your king?” The chief priests answered, “We have no king but Caesar.” Then he handed him over to them to be crucified. So they took Jesus, and, carrying the cross himself, he went out to what is called the Place of the Skull, in Hebrew, Golgotha. There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus in the middle. Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read, “Jesus the Nazorean, the King of the Jews.” Now many of the Jews read this inscription, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek. So the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, “Do not write ‘The King of the Jews,’ but that he said, ‘I am the King of the Jews’.” Pilate answered, “What I have written, I have written.” When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four shares, a share for each soldier. They also took his tunic, but the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top down. So they said to one another, “Let’s not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it will be, “in order that the passage of Scripture might be fulfilled that says: They divided my garments among them, and for my vesture they cast lots. This is what the soldiers did. Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple there whom he loved he said to his mother, “Woman, behold, your son.” Then he said to the disciple, “Behold, your mother.” And from that hour the disciple took her into his home. After this, aware that everything was now finished, in order that the Scripture might be fulfilled, Jesus said, “I thirst.” There was a vessel filled with common wine. So they put a sponge soaked in wine on a sprig of hyssop and put it up to his mouth. When Jesus had taken the wine, he said, “It is finished.” And bowing his head, he handed over the spirit. Here all kneel and pause for a short time. Now since it was preparation day, in order that the bodies might not remain on the cross on the sabbath, for the sabbath day of that week was a solemn one, the Jews asked Pilate that their legs be broken and that they be taken down. So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and then of the other one who was crucified with Jesus. But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs, but one soldier thrust his lance into his side, and immediately blood and water flowed out. An eyewitness has testified, and his testimony is true; he knows that he is speaking the truth, so that you also may come to believe. For this happened so that the Scripture passage might be fulfilled: Not a bone of it will be broken. And again another passage says: They will look upon him whom they have pierced. After this, Joseph of Arimathea, secretly a disciple of Jesus for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate if he could remove the body of Jesus. And Pilate permitted it. So he came and took his body. Nicodemus, the one who had first come to him at night, also came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes weighing about one hundred pounds. They took the body of Jesus and bound it with burial cloths along with the spices, according to the Jewish burial custom. Now in the place where he had been crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had yet been buried.

So they laid Jesus there because of the Jewish preparation day; for the tomb was close by.

3. Reflecting on the Word – *Meditatio*

3.1. A key to the reading:

- Jesus master of His fate

I would like to suggest that we meditate in the spirit of Mary, at the foot of the cross of Jesus. She, the strong woman who understood the full meaning of this event of the passion and death of the Lord, will help us cast a contemplative glance at the crucified (Jn 1:5–27). We are looking at chapter 19 of John's Gospel, which begins with the scene of the scourging and the crowning with thorns. Pilate presents "Jesus the Nazarene, the king of the Jews" to the chief priests and to the guards who call for His death on the cross (Jn 1:). Thus Jesus begins the way of the cross towards Golgotha, where He will be crucified. In the story of the Passion according to John, Jesus reveals himself as master of himself and in control of all that is happening to Him. John's text is full of phrases that point to this theological fact, that Jesus offers His life. He actively, not passively, endures the events of the passion. Here are just some examples putting the stress on some phrases and words. The reader may find other examples:

Knowing everything that was to happen to Him, Jesus came forward and said: "Who are you looking for?" They answered, "Jesus the Nazarene". He said, "I am He!". Now Judas the traitor was standing among them. **When Jesus said to them "I am He", they moved back and fell on the ground.** He asked them a second time, "Who are you looking for?" They said, "Jesus the Nazarene". Jesus replied, "I have told you that I am He. If I am the one you are looking for, **let these others go**". This was **to fulfill the words He had spoken**, "Not one of those You gave me have I lost". (Jn 1:-9)

"Jesus then came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe" (Jn 1:), Jesus replied, **"You would have no power over me at all, if it had not been given you from above."** (Jn 1:1).

On the cross too, Jesus takes an active part in His death, He does not allow himself to be killed like the thieves whose legs were broken (Jn 1:1-33), but commits His spirit (Jn 1:0). The details recalled by the Evangelist are very important: Seeing His mother and the disciple whom He loved standing near her, Jesus said to His mother, "Woman, this is your son." Then to the disciple He said, "This is your mother." (Jn 1:6-27). These simple words of Jesus bear the weight of revelation, words that reveal to us His will: "this is your son" (v. 26); "this is your mother" (v. 27). These words also recall those pronounced by Pilate on the Lithostrotos: "This is the man" (Jn 1:). With these words, Jesus on the cross, His throne, reveals His will and His love for us. He is the lamb of God, the shepherd who gives His life for His sheep. At that moment, by the cross, He gives birth to the Church, represented by Mary, her sister (or sister-in-law) Mary of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene, together with the beloved disciple (Jn 1:5).

- Beloved and faithful disciples

The fourth Gospel specifies that these disciples "stood by the cross" (Jn 1:5-26). This detail has a deep meaning. Only the fourth Gospel tells us that these five persons stood by the cross. The other Evangelists do not say so. Luke, for instance, says that all those who knew Him followed the events from a distance (Lk 2:9). Matthew also says that many women followed these events from afar. These women had followed Jesus from Galilee and served Him. But now they followed Him from afar (Mt 2:5–56). Like

Matthew, Mark gives us the names of those who followed the death of Jesus from afar (Mk 1:0-41). Thus only the fourth Gospel says that the mother of Jesus and the other women and the beloved disciple “stood by the cross”. They stood there like servants before their king. They are present courageously at a time when Jesus has already declared that “it is fulfilled” (Jn 1:0). The mother of Jesus is present at the hour that finally “has come”. That hour foretold at the wedding feast of Cana (Jn 2:1 ff). The fourth Gospel had remarked then that “the mother of Jesus was there” (Jn 2:1). Thus the person that remains faithful to the Lord in his destiny, he/she is a beloved disciple. The Evangelist keeps this disciple anonymous so that each one of us may see him/herself mirrored in the one who knew the mysteries of the Lord, who laid his head on Jesus’ chest at the last supper (Jn 13:25).

3.1.1. Questions and suggestions to direct our meditation and practice

- Read once more the passage of the Gospel and look in the Bible for the texts mentioned in the key to the reading. Look for other parallel texts that may help us penetrate deeper into the text presented for our meditation.
- In spirit, and with the help of the prayerful reading of John’s text, visit the places of the Passion, stop on Calvary to witness with Mary and the beloved disciple the events of the Passion.
- What struck you most?
- What feelings does this story of the Passion arouse in you?
- What does the fact that Jesus actively bears His passion mean for you?

4. Oratio

O Eternal Wisdom, Infinite Goodness, Ineffable Truth, You who probe hearts, Eternal God, help us to understand that You can, know and want to! O Loving and Bleeding Lamb, crucified Christ, fulfill in us that which You said: “Anyone who follows me will not be walking in the dark, but will have the light of life” (Jn 8:12). O perfect light, from whom all lights proceed! O light for whom light was created, without whom all is darkness and with whom all is light. Light up, light up, do light up! Let Your whole will penetrate all the authors and collaborators You have chosen in this work of renewal. Jesus, Jesus love, Jesus, transform us and make us conform to You. Uncreated Wisdom, Eternal Word, sweet Truth, silent Love, Jesus, Jesus Love!

(St. Mary Magdalene de’ Pazzi, O.Carm.,
in *The Renewal of the Church*, 90-91.)

5. Contemplatio

Repeat frequently and calmly these words of Jesus when He offered himself:
“Father into Your hands I commend my spirit”

Lectio Divina Saturday, April 11, 2020

Luke 23:50-56

The light of the Bridegroom, shines beyond the night

1. Prayer

Lord, on this day, there is only emptiness and solitude, absence and silence: a tomb, a lifeless body, and the dark of the night.

You are no longer visible, no word, no breathing. You are observing the Sabbath, in total rest. Where will I find You, now that I have lost You?

I will follow the women, I too will sit down together with them, in silence, to make ready the fragrances of love. From my heart, Lord, I will take the most delicate fragrances, the most precious, just as the woman did, when in her love she broke the alabaster jar and spread its perfume all around.

And I will call the Spirit, with the words of the bride, I will say again, "Awake, north wind, come, wind of the south! Breathe over my garden" (Song 4:16)

2. Reading

From the Gospel according to Luke (23:50-56)

Now there was a virtuous and righteous man named Joseph who, though he was a member of the council, had not consented to their plan of action. He came from the Jewish town of Arimathea and was awaiting the kingdom of God. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. After he had taken the body down, he wrapped it in a linen cloth and laid him in a rock-hewn tomb in which no one had yet been buried. It was the day of preparation, and the sabbath was about to begin. The women who had come from Galilee with him followed behind, and when they had seen the tomb and the way in which his body was laid in it, they returned and prepared spices and perfumed oils. Then they rested on the sabbath according to the commandment.

3. Meditation

"Now", a very simple expression, full of life and truth, marking the existing of a cry that breaks through the indifference, shakes us from our paralysis, and breaks through the veil. It stands in opposition to and as an escape from the great distance taken by the disciples of Jesus throughout His passion. Peter followed Him from afar (Lk 22:54); all those who knew Him and the women who had followed Him, looked on from a distance (Lk 23:49), but Joseph of Arimathea, steps forward, introduces himself to Pilate and asks for Jesus' body. He is there, not listed among the absent, he is near, not standing at a distance, and he will never leave.

"It was the day of Preparation, and the sabbath was beginning". This gospel is situated in that moment that divides the dark of the night from the light of the new day. The Greek verb used by Luke seems to describe clearly the movement of this holy Saturday, that little by little emerges from the darkness and rises and grows beyond the light. In this resurrection movement we too are caught up, as we approach this scripture in faith. But, we have to choose, to remain in death, in the preparation, that is only preparation and not fulfillment, or accept to enter the movement in order to rise in the light. As the Lord says, "Awake, you who sleep, rise from the dead and Christ will shine on you" (Ep 5:14) using the same verb.

“who had come with Him from Galilee, followed”, These words are very beautiful, referring to the movement of the women, because they help us capture all the intensity of their participation in what was happening to Jesus. Indeed, Luke uses certain nuances, for example, using a form of the verb “to follow” that suggests greater intensity. The reference to “with Him” has the same effect. They went together, decisively, urged on by their love. Their journey, which began in Galilee, continues, even through death, and absence. Perhaps they feel that they are not alone and they begin to proclaim that He is present.

“and they saw the tomb”, It is wonderful to note that in the eyes of these women there is a light that is more powerful than the night! They can see beyond, they observe, they take note and they look intently and with real interest: in one word, they contemplate. The eyes of the heart open out to the reality of what is happening. As the gaze of Jesus reaches them, they bear within them His image, the face of that love that has visited and illumined their whole existence. Not even the drama of death and physical separation could extinguish the Sun that never sets, even though it is night.

“Then they returned”, As well as that, they still have the internal strength to make decisions, to do things, to set out once more on the way. They turn their backs on death, on absence, and they go home, like the victorious warrior. They carry no trophies, but in their hearts they bear a certainty, the courage of an ardent love.

“and prepared spices and ointments”. This was the task of the priests, as the Scriptures tell us (I Cr 9:30); it is a sacred duty, almost liturgical, almost like a prayer. The women of the Gospel, in fact, pray and succeed in transforming the night of death into a place of blessing, hope, loving and attentive care. No glance, no movement or gesture is without meaning for them. They prepare, or more precisely, as we see from the meaning of the corresponding Hebrew verb, they compose the perfumed aromas using all their wisdom to mix the necessary ingredients, in the right measure and proportion: a wholly feminine art, wholly maternal, born from within, from the womb, a privileged place of love. Holy Saturday, indeed, is like a womb that embraces life: an embrace that protects and nurtures the new creature that is about to be born.

“On the sabbath they rested”, What rest are we really talking about? What cessation, what suspension is coming about in the lives of these women in the depth of their hearts? The verb that Luke uses clearly suggests “silence”, a silence that turns into the main actor in this Sabbath, a Holy Saturday of waiting. There are no more words to be said, no declarations, no debate: all the world is silent, as the wind of the Holy Spirit blows (cf. Job 38:17) and the fragrance spreads. One song returns to the heart, in the night, (Ps 76:7): it is a song of love, repeated by the women, and with them, Joseph, and everyone, who like him, is not bound by the decisions and the actions of others (v.5) in this world. The words are the words that the Bride in the Song of Songs repeats, the last words, kept in reserve for the Beloved, when, right at the end of the book, she says: “Make haste, my beloved, and be like a gazelle or a young stag upon the mountains of spices”. (Song 8:14). This is the cry of the resurrection, the song of victory over death.

4. Questions for Reflection

Do I stand, perhaps, at a distance, not wanting to come any closer to Jesus, not wanting to look for Him, not wanting to wait for Him?

Would I be able to follow the women, and walk into the night, into death, into the emptiness?

Are my eyes open to see the place of the burial, the stone that hides the Lord Jesus? Can I experience contemplation, that is, can I see in some depth, beyond the surface? Do I believe in the presence of the Lord, stronger than the tomb and the rock?

Am I willing to go back, along with the women? That is, to go through a journey of conversion, change?

Is there space in me for silence, for the attention of the heart, for openness to God?

Do I feel arising within me the desire to proclaim the resurrection, the new life in Christ, all around me? Am I too, at least somewhat, like the women of the Gospel, who repeat the invitation of the Bridegroom, "Rise!"

5. Closing Prayer

Lord, for You the night is as clear as the day!

Song of Trust and Security in God

Protect me, O God, for in You I take refuge.

I say to the Lord, 'You are my Lord;

I have no good apart from You.'

The Lord is my chosen portion and my cup;

You hold my lot.

The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places;

I have a goodly heritage.

I bless the Lord who gives me counsel;

in the night also my heart instructs me.

I keep the Lord always before me;

because He is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.

Therefore my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices;

my body also rests secure.

For You do not give me up to Sheol,

or let Your faithful one see the Pit.

You show me the path of life.

In Your presence there is fullness of joy;

in Your right hand are pleasures for evermore.

from Psalm 16

Lectio Divina Sunday, April 12, 2020

Jesus' resurrection

He is living among us

John 20: 1-9

1. Opening prayer

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

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

2. Reading

a) A key to guide the reading:

Let us read the text where the evangelist seeks to tell the readers the meaning of faith in the resurrection. He seeks to do this by means of the visit of the two disciples to the empty tomb and the appearance of Jesus to Mary Magdalene. While reading, let us pay attention to the details of the story as told in the Gospel of John who presents a very deep symbolic dimension.

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

Jn 20:1-3: the disturbing experience of the empty tomb

Jn 20:4-10: Peter and the beloved disciple run to the sepulcher: the beloved disciple saw and believed

Jn 20:11-18: Jesus shows Himself first to Mary Magdalene and gives her a command.

c) The text:

1-3: It was very early on the first day of the week and still dark, when Mary of Magdala came to the tomb. She saw that the stone had been moved away from the tomb and came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved. 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb,' she said, 'and we don't know where they have put Him.' So Peter set out with the other disciple to go to the tomb.

4-10: They ran together, but the other disciple, running faster than Peter, reached the tomb first; he bent down and saw the linen cloths lying on the ground, but did not go in. Simon Peter, following him, also came up, went into the tomb, saw the linen cloths lying on the ground and also the cloth that had been over His head; this was not with the linen cloths but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple who had reached the tomb first also went in; he saw and he believed. Till this moment they had still not understood the scripture, that He must rise from the dead. The disciples then went back home.



11-18: But Mary was standing outside near the tomb, weeping. Then, as she wept, she stooped to look inside, and saw two angels in white sitting where the body of Jesus had been, one at the head, the other at the feet. They said, 'Woman, why are you weeping?' 'They have taken my Lord away,' she replied, 'and I don't know where they have put

Him.' As she said this she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, though she did not realize that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?' Supposing Him to be the gardener, she said, 'Sir, if you have taken Him away, tell me where you have put Him, and I will go and remove Him.' Jesus said, 'Mary!' She turned round then and said to Him in Hebrew, 'Rabbuni!' -- which means Master. Jesus said to her, 'Do not cling to Me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to the brothers, and tell them: I am ascending to My Father and your Father, to my God and your God.' So Mary of Magdala told the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord,' and that He had said these things to her.

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 struck you in this text that describes the first experience of the resurrection?
- b) The beloved disciple went in, saw and believed. What did he see and what led him to believe? Why is it that the text tells us only the reaction of the beloved disciple and not that of Peter?
- c) What changes take place in Mary Magdalene during the dialogue? How did this change happen?
- d) What mission or command does Jesus give Mary Magdalene?
- e) Mary Magdalene was seeking Jesus in one way and meets Him in another. How does this occur in our lives?
- f) To see and believe. The beloved disciple saw and believed. What is it that leads me to believe that Jesus is alive, that He is present in our midst, today, giving new life to the poor?
- g) Have you gone through an experience of loss or death? What gave you new life or new hope and the joy of life? What is it that I say when I affirm, "I believe in the resurrection"?

5. A key to the reading

for those who wish to go deeper into the text.

a) In John's Gospel, faith in the resurrection is encountered in the description of the passion and death of Jesus:

* In describing the passion and death of Jesus, John's Gospel wants to point out not the sentence passed on a political subversive, but the hour for glorifying the Son of God. During the whole process that carries Jesus to His death, He is master of what happens to Himself and to His adversaries. For John, the cross is synonymous with "lifting", rising on high, to be with the Father (Jn 3:14; 8:28; 12:32-34). It is the beginning of the resurrection that is revealed fully on the first day of the week (Jn 20:1). That is why in John's Gospel there is no agony in the garden (Jn 18:1-2). When Jesus is in prison, the soldiers are frightened when Jesus says, "I am He!" (Jn 18:6). When Jesus is dying, He

does not cry out as in the other Gospels. Serenely He takes leave of His friends, of His mother, and then expires (Jn 19:28-30).

* The story of the passion is another more concrete example of the fact that John does not simply relate historical facts, but puts them through an X-Ray. He tries to show what the facts hide. When Pilate, Hanna, the Jewish and Roman authorities try to end Jesus' life, in truth they were allowing Jesus to be elevated towards God. From His prison, Jesus directs events and gives His life. "I lay down My life of My own free will, and as it is in My power to lay it down, so it is in My power to take it up again. No one takes it from Me. I lay it down of My own free will" (Jn 10:17-18). All can set their minds at rest and be full of hope because Jesus has overcome and has been glorified by the Father (Jn 17:5).

b) Peter and the beloved disciple go the empty tomb (vv. 1-10):

* The experience of the resurrection of the early community was a long process, an experience that grew slowly like the growth of a strong tree. At first, many did not believe in the witness of those who had experienced the living presence of Jesus (Mt 28:17; Mk 16:11, 13, 14; Lk 24:11, 36, 41; Jn 20:25). But the experience of the resurrection expressed in the form of appearances was so strong, so deep and so convincing that it succeeded in overcoming human unbelief confronted with the possibility of the victory of life over death.

* The women were more faithful than the men. They were the first to believe in the Good News of the resurrection (Mt 28:9-10; Lk 24:4-11; Jn 20:11-18). Faced with the news of Mary Magdalene, who sees the empty tomb, Peter and the beloved disciple run to the tomb. The Gospel relates the strange news according to which "the other disciple" ran faster than Peter and arrived first at the tomb, but did not go in. He looked inside and saw the bandages on the ground. After he went in he saw also the folded shroud to one side. The Gospel then says, "He saw and believed!" But nothing is said of Peter's reaction although it was he who had gone first into the empty tomb. At the end, the Gospel adds, "Till this moment they had failed to understand the teaching of scripture, that He must rise from the dead" (Jn 20:9). This means that the Old Testament on its own does not communicate a complete understanding of what it contains. The light for understanding the real meaning of the Old Testament appears at the very moment when the beloved disciple "saw and believed". His experience of the resurrection was like a light that struck the eyes of the disciples and revealed to them the complete and full meaning of the Old Testament. It is this light to the sight that liberates the words of the Old Testament.

* A comparison to understand the change. In a circle of friends, someone showed a photo where there was a man with a harsh face, with the finger raised, almost assaulting the public. All thought that he was an inflexible person, unpleasant, who distanced himself from others. At that moment, a boy arrived and said, "This is my father!" The others looked at him and said, "A harsh father, then!" The boy replied, "No, no, no! He is very loving. My father is a lawyer. That photo was taken in court when he was denouncing the crime of a landowner who wanted to dispossess a poor family of some unused land that they owned for a long time! My father won the case. The poor family was not deprived of its land!" All looked at the photo again and said, "What a beautiful

photo!" Almost by miracle, a light was shed on the photo and it assumed a new look. That harsh face became bathed in great tenderness! The words of the son changed everything, while changing nothing! The words and actions of Jesus, born of His experience as son, received and raised by the Father, without changing one letter or comma, changed the whole meaning of the Old Testament (Mt 5:17-18). The same God, who seemed so distant and harsh, took on the traits of a good Father, full of tenderness!

c) Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene:

* Mary Magdalene was one of the few who had the courage to stay with Jesus until the time of His death on the cross. She goes back to the tomb to be where she had been with the Beloved for the last time. She looks for Jesus with whom she had lived for the last three years. The disciples from Emmaus will see Jesus, but will not recognize him (Lk 24:15-16). The same thing happens to Mary Magdalene. She sees Jesus, but does not recognize Him. She thinks He is the gardener. But she is looking for the Jesus of the past, the same as He was three days previously. The image of Jesus as He was stops her from recognizing the living Jesus, present before her.

* Jesus pronounces the name "Mary!" This was the signal for her to recognize Him: the same voice, the same manner of saying the name. She replies, "Master!" Jesus has come back, and it was the same Jesus who had died on the cross. Her first impression is that death was just a painful incident along the way, and that now all was back as it was before. Mary embraces Jesus strongly. It was the same Jesus she knew.

* In fact, it is the same Jesus, but the manner of being with her is not the same. Jesus says to her, "Do not cling to Me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father!" He will go to the Father. Mary Magdalene must leave Jesus and take on her mission: to announce to the brothers that Jesus has ascended to the Father. Jesus opened the way for us and brought God close to us again.

* The way the appearance of Jesus to Mary Magdalene is described makes us realize the stages of the journey she has to go through, from the painful search to the new encounter of Easter. These too are the stages we all have to go through in our lives, the search for God by living the Gospel.

6. Psalm 27 (26)

God is my victory

Yahweh is my light and my salvation,
whom should I fear?
Yahweh is the fortress of my life,
whom should I dread?
When the wicked advance against me
to eat me up,
they, my opponents, my enemies,
are the ones who stumble and fall.
Though an army pitch camp against me,
my heart will not fear,
though war break out against me,

my trust will never be shaken.
One thing I ask of Yahweh,
one thing I seek:
to dwell in Yahweh's house
all the days of my life,
to enjoy the sweetness of Yahweh,
to seek out His temple.
For He hides me away under His roof
on the day of evil,
He folds me in the recesses of His tent,
sets me high on a rock.
Now my head is held high
above the enemies who surround me;
in His tent I will offer sacrifices of acclaim.
I will sing. I will make music for Yahweh.
Yahweh, hear my voice as I cry,
pity me, answer me!
Of you my heart has said, 'Seek His face!'
Your face, Yahweh, I seek;
do not turn away from me.
Do not thrust aside Your servant in anger,
without You I am helpless.
Never leave me, never forsake me,
God, my Savior.
Though my father and mother forsake me,
Yahweh will gather me up.
Yahweh, teach me Your way,
lead me on the path of integrity
because of my enemies;
do not abandon me to the will of my foes
-- false witnesses have risen against me,
and are breathing out violence.
This I believe: I shall see the goodness of Yahweh,
in the land of the living.
Put your hope in Yahweh, be strong,
let your heart be bold, put your hope in Yahweh.

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, April 13, 2020

Easter Time

1) Opening prayer

Our living God,
our heart is glad and rejoices
and we feel secure in our faith
that we have a living person to believe in, Jesus Christ, who is risen from the dead.
Let Him show us the path of life,
let us live in the joy of His presence
and give us the grace to make us witnesses,
so that we can proclaim with our whole life
that Jesus is our risen, living Lord
now and for ever.

2) Gospel Reading - Matthew 28:8-15

Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went away quickly from the tomb, fearful yet overjoyed, and ran to announce the news to his disciples. And behold, Jesus met them on their way and greeted them. They approached, embraced his feet, and did him homage. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me." While they were going, some of the guard went into the city and told the chief priests all that had happened. The chief priests assembled with the elders and took counsel; then they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, telling them, "You are to say, 'His disciples came by night and stole him while we were asleep.' And if this gets to the ears of the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble." The soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed. And this story has circulated among the Jews to the present day.

3) Reflection

- Easter! Today's Gospel describes the experience of the Resurrection which the disciples of Jesus had. At the beginning of his Gospel, in presenting Jesus, Matthew had said that Jesus is the Emmanuel, God with us (Mt 1:23). Now, at the end, he communicates and increases this certainty of faith, because he proclaims that Jesus is risen (Mt 28:6) and that He will be with us always, until the end of time! (Mt 28:20). In the contradictions of life, this truth is questioned and contested very much. Opposition is not lacking. The enemies, the chief priests of the Jews, defended themselves against the Good News of the Resurrection and sent word to say that the body had been stolen by the disciples (Mt 28:11-13). This also happens today: on the one side, the effort of many people to live and to witness to the resurrection; on the other side, so many evil people who fight against the resurrection and against life.
- In the Gospel of Matthew, the truth of the Resurrection of Jesus is told in symbolic language, which reveals the hidden sense of the events. Matthew speaks about the earthquake, of lightning and of the angels who announce the victory of Jesus over death (Mt 2-4). It is an apocalyptic language, very common at that time, to announce that finally the world had been transformed by the power of God! The hope of the poor, who reaffirmed their faith, was fulfilled: "He is alive in our midst!"

- Matthew 28:8: The joy of the Resurrection overcomes fear. On Sunday morning, the first day of the week, two women went to the tomb, Mary of Magdala and Mary of James, also called the other Mary. All of a sudden the earth trembled and an angel appeared as lightning. The guards who were guarding the tomb were so shaken up with fear that they were like dead men. The women were frightened but the angel encouraged them, announcing the victory of Jesus over death and sending them to go join the disciples of Jesus in Galilee. And in Galilee they would be able to see Him again. Everything began there; they received the great revelation of the Risen Lord. The joy of the Resurrection began to overcome fear. Thus the announcement of life and resurrection begins in this way.
- Matthew 28:9-10: Jesus appears to the women. The women left quickly. There is a mixture of fear and of joy. These are sentiments typical of those who have a profound experience of the mystery of God. Suddenly, Jesus himself went to meet them and said to them, “Rejoice!” And they fell on their knees and adored Him. It is the attitude of the one who believes and accepts the presence of God, even if it surprises and goes beyond the human capacity to understand. Now, Jesus Himself orders them to go and join the brothers in Galilee: “Do not be afraid. Go and tell My brothers to go to Galilee and there they will see Me”.
- Matthew 28:11-15: The astuteness or guile of the enemies of the Good News. The opposition itself which Jesus had to face during His life, springs up again now after His Resurrection. The chief priests meet and give money to the guards. They should spread the news that the disciples have robbed the body of Jesus, and this in order to avoid everything which is said about the Resurrection. The chief priests do not accept the Good News of the Resurrection. They prefer to believe that it is an invention on the part of the disciples – men and women – of Jesus.
- The significance of the testimony of the women. The presence of the women at the death, at the burial, and at the resurrection of Jesus is significant. They are witnesses to the death of Jesus (Mt 27:54-56). At the moment of the burial, they remain sitting before the tomb and therefore, they can render witness of the place where Jesus was buried (Mt 27:61). Now, on Sunday morning, they are there once again. They know that the empty tomb is truly the tomb of Jesus! The profound experience of death and resurrection which they had, transformed their lives. They themselves become qualified witnesses of the Resurrection in the Christian communities. This is why they receive the order to announce, “Jesus is alive! He has risen from the dead!”

4) Personal questions

- How do I experience the Resurrection in my life today?
- Does the Resurrection transform me in any way?
- Today, what is the mission of our community as disciples of Jesus? Through what in the Resurrection can we draw force and strength and courage to fulfill our mission?

5) Concluding Prayer

I bless Yahweh, who is my counselor,
 even at night my heart instructs me.
 I keep Yahweh before me always,

for with Him at my right hand,
nothing can shake me. (Ps 16:7-8)

Lectio Divina Tuesday, April 14, 2020

Easter Time

1) Opening prayer

O God of life,
we profess our faith in Jesus
and recognize Him as our Lord and Savior. Make us listen to Him
when He speaks His good news to us
for it is a message of life.
May we also hear His voice
when He cries out to us in people in need
or simply when He speaks to us
in people who express to us
their joys and hopes, their love and their faith.
We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

2) Gospel Reading - John 20:11-18

Mary Magdalene stayed outside the tomb weeping. And as she wept, she bent over into the tomb and saw two angels in white sitting there, one at the head and one at the feet where the Body of Jesus had been. And they said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken my Lord, and I don't know where they laid him." When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus there, but did not know it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" She thought it was the gardener and said to him, "Sir, if you carried him away, tell me where you laid him, and I will take him." Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni," which means Teacher. Jesus said to her, "Stop holding on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and tell them, 'I am going to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" Mary went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord," and then reported what he had told her.

3) Reflection

- Today's Gospel describes the apparition of Jesus to Mary Magdalene. The death of her great friend prompts Mary to lose her sense of life. But she does not give up her search. She goes to the tomb in order to meet again the one whom death has taken away. There are moments in our life in which everything crumbles. It seems that everything is finished. Death, disasters, pain and suffering, disillusionments, betrayals: so many things which may cause us to feel lost, as if standing on firm ground, and which can lead us to fall into a deep crisis. But other things also happen. For example, suddenly we meet a friend again, and that can give us hope anew and can make us discover that love is stronger than death and defeat. The Lord allows desolation, but He also provides consolation as we need it.
- Chapter 20 in John's Gospel, besides the apparitions of Jesus to Mary Magdalene, also

speaks about diverse episodes which indicate the richness of the experience of the Resurrection: (a) to the beloved disciple and to Peter (Jn 20:1-10); (b) to Mary Magdalene (Jn 20:11-18); (c) to the community of disciples (Jn 20:19-23) and (d) to the Apostle Thomas (Jn 20:24-29). The purpose of the writing of the Gospel is to lead people to believe in Jesus, and believing in Him, to have life (Jn 20:30-31).

- In the way of describing the apparition of Jesus to Mary Magdalene one is aware of the different stages of the road that she had to follow, of the sorrowful search until the time of the encounter at Easter. These are also the stages through which we all have to pass, throughout our life, in seeking God and living the Gospel.

- John 20:11-13: Mary Magdalene weeps, but she seeks. There was a very strong love between Jesus and Mary Magdalene. She was one of the few persons who had the courage to remain with Jesus up to the moment of His death on the Cross. After the obligatory rest on Saturday, she goes back to the tomb to be in the place where she had seen her beloved for the last time. But, surprisingly, the tomb is empty! The angels ask her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” and her response is, “They have taken away my Lord and I do not know where they have put Him!” Mary Magdalene looked for Jesus, that Jesus whom she had known for three years.

- John 20:14-15: Mary Magdalene speaks with Jesus without knowing Him. The disciples at Emmaus saw Jesus but they did not recognize Him. She thinks that Jesus is the gardener. And just as the angels had done, Jesus also asks, “Why are you weeping?” and He adds, “Whom are you looking for?” The response: “If you have taken Him away, tell me where you have put Him and I will go and get Him”. She was still looking for the Jesus of the past, the same one of three days before. And it is precisely the image of the Jesus of the past which prevents her from recognizing the living Jesus, who is present before her.

- John 20:16: Mary Magdalene recognizes Jesus. Jesus pronounces her name: “Mary!” This was the signal to recognize Him: the same voice, the same way of pronouncing her name. She answers, “Master!” Jesus had returned the same as the one who had died on the cross. The first impression was that death was only a painful incident on the journey, but now everything has again become as before. Mary embraces Jesus strongly. He was the same Jesus whom she had known and loved. And thus is fulfilled what the Parable of the Good Shepherd said: “He calls them by name and they recognize His voice”. “I know My sheep and My sheep know Me” (Jn 10:3, 4, 14).

- John 20:17-18: Mary Magdalene receives the mission to announce the resurrection to the apostles. In fact, it is the same Jesus, but the way of being together with her is not the same as before. Jesus tells her, “Do not cling to me, because I have not as yet ascended to the Father!” He goes toward the Father. Mary Magdalene has to let Jesus go and assume her mission: to announce to the brothers that He, Jesus, has ascended to the Father. Jesus has opened up the way for us and thus, once more, God is close to us.

4) Personal questions

- Have you ever had an experience which gave you the feeling of loss and death? What was it like? What gave you new life and gave you back the hope and joy of living?

- What is the change that took place in Mary Magdalene throughout the dialogue? Mary Magdalene was looking for Jesus in a certain way and found Him in a different way. How does this take place in our life?

- Do we also look for Jesus in the past, as a historical figure, when He is present right

before us in the poor and outcast we meet every day? What can we do to be more aware of Him in those that we meet today?

- Has Jesus ever called to me as I faced someone who was poor and outcast? Did I recognize my name as He called me through that person and that opportunity to see Him?

5) Concluding Prayer

We are waiting for Yahweh;
He is our help and our shield,
for in Him our heart rejoices,
in His holy name we trust.
Yahweh, let Your faithful love rest on us,
as our hope has rested in You. (Ps 33:20-22)

Lectio Divina Wednesday, April 15, 2020

Easter Time

1) Opening prayer

God our Father,
You are a God not of the dead
nor of those paralyzed by their fears and limitations
but the God of the living. Raise us up and make us walk forward
in joy and hope
as companions on the road
of Him whom you raised from the dead,
Jesus Christ, our Risen Lord for ever.

2) Gospel Reading - Luke 24:13-35

That very day, the first day of the week, two of Jesus' disciples were going to a village seven miles from Jerusalem called Emmaus, and they were conversing about all the things that had occurred. And it happened that while they were conversing and debating, Jesus himself drew near and walked with them, but their eyes were prevented from recognizing him. He asked them, "What are you discussing as you walk along?" They stopped, looking downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, said to him in reply, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know of the things that have taken place there in these days?" And he replied to them, "What sort of things?" They said to him, "The things that happened to Jesus the Nazarene, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, how our chief priests and rulers both handed him over to a sentence of death and crucified him. But we were hoping that he would be the one to redeem Israel; and besides all this, it is now the third day since this took place. Some women from our group, however, have astounded us: they were at the tomb early in the morning and did not find his Body; they came back and reported that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who announced that he was alive. Then some of those with us went to the tomb and found things just as the women had described, but him they did not see." And he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are! How slow of heart to believe all that the prophets spoke! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer

these things and enter into his glory?" Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them what referred to him in all the Scriptures. As they approached the village to which they were going, he gave the impression that he was going on farther. But they urged him, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening and the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them. And it happened that, while he was with them at table, he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them. With that their eyes were opened and they recognized him, but he vanished from their sight. Then they said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he spoke to us on the way and opened the Scriptures to us?" So they set out at once and returned to Jerusalem where they found gathered together the Eleven and those with them who were saying, "The Lord has truly been raised and has appeared to Simon!" Then the two recounted what had taken place on the way and how he was made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

3) Reflection

- Today's Gospel speaks to us of a very well know episode, of the apparition of Jesus to the disciples at Emmaus. Luke writes in the year 80 for the communities of Greece, which for the most part were made up of converted Gentiles. The years 60's and 70's had been most difficult ones. There had been the great persecution of Nero in the year 64. Six years later, in the year 70, Jerusalem was completely destroyed by the Romans. In the year 72, in Masada, in the desert of Judah, there was the massacre of the last rebellious Jews. In those years, the Apostles, witnesses of the Resurrection, disappeared gradually. People began to feel tired on the journey. From where could they draw the strength so as not to get discouraged? How to discover the presence of Jesus in such a difficult situation? The story of the apparition of Jesus to the disciples at Emmaus tries to give a response to all these anguishing questions. Luke wants to teach the communities how to interpret Scripture in order to be able to rediscover the presence of Jesus in life.
- Luke 24:13-24: 1st Step: to get away from reality. Jesus meets the two friends in a situation of fear and lack of faith. The force of death, the cross, had killed the hope in them. This was the situation of many people at the time of Luke, and is also the predicament of many people today. Jesus gets close to them and walks by their side. He listens to their conversation and asks, "What are all these things that you are discussing as you walk along?" The dominant ideology of the government and of the official religion of the time prevent them from seeing. "Our hope had been that He would be the one to set Israel free." What is the conversation of people who suffer today? The first step is this one: get close to the people, listen to their reality, feel their problems: be capable of asking questions which will help the people to look at reality from a more critical perspective.
- Luke 24:25-27: 2nd step: use the Bible to enlighten life. Jesus uses the Bible and the history of people to illuminate the problem which made the two friends suffer, and to clarify the situation in which they are living. He also uses it to place them in the whole plan of God which came from Moses and the prophets. Thus, He indicates that history had not escaped from God's hand. Jesus uses the Bible not as a doctor who knows everything, but rather like a companion who comes to help friends and to remind them of what they had forgotten. Jesus tries to awaken their memory: "Foolish and slow to believe all that the prophets have said! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer

before entering into His glory?”

This is the second step: With the Bible, help people to discover the wisdom which already exists in them, and transform the cross, a sign of death, into a sign of life and of hope. What prevented them from walking now becomes for them strength and light on the journey. How can we do this today?

Luke 24:28-32: 3rd step: to share in community. The Bible in itself does not open their eyes. It only makes their heart burn. What opens the eyes and makes them see is the breaking of the bread, the communal gesture of sharing, and the celebration of the Supper. At the moment in which both recognize Jesus, they are born anew, and Jesus disappears. Jesus does not take possession of his friends' road. He is not paternalistic. Risen, the disciples are capable of walking alone.

The third step is the following: to know how to create a fraternal environment of faith, of celebration and of sharing, where the Holy Spirit can act. It is He who makes us discover and experience the Word of God in life, which leads us to understand the meaning of the words of Jesus (Jn 14:26; 16:13).

• Luke 24:33-35: 4th step: The result: To resurrect means to go back to Jerusalem. The two of them, courageously, get back on the road to go to Jerusalem, where the same forces of death, which had killed Jesus and had killed their hope, continue to be active. But, now everything has changed. If Jesus is alive, then there is in Him and with Him a stronger power than that which killed Him. This experience makes them resurrect! Truly, everything has changed. There is return and not flight! Faith and not unbelief! Hope and not despair! Critical conscience and not fatalism in the face of power! Liberty and not oppression! In one word: life and not death! Instead of the bad news of the death of Jesus, the Good News of his Resurrection! Both of them experience life and life in abundance! (Jn 10:10). This is a sign that the Spirit of Jesus is acting in them!

4) Personal questions

- Both of them say, “We were hoping, but...!” Have you ever been in a situation of discouragement which led you to say, “I was hoping, but...!”?
- How do you read, use and interpret the Bible? Have you ever felt your heart burning when reading and meditating on the Word of God? Do you read the Bible alone or are you part of a Bible group?
- Considering these steps, and the way Jesus enlightened these disciples, how would you help a friend who was losing hope or faith?

5) Concluding Prayer

Give thanks to Yahweh, call on His name,
proclaim His deeds to the peoples!
Sing to Him, make music for Him,
recount all His wonders! (Ps 105:1-2)

Lectio Divina Thursday, April 16, 2020

Easter Time

1) Opening prayer

Almighty God and Father,
Jesus died for us on the cross
and You raised Him from the dead.
We have not seen the marks of the nails in His hands
nor touched the wound in His side,
but we believe that He is alive
and present here among us.
Open our hearts to His word
and let us touch Him in the bread of the Eucharist,
that He may raise us above our sins
and change us into new people.
May we thus bear witness to Your risen Son,
Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

2) Gospel Reading - Luke 24:35-48

The disciples of Jesus recounted what had taken place along the way, and how they had come to recognize him in the breaking of bread. While they were still speaking about this, he stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be with you." But they were startled and terrified and thought that they were seeing a ghost. Then he said to them, "Why are you troubled? And why do questions arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me and see, because a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you can see I have." And as he said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. While they were still incredulous for joy and were amazed, he asked them, "Have you anything here to eat?" They gave him a piece of baked fish; he took it and ate it in front of them. He said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and in the prophets and psalms must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. And he said to them, "Thus it is written that the Christ would suffer and rise from the dead on the third day and that repentance, for the forgiveness of sins, would be preached in his name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things."

3) Reflection

- In these days after Easter, the Gospel texts narrate the apparitions of Jesus. At the beginning, in the first years after the death and the Resurrection of Jesus, the Christians were concerned with defending the Resurrection through the apparitions. They themselves, the living community, were a great apparition of the Risen Jesus. But in the measure in which the criticism of the enemies against the faith in the Resurrection increased, and that internally, and as there arose criticism and doubts concerning diverse functions in the community (cf. 1 Co 1:12), they began to recall the apparitions of Jesus. There are two types of apparitions: (a) those which stress the doubts and the resistance of the disciples in believing in the Resurrection, and (b) those who call attention to the

orders of Jesus to the disciples – men and women – conferring some mission to them. The first ones respond to criticisms from the outside. These show that Christians are not naïve and credulous persons who accept everything and anything. Au contraire! They themselves had many doubts in believing in the Resurrection. The others respond to the criticism from within and establish the community functions and tasks, not on human qualities which are always debatable, but on the authority and orders received from the Risen Jesus. The apparitions of Jesus in today's Gospel put together two different aspects: the doubts of the disciples and the mission to announce and to forgive received from Jesus.

- Luke 24:35: The summary of the story of Emmaus. Returning to Jerusalem, the two disciples found the community together and they shared with them the experience that they had lived. They told them what had happened along the road and how they recognized Jesus in the breaking of the bread. The community gathered together, and in turn, shared the apparition of Jesus to Peter. This was a reciprocal sharing of the experience of the Resurrection, as it also happens today when the communities gather together to share and celebrate their faith, their hope and their love.

- Luke 24:36-37: The apparition of Jesus causes great fright in the disciples. At this moment, Jesus becomes present among them and says, "Peace be with you!" This is the most frequent greeting of Jesus: "Peace be with you!" (Jn 14:27; 16:33; 20:19, 21, 26). But the disciples, upon seeing Jesus, were frightened and did not recognize Him. Before them is Jesus in person, but they think that they are seeing a ghost, a phantasm. They cannot believe it. It is now the encounter between Jesus of Nazareth and the Risen Jesus.

- Luke 24:38-40: Jesus helps them to overcome fear and unbelief. Jesus does two things to help the disciples overcome fear and unbelief. He shows them His hands and His feet, saying, "It is I Myself!", and tells them to touch His body saying, "A ghost has no flesh and bones as you can see I have!" Jesus shows His hands and feet because on them is the sign of the nails (cf. Jn 20:25-27). The Risen Christ is Jesus of Nazareth, the same one who was nailed to the Cross and not a phantasm Christ as the disciples imagined when they saw Him. He orders them to touch His body, because the Resurrection is the Resurrection of the whole person, body and soul. The Resurrection has nothing to do with the theory of the immortality of the soul, which the Greeks taught.

- Luke 24:41-43: The other gesture to help them overcome unbelief. But it does not suffice! Luke said that they could not believe because their joy was so great that they became dumbfounded. Jesus asks them to give Him something to eat. They offer Him some fish and He eats before them, to help them to overcome doubt.

- Luke 24:44-47: A key to understanding the new significance of the Scripture. One of the greatest difficulties of the first Christians was that of accepting the Crucified as the promised Messiah, because the Law taught that a crucified person was a "person cursed by God" (Deut 21:22-23). For this reason, it was important to know that Scripture had already announced that "Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead on the third day and that in His name, conversion and forgiveness of sins would be preached to all peoples." Jesus shows them what had already been written in the Law of Moses, in the prophets and in the psalms. Jesus risen from the dead, alive in their midst, becomes the key to opening to them the total significance of Sacred Scripture.

- Luke 24:48: You are witnesses of this. In this last order is enclosed the whole mission of the Christian communities: to be witnesses to the Resurrection, in such a way that

the love of God which accepts us and forgives us will be manifested, and which wants us to live in community as sons and daughters, brothers and sisters with one another.

4) Personal questions

- Sometimes unbelief and doubt beset the heart and weaken the certainty that faith gives us concerning the presence of God in our life. Have you ever experienced this? How have you overcome it?
- Our mission is that of being witnesses to the love of God revealed in Jesus. Am I a witness to this love?
- Can I identify those things in my life which cast doubt on my faith? How do I defend against these attacks?

5) Concluding Prayer

What are human beings
that You spare a thought for them,
or the child of Adam that You care for him? (Ps 8:4)

Lectio Divina Friday, April 17, 2020

Easter Time

1) Opening prayer

Our God and Father,
through our risen Lord, Your Son Jesus Christ,
You have given us a message of hope
and a person to live for.
Free our faith from triviality and routine
and fill us with His Spirit of courage,
that we may learn to live
with the insecurities of the change of renewal
ever-demanded by the gospel
and by the needs of the times.
May our Christian living bear witness
to the name of Him by whom we are saved,
Jesus Christ, our risen Lord.

2) Gospel Reading - John 21:1-14

Jesus revealed himself again to his disciples at the Sea of Tiberias. He revealed himself in this way. Together were Simon Peter, Thomas called Didymus, Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, Zebedee's sons, and two others of his disciples. Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We also will come with you." So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. When it was already dawn, Jesus was standing on the shore; but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, "Children, have you caught anything to eat?" They answered him, "No." So he said to them, "Cast the net over the right side of the boat and you will find something." So they cast it, and were not able to pull it in because of the number of fish.

So the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, “It is the Lord.” When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he tucked in his garment, for he was lightly clad, and jumped into the sea. The other disciples came in the boat, for they were not far from shore, only about a hundred yards, dragging the net with the fish. When they climbed out on shore, they saw a charcoal fire with fish on it and bread. Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish you just caught.” So Simon Peter went over and dragged the net ashore full of one hundred fifty-three large fish. Even though there were so many, the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, “Come, have breakfast.” And none of the disciples dared to ask him, “Who are you?” because they realized it was the Lord. Jesus came over and took the bread and gave it to them, and in like manner the fish. This was now the third time Jesus was revealed to his disciples after being raised from the dead.

3) Reflection

- Chapter 21 of the Gospel of Saint John seems like an appendix which was added after the Gospel had already been written. The conclusion of the previous chapter (Jn 20:30-31) makes one suspect that it is an addition. However, whether it is an addition or not, it is the Word of God, which presents to us the beautiful message of the Resurrection on this fifth day of Easter week.
- John 21:1-3: The fisherman of men returns to be a fisherman of fish. Jesus has died and has risen. After three years of life together with Jesus, the disciples returned to Galilee. A group of them find themselves together at the lakeshore. Peter goes back to the past and says: “I am going fishing!” The others answer: “We will come with you!” Thus, Thomas, Nathanael, John and James together with Peter go to the boat to go fishing. They go back to the life of the past as if nothing had happened. But something did happen. Something was taking place! The past did not return! “We have caught nothing!” They return to shore, tired. This had been a night filled with frustration.
- John 21:4-5: The context of the new apparition of Jesus. Jesus was on the shore, but they did not recognize Him. Jesus asks, “Little children, have you anything to eat?” They answer, “No!” In the negative response they realize that the night had been deceiving because they had caught nothing. They had been called to be fishermen of men (Mk 1:17; Lk 5:10), and they go back to be fishermen of fish. But something had changed in their life! The experience of three years with Jesus produces in them an irreversible change. It was no longer possible to return to the past as if nothing had happened, as if nothing had changed.
- John 21:6-8: “Throw the net out to the right of the boat and you will find something.” They did something which perhaps they had never done in their life. Five experienced fishermen obey a carpenter who orders them to do something which is in contrast to their experience. Jesus, that unknown Person, who is on the shore, orders them to throw the net on the right side of the boat. They obey; they throw the net, and behold the unexpected result. The net was full of fish! How was this possible? How to explain this surprise so unexpected, unforeseen! Love makes one discover. The beloved disciple says, “It is the Lord”. This intuition clarifies everything. Peter jumps into the water to get close to Jesus very quickly. The other disciples follow him, pulling the boat, and dragging the net full of fish.
- John 21:9-14: The kindness of Jesus. Coming ashore, they saw a charcoal fire which had been lit by Jesus, where He was roasting fish and bread. He asked them to take some of the fish they had caught, and immediately Peter went to the boat and towed the

net containing one hundred and fifty-three fish. A great number of fish and the net did not break. Jesus calls the multitude, “Come and eat!” He had the kindness to prepare something to eat after a disappointing night during which they had caught nothing: a very simple gesture which reveals something of God’s love for us. “Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father” (Jn 14:9). None of the disciples was bold enough to ask, “Who are you?” because they knew He was the Lord. Recalling the Eucharist, John the Evangelist contemplates: “Jesus stepping forward took the bread and gave it to them.” Thus, he suggests that the Eucharist is the privileged place for the encounter with the Risen Jesus.

4) Personal questions

- Has it ever happened to you that someone told you to throw the net to the right side of your life, to do something contrary to your experience? Did you obey and throw in the net?
- The kindness of Jesus. How is your kindness in the small things of life?
- Do you recognize Jesus only after signs and miracles, or do you see Him in the simple acts of life, such as making a meal?

5) Concluding Prayer

Give thanks to Yahweh for He is good,
for His faithful love endures for ever.
Let those who fear Yahweh say,
“His faithful love endures for ever.” (Ps 118)

Lectio Divina Saturday, April 18, 2020

Easter Time

1) Opening prayer

Our God and Father,
Your Son Jesus lived among us,
flesh of our flesh, blood of our blood.
He died for our sake
and You raised Him back to life.
May we experience His love and His presence
to such an extent
that we can never stop proclaiming
what we have seen and heard,
and that people may give glory to You, our God.
We ask this in the name of Jesus the Lord. Amen.

2) Gospel Reading - Mark 16:9-15

When Jesus had risen, early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had driven seven demons. She went and told his companions who were mourning and weeping. When they heard that he was alive and had been seen by her, they did not believe. After this he appeared in another form to two of them walking along on their way to the country. They returned and told the

others; but they did not believe them either. But later, as the Eleven were at table, he appeared to them and rebuked them for their unbelief and hardness of heart because they had not believed those who saw him after he had been raised. He said to them, “Go into the whole world and proclaim the Gospel to every creature.”

3) Reflection

- Today’s Gospel is part of a broader literary unit (Mk 16:9-20) which presents a list or summary of diverse apparitions of Jesus: (a) Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene, but the disciples do not accept her testimony (Mk 16:9-11); (b) Jesus appears to the disciples, but the others do not accept their testimony (Mk 16:12-13); (c) Jesus appears to the eleven; He criticizes their lack of faith and orders them to announce the Good News to all (Mk 16:14-18); (d) Jesus ascends to heaven and continues to cooperate with the disciples (Mk 16:19-20).

- Besides this list of apparitions in the Gospel of Mark, there are other lists of apparitions which do not always coincide among themselves. For example, the list kept by Paul in the Letter to the Corinthians is very different (1 Cor 15:3-8). This variety shows that at the beginning the Christians were not concerned with proving the Resurrection by means of the apparitions. For them faith in the Resurrection was so evident and alive that there was no need to prove it. A person sunbathing on the shore is not concerned with showing that the sun exists, because she herself, sun burnt, is the evidence of the existence of the sun. The communities, existing in the midst of the immense Empire, were a living proof of the Resurrection. The list of the apparitions began to appear later, in the second generation, in order to refute the criticism of opponents.

- Mark 16:9-11: Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene, but the other disciples do not believe her. Jesus first appears to Mary Magdalene. She goes to announce this to the others. To come into the world, God wanted to depend on the womb of a young girl 15 or 16 years old, called Mary of Nazareth (Lk 1:38). To be recognized alive in our midst, He wants to depend on the announcement of a woman who had been liberated from seven devils, also called Mary, of Magdala! (This is why she was called Mary Magdalene). But the others did not believe her. Mark says that Jesus appeared first to Mary Magdalene. In the list of apparitions, recorded in the letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor 15:3-8), the apparitions of Jesus to the women are not mentioned. The first Christians had difficulty believing in the testimony of women. It is shameful!

- Mark 16:12-13: Jesus appears to the disciples, but the others do not believe them. Without too many details, Mark refers to an apparition of Jesus to two disciples, “while they were on their way into the country.” This is perhaps a reference to the apparition of Jesus to the disciples at Emmaus, narrated by Luke (Lk 24:13-35). Mark insists on saying that “the others did not believe them either”.

- Mark 16:14-15: Jesus criticizes the unbelief and orders them to announce the Good News to all creatures. For this reason, Jesus appears to the eleven and reproaches them because they did not believe the people who had seen Him in His resurrected body. Once again, Mark refers to the resistance of the disciples in refusing to believe the testimony of those who have experienced the Resurrection of Jesus. Why? Probably to teach three things: in the first place, that faith in Jesus passes through the faith in the people who give witness; in the second place, that nobody should be discouraged when doubt or unbelief arises in the heart; in the third place, to refute the claim of those who said that the Christian is naïve and accepts any news uncritically, because the eleven

had great difficulty accepting the truth of the Resurrection!

- Today's Gospel ends with the sending forth: "Go out to the whole world; proclaim the Gospel to all creation!" Jesus confers upon them the mission to announce the Good News to all creatures.

4) Personal questions

- Which of these: Mary Magdalene, the two disciples of Emmaus, or the eleven disciples, had the greatest difficulty believing in the Resurrection? Why? With whom do I identify?
- What can convince people of the presence of Jesus in our midst?

5) Concluding Prayer

May God show kindness and bless us,
and make His face shine on us.
Then the earth will acknowledge Your ways,
and all nations Your power to save. (Ps 67:1-2)

Lectio Divina Sunday, April 19, 2020

*The mission of the disciples and
the witness of Thomas the apostle John 20:19-31*

1. Opening prayer

Father, who on the Lord's day gather Your people to celebrate the One who is the First and the Last, the living One who conquered death, grant us the strength of Your Spirit so that, having broken the chains of evil, calmed our fears and indecisions, we may render the free service of our obedience and love, to reign in glory with Christ.

2. LECTIO

a) A key to the reading:

We are in the so-called "book of the resurrection" where we are told, in a not-so-logical sequence, several matters concerning the risen Christ and the facts that prove it. In the fourth Gospel, these facts take place in the morning (20:1-18) and evening of the first day after the Saturday and eight days later, in the same place and on the same day of the week. We are before an event that is the most important in the history of humanity, an event that challenges us personally. "If Christ has not been raised then our preaching is useless and your believing it is useless... and you are still in your sins" (1Cor 15:14, 17) says Paul the apostle who had not known Jesus before His resurrection, but who zealously preached Him all his life. Jesus is sent by the Father. He also sends us. Our willingness to "go" comes from the depth of the faith we have in the Risen One. Are we prepared to accept His "mandate" and to give our lives for His Kingdom? This passage is not just about the faith of those who have not seen (the witness of Thomas), but also about the mission entrusted to the Church by Christ.

b) A suggested division of the text to facilitate its reading:

John 20:19-20: appearance to the disciples and showing of the wounds

John 20:21-23: gift of the Spirit for the mission

John 20:24-26: special appearance to Thomas eight days later

John 20:27-29: dialogue with Thomas

John 20:30-31: the aim of the Gospel according to John

c) The text:

19 On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." 20 When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. 21 Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent Me, even so I send you." 22 And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

24 Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and place my finger in the mark of the nails, and place my hand in His side, I will not believe."

26 Eight days later, His disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. The doors were shut, but Jesus came and stood among them, and said, "Peace be with you." 27 Then He said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see My hands; and put out your hand, and place it in My side; do not be faithless, but believing." 28 Thomas answered Him, "My Lord and my God!" 29 Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen Me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe."

30 Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.



3. A moment of silence

to allow the Word to enter into our hearts

4. MEDITATIO

a) A few questions to help in our meditation:

Who or what drew my interest and wonder in the reading? Is it possible for someone to profess being Christian and yet not believe in the Resurrection of Jesus? Is it so important to believe in the resurrection? What would be different if we stopped at His teaching and witness of life? What does the gift of the Spirit for the mission mean to

me? How does Jesus' mission in the world continue after the Resurrection? What is the content of the missionary proclamation? What value has Thomas' witness for me? What are, if any, my doubts concerning the faith? How do I meet them and still carry on? Am I able to give reasons for my faith?

b) Comment:

In the evening of that same day, the first day of the week: the disciples are living through an extraordinary day. For the community, at the time of the writing of the fourth Gospel, the day after the Sabbath is already "the Lord's day" (Rev 1:10), Dies Domini (Sunday), and is more important than the Sabbath was in the tradition of the Jews.

The doors were closed: a detail which shows that the body of the risen Jesus, even though recognizable, is not subject to the ordinary laws of human life.

Peace be with you: this is not just a wish, but the actual peace promised to them when they were saddened by His departure (Jn 14:27; 2Thess 3:16; Rom 5:3), the messianic peace, the fulfillment of the promises made by God, freedom from all fear, victory over sin and death, reconciliation with God, fruit of His passion, free gift of God. This peace is repeated three times in this passage as well as in the introduction (20:19) further on (20:26) in the exact same way.

He showed them His hands and His side: Jesus provides evident and tangible proof that he is the one who was crucified. Only John records the detail of the wound in the side caused by the spear of a Roman soldier, whereas Luke mentions the wound of the feet (Lk 24:39). In showing his wounds, Jesus wants to say that the peace he gives comes from the cross (2Tim 2:1-13). They are part of his identity as the risen One (Ap 5:6).

The disciples were filled with joy when they saw the Lord: This is the same joy expressed by the prophet Isaiah when he describes the divine banquet (Is 25:8-9), the eschatological joy foreshadowed in the farewell speech and that no one can take away (Jn 16:22; 20:27). Cfr. also Lk 24:39-40; Mt 28:8; Lk 24:41.

As the Father sent me, so am I sending you: Jesus is the first missionary, "the apostle and high priest of the faith we profess" (Rev 3:1). After the experience of the cross and the resurrection, Jesus' prayer to the Father comes true (Jn 13:20; 17:18; 21:15, 17). This is not a new mission, but the mission of Jesus extended to those who are His disciples, bound to Him like branches are bound to the vine (15:9), so also they are bound to His Church (Mt 28:18-20; Mk 16:15-18; Lk 24:47-49). The eternal Son of God was sent so that "the world might be saved through Him" (Jn 3:17) and the whole of His earthly existence, fully identified with the saving will of the Father, is a constant manifestation of that divine will that all may be saved. He leaves as an inheritance this historical project to the whole Church, especially to ordained ministers within that Church.

He breathed on them: this action recalling the life-giving breath of God on man (Gen 2:7), does not occur anywhere else in the New Testament. It marks the beginning of a new creation.

Receive the Holy Spirit: after Jesus was glorified, the Holy Spirit was bestowed (Jn 7:39). Here the Spirit is transmitted for a special mission, whereas at Pentecost (Acts 2) the Holy Spirit comes down on the whole people of God.

For those whose sins you forgive they are forgiven; for those whose sins you retain, they are retained: we find the power to forgive or not forgive sins also in Matthew in a more juridical form (Mt 16:19; 18:18). According to the Scribes and Pharisees (Mk 2:7), and according to tradition (Isa 43:25), God has the power to forgive sins. Jesus gives this power (Lk 5:24) and passes it on to his Church. In our meditation, it is better not to dwell on this text's theological development in church tradition and the consequent theological controversies. In the fourth Gospel the expression may be taken in a wide sense. Here it is a matter of the power of forgiving sins in the Church as salvation community and those especially endowed with this power are those who share in the apostolic charism by succession and mission. In this general power is included the power to forgive sins also after baptism, what we call "the sacrament of reconciliation" expressed in various forms throughout the history of the Church.

Thomas, called the Twin, who was one of the Twelve: Thomas is one of the main characters of the fourth Gospel and his doubting character, easily discouraged, is emphasized (11:16; 14:5). "One of the twelve" is by now a stereotyped expression (Jn 6:71), because in fact they were only eleven. "Didymus" means "the Twin", and we could be his "twins" through our difficulty in believing in Jesus, Son of God who died and rose again.

We have seen the Lord! When Andrew, John and Philip had found the Messiah, they had already run to announce the news to others (Jn 1:41-45). Now there is the official proclamation by eye-witnesses (Jn 20:18).

Unless I see the holes that the nails made in His hands and can put my finger into the holes they made, and unless I can put my hand into His side, I refuse to believe: Thomas cannot believe the eye-witnesses. He wants to experience the event himself. The fourth Gospel is aware of the difficulty that some may have in believing in the Resurrection (Lk 24; 34-40; Mk 16:11; 1Cor 15:5-8), especially those who have not seen the risen One. Thomas is their (and our) interpreter. He is willing to believe, but he wants to resolve personally any doubt, for fear of being wrong. Jesus does not see in Thomas an indifferent sceptic, but a man in search of truth and satisfies him fully. This is, however, an occasion to express an appreciation of future believers (verse 29).

Put your finger here, look, here are My hands. Give Me your hand; put it into My side. Doubt no longer but believe! Jesus repeats the words of Thomas and enters into a dialogue with him. He understands Thomas' doubts and wishes to help him. Jesus knows that Thomas loves Him and therefore has compassion for him because Thomas does not yet enjoy the peace that comes from faith. Jesus helps him to grow in faith. In order to enter deeper into this theme, see the parallels in: 1Jn 1-2; Ps 78:38; 103:13-14; Rom 5:20; 1Tim 1:14-16.

My Lord and my God! This is a profession of faith in the risen One and in his divinity as is also proclaimed in the beginning of John's Gospel (1:1). In the Old Testament "Lord" and "God" correspond respectively to "Yahweh" and "Elohim" (Ps 35:23-24;

Rev 4:11). It is the fullest and most direct paschal profession of faith in the divinity of Jesus. In Jewish circles these terms had greater value because they applied to Jesus texts concerning God. Jesus does not correct the words of Thomas as He corrected the words of the Jews who accused Him of wanting to be “equal to God” (Jn 5:18ff) thus approving the acknowledgement of His divinity.

You believe because you can see Me. Happy are those who have not seen and yet believe! Jesus cannot stand those who look for signs and miracles in order to believe (Jn 4:48) and He seems to take Thomas to task. Here we must remember another passage concerning a more authentic faith, a “way of perfection” towards a faith to which we must aspire without the demands of Thomas, a faith received as gift and as an act of trust, like the exemplary faith of our ancestors (Rev 11) and of Mary (Lk 1:45). We, who are two thousand years after the coming of Jesus, are told that, although we have not seen Him, yet we can love Him and believing in Him we can exult with “an indescribable and glorious joy” (1Pet 1:8).

These (signs) are recorded so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing this you may have life through His name. The fourth Gospel, like the other Gospels, does not mean to write a complete biography of Jesus, but only to show that Jesus was the Christ, the awaited Messiah, the Liberator, and that He was the Son of God. Believing in Him means that we possess eternal life. If Jesus is not God, then our faith is in vain!

5. ORATIO

Psalm 118 (117)

O give thanks to the Lord, for He is good;
His steadfast love endures for ever!

Let Israel say,

"His steadfast love endures for ever."

Let the house of Aaron say,

"His steadfast love endures for ever."

Let those who fear the LORD say,

"His steadfast love endures for ever."

I was pushed hard, so that I was falling,
but the Lord helped me.

The Lord is my strength and my song;
He has become my salvation.

Hark, glad songs of victory in the tents of the righteous.

The stone which the builders rejected
has become the head of the corner.

This is the Lord's doing;
it is marvelous in our eyes.

This is the day which the Lord has made;
let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Save us, we beseech Thee, O Lord! O Lord,
we beseech Thee, give us success!

6. CONTEMPLATIO

Closing prayer

I thank You Jesus, my Lord and my God, that You have loved me and called me, made me worthy to be Your disciple, that You have given me the Spirit, the One sent to proclaim and witness to Your resurrection, to the mercy of the Father, to salvation and pardon for all men and women in the world. You truly are the way, the truth and the life, the dawn without a setting, the sun of justice and peace. Grant that I may dwell in Your love, bound to You like a branch to its vine. Grant me Your peace so that I may overcome my weaknesses, face my doubts and respond to Your call and live fully the mission You entrusted to me, praising You forever, You who live and reign forever and ever. Amen.

Lectio Divina Monday, April 20, 2020

Easter Time

1) Opening prayer

Lord God, our Father,
You are not far away from any of us,
for in You we live and move and exist
and You live in us
through Your Holy Spirit.
Be indeed with us, Lord,
send us Your Holy Spirit of truth
and through Him deepen our understanding
of the life and message of Your Son,
that we may accept the full truth
and live by it consistently.
We ask You this through Christ our Lord.

2) Gospel Reading - John 3:1-8

There was one of the Pharisees called Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews, who came to Jesus by night and said, 'Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one could perform the signs that You do unless God were with Him.'

Jesus answered, 'In all truth I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.' Nicodemus said, 'How can anyone who is already old be born? Is it possible to go back into the womb again and be born?'

Jesus replied, 'In all truth I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born through water and the Spirit; what is born of human nature is human; what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be surprised when I say, "You must be born from above." The wind blows where it pleases; you can hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.'

3) Reflection

- The Gospel today presents part of Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus. Nicodemus appears several times in the Gospel of John:

(Jn 3:1-13; 7:50-52; 19:39). He was a person who held a certain social position. He was a leader among the Jews and formed part of the supreme tribunal, called the Sanhedrin. In the Gospel of John, he represents the group of Jews who were pious and sincere, but who did not understand everything which Jesus said and did. Nicodemus had heard about the signs and the wonderful things that Jesus did, and he was struck, amazed. He wanted to speak with Jesus in order to understand better. He was a cultured person, who thought he believed the things of God. He expected the Messiah with the Book of the Law in his hand to verify if the novelty announced by Jesus would arrive. Jesus makes Nicodemus understand that the only way to understand the things of God is to be born again! Today this same thing happens. Some, like Nicodemus, accept as new only what agrees with their ideas. What does not agree with their ideas is rejected and considered contrary to tradition. Others allow themselves to be surprised from facts and are not afraid to say, "I have been born anew!"

- John 3:1: A man called Nicodemus. Shortly before Jesus' encounter with Nicodemus, the Evangelist was speaking of the imperfect faith of certain persons who were interested only in the miracles of Jesus (Jn 2:23-25). Nicodemus was one of these people. He had good will, but his faith was still imperfect. The conversation with Jesus helped him to perceive that he had to advance in order to be able to deepen his faith in Jesus and in God.

- John 3:2: 1st question of Nicodemus: the tension between what is old and what is new. Nicodemus was a Pharisee, a prominent person among the Jews and with good common sense. He went to meet Jesus at night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one could perform the signs that You do unless God were with him". Nicodemus gives an opinion of Jesus according to arguments which he, Nicodemus himself, has within himself. This is already important, but it is not enough to know Jesus. The signs which Jesus works can arouse a person and awake some interest in the person. They can generate curiosity, but they do not generate greater faith. They do not make one see the Kingdom of God present in Jesus. For this reason it is necessary to advance, to take one more step. What is this step?

- John 3:3: Jesus' response: "You must be born again!" In order that Nicodemus can see the Kingdom present in Jesus, he should be born again, from above. Anyone who tries to understand Jesus only from his arguments alone does not succeed in understanding Him. Jesus is much greater. If Nicodemus remains only with the catechism of the past in his hand, he will not manage to understand Jesus. He should open his hand completely. He should set aside his own certainties and his security and abandon himself totally. He should make a choice between, on the one hand, the security which comes from organized religion with its laws and traditions and, on the other hand, launch himself into the adventure of the Spirit which Jesus proposes to him.

- John 3:4: 2nd question of Nicodemus: How can anyone who is already old be born again? Nicodemus does not give in and returns with the same question with a certain irony: "How can a man be born when he is old? Is it possible to go back into the womb again and be born again?" Nicodemus takes Jesus' words literally and, because of this, he understands nothing. He should have realized that the words of Jesus had a symbolic sense.

- John 3:5-8: Jesus' answer: To be born from above, to be born from the Spirit. Jesus explains what it means to be born from above or to be born again. It is "To be born from water and the Spirit". Here we have a very clear reference to Baptism. Through the conversation of Jesus with Nicodemus, the Evangelist invites us to review our Baptism. He gives the following words: "What is born of human nature is human, what is born of the Spirit is Spirit". Flesh means that which is born only from our ideas. What is born from us is within our reach. To be born of the Spirit is another thing! The Spirit is like the wind. "The wind blows where it pleases; you can hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going; so it is with anyone who is born of the Spirit". The wind has within itself a direction, a route. We perceive the direction of the wind, for example, the North wind or the wind coming from the South, but we do not know, nor can we control the cause why the wind moves in this or that direction. This is the way the Spirit is. "No one is the master of the Spirit" (Eccl 8: 8). What characterizes the wind best, the Spirit, is liberty. The wind, the Spirit, is free, He cannot be controlled. He acts on others and nobody can act on him. His origin is a mystery. The boat must first find the route of the wind. Then it has to place the sails according to that route. That is what Nicodemus should do and what we should all do.

- A key to understanding better the words of Jesus on the Holy Spirit. The Hebrew language uses the same word to say wind and spirit. As we have said the wind has within it a route, a direction: the North wind, the wind from the South. The Spirit of God has a route, a project, which already manifested itself in creation. The Spirit was present in creation under the form of a bird which flew over the waters of the chaos (Gen 1: 2). Year after year, He renews the face of the earth and sets nature through the sequence of the seasons (Ps 104:30; 147:18). The same is also present in history. He makes the Red Sea move back (Ex 14: 21) and He gives quails to the people to eat (Num 11:31). He accompanies Moses and, beginning with him, He distributes the leaders of the people (Num 11:24-25). He took the leaders and took them to carry out liberating actions: Othniel (Judg 3:10), Gideon (Judg 6:34), Jephthah (Judg 11:29), Samson (Judg 13: 25; 14: 6, 19; 15:14), Saul (1Sam 11:6), and Deborah, the prophetess (Judg 4: 4). He is present in the group of the prophets and acts in them with the force which is contagious (1Sam 10: 5-6, 10). His action in the prophets produces envy in the others. But Moses reacts, "If only all Yahweh's people were prophets, and Yahweh had given them His spirit!" (Num 11:29).

- All along the centuries the hope grew that the Spirit of God would have oriented the Messiah in the realization of God's project (Isa 11:1-9) and it would have descended upon all the people of God (Ezek 36: 27; 39: 29; Isa 32:15; 44:3). The great promise of the Spirit appears in various ways in the prophets of the exile: the vision of the dry bones, risen by the force of the Spirit of God (Ezek 37:1-14); the effusion of the Spirit of God on all the people (Joel 3:1-5); the vision of the Messiah-Servant who will be anointed by the Spirit to establish the right on earth and announce the Good News to the poor (Isa 42:1; 44:1-3; 61:1-3). They perceive a future, in which people, always more and more, are reborn thanks to the effusion of the Spirit (Ezek 36: 26-27; Ps 51: 12; cf. Isa 32:15-20).

- The Gospel of John uses many images and symbols to signify the action of the Spirit. Just like in creation (Gen 1:1), in the same way the Spirit descended upon Jesus "like a dove, coming from heaven" (Jn 1:32). It is the beginning of the new creation! Jesus

pronounces the words of God and communicates to us His Spirit (Jn 3:34). His words are spirit and life (Jn 6:63). When Jesus announces that he is going to the Father, He says that He will send another Consoler, another defender, so that He can remain with us. He is the Holy Spirit (Jn 14:16-17). Through His Passion, death and resurrection, Jesus obtains for us the gift of the Holy Spirit. Through Baptism all of us receive this same Spirit of Jesus (Jn 1:33). When He appears to the Apostles, He breathes on them and says, "Receive the Holy Spirit!" (Jn 20:22). The Spirit is like the water which springs up from persons who believe in Jesus (Jn 7: 37-39; 4:14). The first effect of the action of the Spirit in us is reconciliation: "If you forgive anyone's sins they are forgiven; if you retain anyone's sins they are retained" (Jn 20:23). The Spirit is given to us in order that we may remember and understand the full meaning of the words of Jesus (Jn 14: 26; 16: 12-13). Animated by the Spirit of Jesus we can adore God anywhere (Jn 4: 23-24). Here is realized the liberty of the Spirit of whom Saint Paul speaks: "Where the Spirit is, there is liberty" (2 Cor 3:17).

4) Personal questions

- How do you react to new things which present themselves; like Nicodemus or do you accept God's surprises?
- Jesus compares the action of the Holy Spirit to the wind (Jn 3:8). What does this comparison reveal to me about the action of the Spirit of God in my life? Have you already had some experience which has given you the impression of being born again?

5) Concluding prayer

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

Lectio Divina Tuesday, April 21, 2020

Easter Time

1) Opening prayer

All praise and thanks be to You,
Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.
You have given us Your risen Son
to be alive in our communities.
Make us see Him with eyes of faith,
that He may unite us, heart and soul.
May His dynamic presence among us
move us to become with Him,
each other's bread of life,
that no one among us may hunger
for food or help when in need.
We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

2) Gospel Reading - John 3:7b-15

Jesus said to Nicodemus: "You must be born from above.' The wind blows where it wills, and you can hear the sound it makes, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes; so it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." Nicodemus answered and said to him, 'How can this happen?' Jesus answered and said to him, "You are the teacher of Israel and you do not understand this? Amen, amen, I say to you, we speak of what we know and we testify to what we have seen, but you people do not accept our testimony. If I tell you about earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? No one has gone up to heaven except the one who has come down from heaven, the Son of Man. And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life."

3) Reflection

- Today's Gospel speaks about the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus. Nicodemus had heard people speak about the things Jesus did, and he was struck, surprised. He wishes to speak with Jesus in order to be able to understand better. He thought he knew the things of God. He lived with the booklet of the past in his hand to see if this agreed with the newness announced by Jesus. In the conversation, Jesus says that the only way in which Nicodemus could understand the things of God was to be born again! Sometimes we are like Nicodemus: we only accept as something new what is in agreement with our old ideas. Other times, we allow ourselves to be surprised by facts and we are not afraid to say, "I am born anew!"
- When the Evangelists recall the last words of Jesus, they have in mind the problems of the communities for which they write. Nicodemus' questions to Jesus are a reflection of the questions of the communities of Asia Minor at the end of the first century. For this reason, Jesus' answers to Nicodemus were, at the same time, a response to the problems of those communities. At that time, the Christians followed the catechesis in this way. Most probably, the account of the conversation of Jesus with Nicodemus formed part of the baptismal catechesis, because He says that the people have to be reborn of water and the Spirit (Jn 3:6).
- John 3:7b-8: Born from above, born anew, again, and born of the Spirit. In Greek, the same word means anew, again and from above. Jesus had said, "No one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit" (Jn 3:5). And He adds, "What is born of human nature, is human (flesh); what is born of the Spirit is Spirit" (Jn 3:6). Here "flesh" means that which is born only from our own ideas. What is born from us has our own mark, our own measure. To be born of the Spirit is another thing! And Jesus once again reaffirms what He had said before: "One has to be born from above (born again)." That is, one must be reborn of the Spirit who comes from above. And He explains that the Spirit is like the wind. Both in Hebrew and in Greek, the same word is used to say spirit and wind. Jesus says, "The wind blows where it pleases; you can hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." The wind has within it a direction. We are aware of the direction of the wind, for example, the wind of the North and the wind of the South, but we do not know nor do we control the cause why the wind moves in one direction or another. The Spirit is like this. "No one is the master of the Spirit" (Eccl

8:8). That which best characterizes the wind, the Spirit, is liberty. The wind, the Spirit, is free; it cannot be controlled. It acts on others, and nobody can act on it. Its origin is the mystery; its destiny is the mystery. The fisherman has, in the first place, to discover the direction of the wind. Then he should place the sails according to that direction. This is what Nicodemus should do and what all of us should do.

- John 3:9: Question of Nicodemus: How is that possible? Jesus does nothing more than summarize what the Old Testament taught concerning the action of the Spirit, of the holy wind, in the life of the People of God and which Nicodemus, Teacher and Doctor, should know. And just the same, Nicodemus is frightened in hearing Jesus' response and acts as if he was ignorant: "How is that possible?"

- John 3:10-15: Jesus' answer: Faith comes from witness and not from miracle. Jesus changes the question: "You are the Teacher of Israel and you do not know these things?" For Jesus, if people believe only when things are according to their own arguments and ideas, then faith is not perfect. Faith is perfect when it is the faith of one who believes because of the witness. He leaves aside his own arguments and gives himself, because he believes in the one giving witness.

4) Personal Questions

- Have you had some experience in which you have had the impression of being born again? What did it consist of?

- Jesus compares the action of the Holy Spirit with the wind. What does this comparison of the action of the Spirit of God reveal in our life? Have you already set the sails of your life in sync with the wind of the Spirit?

- The action of the Holy Spirit, like the wind, is often not like a hurricane, but rather like a small voice (1Kgs 19:11) – a whisper of the wind. Am I attentive enough to hear when the Holy Spirit speaks to me so softly?

5) Concluding Prayer

Yahweh is near to the broken-hearted;
He helps those whose spirit is crushed.
Though hardships without number beset the upright,
Yahweh brings rescue from them all. (Ps 34:18-19)

Lectio Divina Wednesday, April 22, 2020

Easter Time

1) Opening prayer

Lord our God,
You loved the world - that is us - so much
that You gave us Your only Son
to save us from ourselves
and to give us eternal life. Do not condemn us, Lord,
do not leave us to ourselves
and to our little schemes
but give us Your Son now to stay with us

and to make love and justice and peace
ever new realities among us,
Your people reborn in Your Son,
Jesus Christ our Lord.

2) Gospel Reading - John 3:16-21

God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him will not be condemned, but whoever does not believe has already been condemned, because he has not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God. And this is the verdict, that the light came into the world, but people preferred darkness to light, because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come toward the light, so that his works might not be exposed. But whoever lives the truth comes to the light, so that his works may be clearly seen as done in God.

3) Reflection

- John's Gospel is like a fabric or cloth made of three different, but similar, threads. The three of them are so well combined with one another that, sometimes, it is not possible to understand when one goes from one thread to the other. (a) The first thread is the facts and words of Jesus during the thirty years, preserved by the eye witnesses who kept the things which Jesus did and taught. (b) The second thread is the facts of the life of the community. Because of their faith in Jesus and convinced of His presence among them, the communities enlightened their path with the words and the gestures of Jesus. This has some impact on the description of the facts. For example, the conflict of the communities with the Pharisees at the end of the first century marks the way of describing the conflicts of Jesus with the Pharisees. (c) The comments made by the Evangelist are the third thread. In some passages it is difficult to perceive when Jesus ceases to speak and the Evangelist begins to weave his own comments. The text of today's Gospel, for example, is a beautiful and profound reflection of the Evangelist on the action of Jesus. The people can hardly notice the difference between when Jesus speaks and when the Evangelist does. In any case, both of them are Word of God.
- John 3:16: God loved the world. The word world is one of those words used more frequently in the Gospel of John: 78 times! It has several meanings. In the first place world may signify the earth, the space inhabited by human beings (Jn 11:9; 21:25) or also the created universe (Jn 17:5, 24) World can also mean the people who inhabit this earth, all of humanity (Jn 1:9; 3:16; 4:42; 6:14; 8:12). It can also mean a large group of people, as when we speak of "the whole world" (Jn 12:19; 14:27). Here, in our text the word world also has the sense of humanity, all human beings. God so loves humanity that He gave His only Son. The one who accepts that God reaches down to us in Jesus has already passed through death and has eternal life.
- John 3:17-19: The true sense of judgment. The image of God which appears in the three verses is that of a Father full of tenderness and not of a severe judgment. God sends His Son not to judge and condemn the world, but in order that the world may be saved through Him. The one who believes in Jesus and accepts Him as the revelation of

God is not judged, because he is already accepted by God. And the one who does not believe in Jesus has already been judged. He excludes himself. And the Evangelist repeats what he had already said in the Prologue: many people do not want to accept Jesus, because His light reveals the evil which exists in them (cf. Jn 1:5, 10-11).

- John 3:20-21: To practice truth: In every human being, there is a divine seed, a trait of the Creator. Jesus, the revelation of the Father, is a response to this deepest desire of the human being. The one who wants to be faithful to what he has deepest in him accepts Jesus. It is difficult to find a broader ecumenical vision than the one expressed in these three verses in the Gospel of John.

- To complete the significance of the word world in the Fourth Gospel. Other times the word world means that part of humanity opposed to Jesus and to His message. There the word world assumes the meaning of “enemies” or “opponents” (Jn 7:4,7; 8:23, 26; 9:39; 12:25). This world which is contrary to the practice of the liberty of Jesus, is directed by the enemy, or Satan, also called the “prince of this world” (Jn 14:30; 16:11). It represents the Roman Empire and, at the same time, also those Jews responsible for driving out the followers of Jesus from the synagogue. This world persecutes and kills the communities, causing tribulations for the faithful (Jn 16:33). Jesus will liberate them, conquering the prince of this world (Jn 12:31). Therefore, world means a situation of injustice, of oppression, which generates hatred and persecution against the communities of the beloved disciple. The persecutors are those people who have the power, the leaders, both of the Empire and of the synagogue. Lastly, world means all those who practice injustice using the name of God (Jn 16:2). The hope which the Gospel gives to the persecuted communities is that Jesus is stronger than the world. This is why He says: “In the world you will have hardship, but be courageous, I have conquered the world!” (Jn 16:33)

4) Personal questions

- God so loved the world that He gave His only Son. Has this truth penetrated the depth of your heart? Can we imagine sacrificing someone we love for a cause?
- The most ecumenical truth that exists is the life which God has given us and for which He has given His only Son. How do I live ecumenism in my daily life?
- It is clear at the end of this passage that “belief in His Son” does not just mean verbal acknowledgement. Believing also means believing the way of life He points us to by following every instruction and motivation He shares with us. Do we seek to know the wants, motivations, and actions He shares with us to live, and do we fulfill them?

5) Concluding Prayer

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

Lectio Divina Thursday, April 23, 2020

Season of Easter

1) Opening prayer

Lord our God,
Your Son Jesus Christ came from You
and bore witness to the things
He had heard and seen.
He could not but bear witness to You.
Give us the Spirit of Your Son, we pray You,
to speak Your word and to live it,
that we may show Christ, Your living Word,
to those who have not seen Him.
We ask You this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

2) Gospel Reading - John 3:31-36

The one who comes from above is above all. The one who is of the earth is earthly and speaks of earthly things. But the one who comes from heaven is above all. He testifies to what he has seen and heard, but no one accepts his testimony. Whoever does accept his testimony certifies that God is trustworthy. For the one whom God sent speaks the words of God. He does not ration his gift of the Spirit. The Father loves the Son and has given everything over to him. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever disobeys the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God remains upon him.

3) Reflection

- During the month of January we meditated on John 3:22-30, which shows us the last witness of John the Baptist concerning Jesus. It was a response given by him to his disciples, in which he reaffirms that he, John, is not the Messiah, but rather his precursor (Jn 3:28). On that occasion, John utters that beautiful phrase which summarizes his witness: “It is necessary that He grow greater and I grow smaller!” This phrase is the guide for all those who want to follow Jesus.
- The verses of today’s Gospel are again a comment of the Evangelist in order to help the communities to better understand the importance of the things that Jesus did and taught. Here, we have another indication of those three threads of which we spoke before.
- John 3:31-33: A refrain which is always repeated. Throughout the Gospel of John, there often appears conflict between Jesus and the Jews who challenge the words of Jesus. Jesus speaks of what He hears from the Father. He is total transparency. His enemies, not opening themselves to God and because they cling to their own ideas here on earth, are not capable of understanding the deep significance of the things that Jesus lives, does and says. Ultimately, this is the evil one which pushes the Jews to arrest and condemn Jesus.

• John 3:34: Jesus gives us the Spirit without reserve. John's Gospel uses many images and symbols to signify the action of the Spirit. As in Creation (Gen 1:1), in the same way the Spirit descends on Jesus "like a dove, come from Heaven" (Jn 1:32). It is the beginning of the new creation! Jesus repeats the words of God and communicates the Spirit to us without reserve (Jn 3:34). His words are Spirit and life (Jn 6:63). When Jesus is about to leave this earth, He says that He will send another Advocate, another defender, to be with us forever (Jn 14:16-17). By his Passion, Death and Resurrection, Jesus obtains for us the gift of the Spirit. Through baptism all of us have received this same Spirit of Jesus (Jn 1:33). When He appeared to the apostles, He breathed on them and said: "Receive the Holy Spirit!" (Jn 20:22). The Spirit is like the water which springs from the people who believe in Jesus (Jn 7:37-39; 4:14). The first effect of the action of the Spirit in us is reconciliation: "If you forgive anyone's sins they will be forgiven; if you retain anyone's sins, they are retained!" (Jn 20:23). The Spirit is given to us to recall and understand the full significance of the words of Jesus (Jn 14:26; 16:12-13). Animated by the Spirit of Jesus we can adore God in any place (Jn 4:23-24). Here is fulfilled the liberty of the Spirit of which Saint Paul speaks: "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (2 Cor 3:17).

• John 3:35-36: The Father loves the Son. He reaffirms the identity between the Father and Jesus. The Father loves the Son and places all things in His hand. Saint Paul will say that the fullness of divinity dwells in Jesus (Col 1:19; 2:9). This is why the one who accepts Jesus and believes in Jesus has eternal life, because God is life. The one who does not accept and believe in Jesus, places himself outside.

4) Personal questions

- Jesus communicates the Spirit to us, without reserve. Have you had any experience of this Spirit in your life?
- He who believes in Jesus has eternal life. What does it mean to believe? If one proclaims someone is a king, but does not follow this king's commands, is there really belief there is a king? Using this parallel, what does it really mean to believe?

5) Concluding Prayer

Proclaim with me the greatness of Yahweh;
let us acclaim His name together.
Taste and see that Yahweh is good.
How blessed are those who take refuge in Him. (Ps 34:3, 8)

Lectio Divina Friday, April 24, 2020

Easter Time

1) Opening prayer

Lord our God,
your Son Jesus fed
those who followed Him in the desert

and they received as much as they wanted. May we know and be convinced that He can fill our own emptiness not just with gifts that fill our need of the moment but with Himself, and may we accept Him eagerly, for He is our Lord forever. Amen.

2) Gospel Reading - John 6:1-15

Jesus went across the Sea of Galilee. A large crowd followed him, because they saw the signs he was performing on the sick. Jesus went up on the mountain, and there he sat down with his disciples. The Jewish feast of Passover was near. When Jesus raised his eyes and saw that a large crowd was coming to him, he said to Philip, "Where can we buy enough food for them to eat?" He said this to test him, because he himself knew what he was going to do. Philip answered him, "Two hundred days' wages worth of food would not be enough for each of them to have a little." One of his disciples, Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter, said to him, "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish; but what good are these for so many?" Jesus said, "Have the people recline." Now there was a great deal of grass in that place. So the men reclined, about five thousand in number. Then Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed them to those who were reclining, and also as much of the fish as they wanted. When they had had their fill, he said to his disciples, "Gather the fragments left over, so that nothing will be wasted." So they collected them, and filled twelve wicker baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves that had been more than they could eat. When the people saw the sign he had done, they said, "This is truly the Prophet, the one who is to come into the world." Since Jesus knew that they were going to come and carry him off to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain alone.

3) Reflection

- The reading of John today places before us two signs or miracles: the multiplication of the loaves (Jn 6:1-15) and walking on the water (Jn 6:16-21). Then the long discourse on the bread of life is mentioned (Jn 6:22-71). John places this fact close to the feast of the Passover (Jn 6:4). The central issue is the confrontation between the old Passover of the Exodus and the new Passover which takes place in Jesus. The discourse on the bread of life will explain the new Passover which takes place in Jesus.
- John 6:1-4: The situation. In the ancient Passover, the multitude crossed the Red Sea. In the new Passover, Jesus crosses the Sea of Galilee. A great crowd follows Moses. A great crowd follows Jesus in this new exodus. In the first exodus, Moses goes up to the mountain. Jesus, the new Moses, also goes up to the mountain. The crowds follow Moses who presents great signs. The crowds follow Jesus because they have seen the signs that He worked on behalf of the sick.
- John 6:5-7: Jesus and Philip. Seeing the multitude, Jesus confronts the disciples with the hunger of the people and asks Philip, "Where can we buy some bread for these people to eat?" In the first exodus, Moses obtained food for the hungry people. Jesus, the new Moses, will Himself provide the same thing. But Philip, instead of looking at

the situation in the light of the Scripture, looked at it according to the system and replies, “Two hundred denarii would not buy enough!” One denarius was the minimum salary for one day. Philip is aware of the problem and recognizes his inability to solve it. He complains, but presents no solution.

- John 6:8-9: Andrew and the boy. Andrew, instead of complaining, seeks a solution. He finds a boy who has five loaves of bread and two fish. Five barley loaves and two fish were the daily ration of food for the poor. The boy hands over his daily ration of food! He could have said, “Five loaves of bread and two fish, what is this for all these people? It will serve nothing! Let us divide all this among ourselves, between two or three people,” but instead, he has the courage to give the five loaves of bread and the two fish to feed 5000 people (Jn 6:10) One who does this is either a fool or has much faith, believing that out of love for Jesus, all are ready to share their food as the boy did!
- John 6:10-11: The multiplication. Jesus asks the people to sit down on the ground. Then He multiplies the food, the ration of the poor. The text says, “Then Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed them to those who were sitting there; He then did the same with the fish, distributing as much as they wanted.” With this phrase, written in the year 100, John recalls the action of the Last Supper (I Cor 11:23-24). The Eucharist, when it is celebrated as it should be, will lead people to share as it impelled the boy to give all his ration of food to be shared.
- John 6:12-13: The twelve baskets of what was left over. Number twelve connotes the totality of the people with their twelve tribes. John does not say whether fish were also left over. He is interested in recalling the bread as a symbol of the Eucharist. The Gospel of John does not have the description of the Last Supper, but describes the multiplication of the loaves, symbol of what would happen in the communities through the celebration of the Eucharistic Supper. If among the Christian people there was a true and proper sharing, there would be abundant food and twelve baskets would be left over for many other people!
- John 6:14-15: They want to make Him king. The people interpret Jesus’ gesture, saying, “This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world!” The people’s intuition is correct. Jesus in fact, is the new Moses, the Messiah, the one whom the people were expecting (Deut 18:15-19). But this intuition had been corrupted by the ideology of the time which wanted a great king who would be strong and a dominator. This is why, seeing the sign, the people proclaim Jesus the Messiah and ask to make him King! Jesus realizes what could happen, and He withdraws and goes to the mountain alone. He does not accept this way of being Messiah and waits for the opportune moment to help the people to advance a step farther.

4) Personal questions

- With regard to the problem of hunger in the world, do you act as Philip, as Andrew or like the boy?
- The people wanted a Messiah who would be a strong and powerful king. Do we want a powerful Messiah in our life too, to take away all of our problems? Or do we submit as He did and accept what God has given us and follow rather than conquer?

5) Concluding Prayer

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

Lectio Divina Saturday, April 25, 2020

Easter Time

1) Opening prayer

Lord our God,
there is much in us that obscures Your word
and keeps us from being truly Your Church. We pray You today:
Call us, as once You called Mark,
to speak and live Your word.
Inspire us through Your Spirit
and teach us to live in the hope
that Your kingdom will come
and remain among us
through Jesus Christ, our Lord,
now and for ever.

2) Gospel Reading - Mark 16:15-20

Jesus appeared to the Eleven and said to them: "Go into the whole world and proclaim the Gospel to every creature. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved; whoever does not believe will be condemned. These signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will drive out demons, they will speak new languages. They will pick up serpents with their hands, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not harm them. They will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover." Then the Lord Jesus, after he spoke to them, was taken up into heaven and took his seat at the right hand of God. But they went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the word through accompanying signs.

3) Reflection

- Today's Gospel forms part of the appendix of the Gospel of Mark (Mk 16:9-20) which presents a list of some apparitions of Jesus: to Magdalene (Mk 16:9-11), to the two disciples who were walking out in the country (Mk 16:12-13) and to the twelve apostles (Mk 16:14-18). This last apparition, together with the description of the Ascension into Heaven (Mk 16:19-20), forms the Gospel for today.
- Mark 16:14: The signs which accompany the announcement of the Good News. Jesus appears to the eleven disciples and reproaches them for not believing the persons who had seen Him resurrected. They did not believe Mary Magdalene (Mk 16:11), nor the two disciples on the road out in the country (Mk 16:13). Several times, Mark refers to

the resistance of the disciples to believing the witness of those who experienced the resurrection of Jesus. Why does Mark insist so much on the lack of faith of the disciples? Probably to teach two things: First, that faith in Jesus goes through faith in persons who give witness. Second, that no one should be discouraged when there is doubt in the heart. Even the eleven disciples doubted!

- Mark 16:15-18: The mission to announce the Good News to the whole world. After having criticized the lack of faith of the disciples, Jesus confers their mission to them: “Go out to the whole world, proclaim the Gospel to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved; whoever does not believe will be condemned”. To those who had the courage to believe in the Good News and who are baptized, Jesus promises the following signs: they will cast out devils, they will speak new languages, they will pick up snakes in their hands and be unharmed if they drink deadly poison, and they will lay their hands on the sick who will recover. This happens even today. To cast out devils is to fight against the force of evil which destroys life. The life of many people improves because they entered into the community and have begun to live the Good News of the presence of God in their life.

- to speak new languages: it means to begin to communicate with others in a new way. Sometimes we meet a person whom we have never seen before, and we care deeply for them and their situation, even though we don't know them well. This happens because we speak the same language, the language of love.

- deadly poison will not harm them: there are many things that poison life together in community. There is gossip which destroys the relationship between persons. The one who lives in the presence of God does not participate in these things and is able to not be disturbed by this terrible poison.

- they cure the sick. Wherever there is a clear and lively knowledge of God's presence, there is also a special care given to the excluded and marginalized, especially the sick. What can help cure is that the person feels accepted and loved.

- Mark 16:19-20: Through the community, Jesus continues His mission. Jesus Himself, who lives in Palestine and accepts the poor of His time, revealing the love of the Father to them, continues to be alive in our midst in our community. Through us, He wants to continue His mission to reveal the Good News of God's love to the poor. Even up to this time the resurrection takes place, and it impels us to sing: “Who will separate us from the love of Christ, who will separate us?” No power of this world is capable of neutralizing the force that comes from faith in the Resurrection (Rm 8:35-39). A community which wants to be a witness of the Resurrection should be a sign of life and should struggle against the forces of death in such a way that the world may be a favorable place for life. Above all, in parts of the world such as Latin America and the Middle East, where the life of people is in danger because of the system of death which has become common there, the communities should be a living proof of the hope which overcomes the world without fear of being happy!

4) Personal questions

- How do these signs of God's presence take place in my life?
- What are the signs of the presence of Jesus in our midst that convince people the most today?
- Do I proclaim the Gospel through my words and actions every day, or just sometimes?

5) Concluding Prayer

I shall sing the faithful love of Yahweh for ever,
from age to age my lips shall declare Your constancy,
for You have said: love is built to last for ever,
You have fixed Your constancy firm in the heavens. (Ps 89:1-2)

Lectio Divina Sunday, April 26, 2020

On the Road to Emmaus

Looking for the key to an understanding of the Scriptures

Luke 24:13-35

1. Opening prayer

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

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

2. Reading

a) A key to guide the reading:

Let us read the text where Luke presents Jesus as interpreting the Scriptures. As we read, let us seek to discover the various steps taken by Jesus in the process of this interpretation, from the moment He meets the two disciples on the way to Emmaus, to the time the disciples meet with the community in Jerusalem.

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

Lk 24:13-24: Jesus tries to find out what it is that is making the two disciples distressed.

Lk 24:25-27: Jesus sheds the light of Scripture on the situation of the two disciples.

Lk 24:28-32: Jesus shares the bread and celebrates with the disciples.

Lk 24:33-35: The two disciples go to Jerusalem and share their experience of the resurrection with the community.

c) The text:

13-24: Now that very same day, two of them were on their way to a village called Emmaus, seven miles from Jerusalem, and they were talking together about all that had

happened. And it happened that as they were talking together and discussing it, Jesus Himself came up and walked by their side; but their eyes were prevented from recognizing Him. He said to them, 'What are all these things that you are discussing as you walk along?' They stopped, their faces downcast. Then one of them, called Cleopas, answered Him, 'You must be the only person staying in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have been happening there these last few days.' He asked, 'What things?' They answered, 'All about Jesus of Nazareth, who showed Himself a prophet powerful in action and speech before God and the whole people; and how our chief priests and our leaders handed Him over to be sentenced to death, and had Him crucified. Our own hope had been that He would be the one to set Israel free. And this is not all: two whole days have now gone by since it all happened; and some women from our group have astounded us: they went to the tomb in the early morning, and when they could not find the body, they came back to tell us they had seen a vision of angels who declared He was alive. Some of our friends went to the tomb and found everything exactly as the women had reported, but of Him they saw nothing.'

25-27: Then He said to them, 'You foolish men! So slow to believe all that the prophets have said! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer before entering into His glory?' Then, starting with Moses and going through all the prophets, He explained to them the passages throughout the scriptures that were about Himself.

28-32: When they drew near to the village to which they were going, He made as if to go on; but they pressed Him to stay with them saying, 'It is nearly evening, and the day is almost over.' So He went in to stay with them. Now while He was with them at table, He took the bread and said the blessing; then He broke it and handed it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognized



Him; but He had vanished from their sight. Then they said to each other, 'Did not our hearts burn within us as He talked to us on the road and explained the scriptures to us?'

33-35: They set out that instant and returned to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven assembled together with their companions, 34 who said to them, 'The Lord has indeed risen and has appeared to Simon.' 35 Then they told their story of what had happened on the way and how they had recognized Him at the breaking of bread.

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 part did you like best in this text? Why?
- b) What steps did Jesus take in interpreting the Scriptures from the time He met the two friends on the road up to the time the disciples went to the community in Jerusalem?

- c) In what type of situation does Jesus meet the two disciples?
- d) What are the similarities and the differences between our present situation and that of the two disciples? What factors create a crisis of faith in our day and are the cause of sadness?
- e) What was the effect of Jesus' reading of the Bible on the life of the two disciples?
- f) Which points in the interpretation made by Jesus are a critique of our way of reading the Bible, and which are a confirmation?

5. A key to the reading

for those who wish to go deeper into the text.

a) The context in which Luke is writing:

* Luke is writing in about the year 85 for the Greek community of Asia Minor, who were living in difficult circumstances, due to factors both external and internal. Internally, there were divergent tendencies that made life together difficult: ex-Pharisees who wanted to impose the law of Moses (Acts 15:1); those who followed John the Baptist more and who had not even heard of the Holy Spirit (Acts 19:1-6); Jews who used the name of Jesus to drive out demons (Acts 19:13); and those who said they were followers of Peter, others of Paul, others of Apollo, and others of Christ (1Cor 1:12). Externally, persecution by the Roma Empire was growing (Rev 1:9-10; 2:3, 10, 13; 6:9-10; 12:16) plus the insidious infiltration of the dominant ideology of the Empire and of the official religion, much the same way communism today infiltrates all aspects of our life (Rev 2:14, 20; 13:14-16).

* Luke is writing to these communities that he may give them a sure direction in the midst of their difficulties and so that they may find the strength and light in living out their faith in Jesus. Luke writes a two volume work: the Gospel and Acts, and he has the same general aim, "to learn how well founded the teaching is that you have received" (Lk 1:4). One of his specific aims is to show, through the beautiful story of the two disciples on the way to Emmaus, how the community ought to read and interpret the Bible. In reality, those walking the streets of Emmaus were the communities (and all of us). Each of us is and all of us together are companions of Cleophas (Lk 24:18). With him we walk the streets of life, seeking a word of support and of guidance in the Word of God.

* The way Luke narrates the meeting of Jesus with the disciples on the way to Emmaus, tells us how the communities of his time used the Bible and practiced what we today call Lectio Divina or Prayerful Reading of the Bible. They used three steps in interpreting the Bible:

b) The steps or aspects used in the process of interpreting the Scriptures:

First step: Start from facts (Lk 24:13-24):

Jesus meets the two friends who are experiencing feelings of fear and dispersion, of lack of trust and dismay. They were fleeing. The force of death, the cross, had killed in them all hope. Jesus approaches them and walks with them. He listens to their conversation and says: "What matters are you discussing as you walk along?" The prevailing ideology prevents them from understanding and having a critical conscience.

"Our own hope had been that he would be the one to set Israel free, but..." (Lk 24:21). What do those who suffer talk about today? What matters today put our faith in a state of crisis?

The first step is this: to approach people, listen to reality, problems; be capable of asking questions that help to look at reality more critically.

Second step: Make use of the Bible (Lk 24:25-27)

Jesus uses the Bible, not in order to give lessons on the Bible, but to shed light on the problem worrying the two friends, and thus shed light on the situation they were experiencing. With the help of the Bible, Jesus leads the two disciples into God's plan and shows them that God has not allowed history to go astray. Jesus does not use the Bible as an expert who knows everything, but as a companion who wishes to help his friends to remember things they had forgotten, namely, Moses and the Prophets. Jesus does not give his friends the feeling of being ignorant, but seeks to create an ambient within which they can remember and thus arouse their memory.

The second step is this: with the help of the Bible, to shed light on the situation and transform the cross, symbol of death, into a symbol of life and of hope. In this manner, that which prevents us from seeing, becomes light and strength along our way.

Third step: Celebrating and sharing in community (Lk 24,28-32)

The Bible alone does not open their eyes but makes their hearts burn! (Lk 24:32). What opens the eyes of the friends and allows them to discover the presence of Jesus is the sharing of the bread, the communitarian gesture, the celebration. As soon as they recognize Jesus, He disappears. And they then experience the resurrection, they are reborn and walk on their own. Jesus does not take over His friends' journey. He is not paternalistic. Now that they are risen, the disciples can walk on their own two feet.

The third step is this: we must know how to create a prayerful and fraternal atmosphere where the Spirit is free to act. It is the Spirit who allows us to discover and experience the Word of God in our lives and leads us to understand the meaning of Jesus' words (Jn 14:26; 16:13). It is especially at this point of the celebration that the practice of basic ecclesial communities, sustained by the margins of the world, help us religious once more to come across and drink from the ancient well of Tradition.

Aim: To rise and go towards Jerusalem (Lk 24:33-35)

Everything has changed in the two disciples. They themselves rise, regain courage and go back to Jerusalem, where the forces of death that killed Jesus are still at work, but where also there are the forces of life in the sharing of the experience of the resurrection. Courage in place of fear. Return in place of flight. Faith in place of its absence. Hope in place of despair. A critical conscience in place of fatalism before power. Freedom in place of oppression. In a word, life in place of death! And in place of the news of the death of Jesus, the Good News of his Resurrection!

This is the aim of reading the Bible: to experience the presence of Jesus and of His Spirit in our midst. It is the Spirit who opens our eyes to the Bible and to reality and draws us to share the experience of the Resurrection, as it is true even to this day, in community meetings.

c) The new way of Jesus: a prayerful reading of the Bible:

* Often, it is not possible to understand whether the use of the OT in the Gospels comes from Jesus or an explanation given by early Christians who sought to express their faith in Jesus in this way. However, what cannot be denied is the frequent and constant use of the Bible by Jesus. A simple reading of the Gospels shows us that Jesus found His bearings in the Scriptures in the performance of His mission and in instructing His disciples and the crowd.

* At the root of Jesus' reading of the Bible is his experience of God as Father. His intimate relationship with the Father gives Jesus a new criterion, which places Him in direct contact with the author of the Bible. Jesus looks for meaning at the very source. He does not go from the writings to their root, but from the root to the writings. The comparison of the photo, as described in the Lectio Divina of Easter Sunday, helps us to shed light on this topic. As by a miracle, the photo of the harsh face was lit up and acquired traits of great tenderness. The words, born of the lived experience of the son, transformed everything, without changing anything (see Lectio Divina for Easter Sunday).

* Thus, looking through the photos of the Old Testament, people in the time of Jesus, formed an idea of a very distant God, harsh, difficult to contact, whose name could not even be mouthed. But Jesus' words and actions, born of His experience as Son, without changing even one word (Mt 5:18-19), transformed the whole meaning of the Old Testament. The God who seemed to be so distant and harsh acquires the features of a Father full of tenderness, always present, ready to welcome and liberate! This Good News of God, communicated by Jesus, is the new key to a re-reading of the whole of the Old Testament. The New Testament is a re-reading of the Old Testament done in the light of the new experience of God, revealed by Jesus. This different way of shedding light on life in the light of the Word of God, creates many conflicts for Him, because it renders the small of this world critical, while it makes the great uncomfortable.

* When interpreting the Bible to the people, Jesus revealed the traits of God's face, the experience that He experienced of God as Father. To reveal God as Father was the source and aim of the Good News of Jesus. By His attitude, Jesus manifests God's love for His disciples. He reveals the Father and incarnates His love! Jesus was able to say, "To have seen Me is to have seen the Father" (Jn 14:9). Hence, the Father's Spirit was also with Jesus (Lk 4:18) and went with Him everywhere, from the incarnation (Lk 1:35) to the beginning of his mission (Lk 4:14), even to the end, his death and resurrection (Acts 1:8).

* Jesus, interpreter, educator and master, was a meaningful person in the life of His disciples. He influenced their lives forever. To interpret the Bible does not mean just to teach truth for the other to live by. The content that Jesus wished to convey was not limited to words, but included actions and His way of relating to people. The content is never separate from the person who communicates it. The goodness and love that emerge from His words are part of the content. They are His nature. Good content without goodness is like spilt milk.

6. Psalm 23 (22)

God is our inheritance forever

The Lord is my Shepherd;

I shall not want.

He makes me lie down in green pastures.

He leads me beside still waters;

He restores my soul.

He leads me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake.

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,

I fear no evil;

for Thou art with me;

Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me.

Thou preparest a table before me

in the presence of my enemies;

Thou anointest my head with oil, my cup overflows.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life;

and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

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, April 27, 2020

Easter Time

1) Opening prayer

Our living God,

we hunger for lasting life and happiness

and the fulfillment of all our hopes.

Satisfy all our hungers

through your Son Jesus Christ, who is our bread of life.

And when he has filled us with himself,

may he lead and strengthen us

to bring to a waiting world

the food of reconciliation and joy,

which you alone can give to the full.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

2) Gospel Reading - John 6:22-29

The next day, the crowd that remained across the sea saw that there had been only one boat there, and that Jesus had not gone along with his disciples in the boat, but only his disciples had left. Other boats came from Tiberias near the place where they had eaten the bread when the Lord gave thanks. When the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they themselves got into boats and came to Capernaum looking for Jesus. And when they found him across the sea they said to him, “Rabbi, when did you get here?” Jesus answered them and said, “Amen, amen, I say to you, you are looking for me not because you saw signs but because you ate the loaves and were filled. Do not work for food that perishes but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him the Father, God, has set his seal.” So they said to him, “What can we do to accomplish the works of God?” Jesus answered and said to them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in the one he sent.”

3) Reflection

- In today’s Gospel we begin the discourse on the Bread of Life (Jn 6:22-71), which is extended during the next six days, until the end of the week. After the multiplication of the loaves, the people follow Jesus. They had seen the miracle; they had eaten and were satiated and wanted more! They were not concerned about looking for the sign or the call of God that was contained in all of this. When the people found Jesus in the synagogue at Capernaum, He had a long conversation with them, called the Discourse of the Bread of Life. It is not really a discourse, but it is a series of seven brief dialogues which explain the meaning of the multiplication of the bread, symbol of the new Exodus and of the Eucharistic Supper.

- It is good to keep in mind the division of the chapter in order to understand better its significance:

6:1-15: the great multiplication of the loaves

6:16-21: the crossing of the lake, and Jesus who walks on the water

6:22-71: the dialogue of Jesus with the people, with the Jews and with the disciples

1st dialogue: 6:22-27 with the people: the people seek Jesus and find Him in Capernaum

2nd dialogue: 6:28-34 with the people: faith as the work of God and the manna of the desert

3rd dialogue: 6:35-40 with the people: the true bread is to do God’s will.

4th dialogue: 6:41-51 with the Jews: the complaining of the Jews

5th dialogue: 6:52-58 with the Jews: Jesus and the Jews.

6th dialogue: 6:59-66 with the disciples: reaction of the disciples

7th dialogue: 6:67-71 with the disciples: confession of Peter

- The conversation of Jesus with the people, with the Jews, and with the disciples is a beautiful dialogue, but a demanding one. Jesus tries to open the eyes of the people in a way that they will learn to read the events and discover in them the turning point that life should take. It is not enough to follow behind miraculous signs which multiply the bread for the body. Man does not live by bread alone. The struggle for life without mysticism does not reach the roots. The people, while speaking with Jesus, always

remain more annoyed or upset by his words. But Jesus does not give in, neither does He change the exigencies. The discourse seems to be a funnel. In the measure in which the conversation advances, fewer people remain with Jesus. At the end only the twelve remain there, but Jesus cannot trust them either! Today the same thing happens. When the Gospel begins to demand commitment, many people withdraw and go away.

- John 6:22-27: People look for Jesus because they want more bread. The people follow Jesus. They see that He did not go into the boat with the disciples and, because of this, they do not understand what He had done to reach Capernaum. They did not even understand the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves. People see what has happened, but they cannot understand all this as a sign of something more profound. They stop only on the surface; in being satisfied with the food. They look for bread and life, but only for the body. According to the people, Jesus does what Moses had done in the past: to feed all the people in the desert. According to Jesus, they wanted the past to be repeated. But Jesus asks the people to take a step more and advance. Besides working for the bread that perishes, they should work for the imperishable food. This new food will be given by the Son of Man, indicated by God Himself. He brings life which lasts forever. He opens for us a new horizon on the sense of life and on God.

- John 6:28-29: Which is God's work? The people ask: what should we do to carry out this work of God? Jesus answers that the great work of God asks us to "believe in the one sent by God". That is, to believe in Jesus!

4) Personal questions

- The people were hungry, they eat the bread, and they look for more bread. They seek the miracle and do not seek the sign of God which was hidden in that. What do I seek more in my life: a miracle or a sign or the meaning?
- Keep silence within you for a moment and ask yourself: "To believe in Jesus: What does this mean for me specifically in my daily life?"
- What do I really work for in my life? Food that perishes or food that endures? Am I not committed and do a little of both, "just in case"?

5) Concluding Prayer

Lord, I tell You my ways and You answer me;
teach me Your wishes.
Show me the way of Your precepts,
that I may reflect on Your wonders. (Ps 119:26-27)

Lectio Divina Tuesday, April 28, 2020

Easter Time

1) Opening prayer

Lord our God, generous Father,
You have given us Your Son Jesus
that we may relive with Him and like Him

His passion and His resurrection. Through Jesus, give us the courage to place ourselves into Your hands in the trials of life and in death, that one day we may see Your glory and at Your right hand Your Son Jesus Christ, who lives with You for ever.

2) Gospel Reading - John 6:30-35

The crowd said to Jesus: "What sign can you do, that we may see and believe in you? What can you do? Our ancestors ate manna in the desert, as it is written: He gave them bread from heaven to eat." So Jesus said to them, "Amen, amen, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave the bread from heaven; my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." So they said to Jesus, "Sir, give us this bread always." Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst."

3) Reflection

- The discourse of the Bread of Life is not a text to be discussed and dissected, but rather it should be meditated on and pondered. This is why, even if it is not fully understood, we should not be concerned. This text of the Bread of Life demands a whole life to meditate on it and deepen it. People have to read it, meditate it, pray it, think about it, read it again, repeat it and ponder it, as one does with a good sweet in the mouth. We turn it and turn it in the mouth until it is finished. The one who reads the fourth Gospel superficially may have the impression that John always repeats the same thing. Reading it more attentively, one becomes aware that it is not a question of repetition. The author of the fourth Gospel has his own way of repeating the same theme, but always at a higher and more profound level. It seems to be like a winding staircase. By turning, one reaches the same place, but always at a higher level or a more profound one.
- John 6:30-33: What sign will you yourself do, the sign which will make us believe in you? People had asked: What should we do to carry out the work of God? Jesus responds: "The work of God is to believe in the one who was sent", that is to believe in Jesus. This is why people formulate a new question: "Which sign do you do so that we can see and can believe? Which work do you do?" This means that they did not understand the multiplication of the loaves as a sign from God to legitimize Jesus before the people, as the one sent by God! They continue to argue: In the past our fathers ate the manna which Moses gave them! They called it "bread from Heaven" (W's 16:20), that is, "bread of God". Moses continues to be the great leader in whom to believe. If Jesus wants the people to believe in Him, He should work a greater sign than Moses. "What work do you do?"
- Jesus responds that the bread given by Moses was not the true bread from heaven. Coming from on high, yes, but it was not the bread of God, because it did not guarantee life to anyone. All of them died in the desert (Jn 6:49). The true bread of heaven, the bread of God, is the one which conquers death and gives life! It is the one which descends from Heaven and gives life to the world. It is Jesus Himself! Jesus tries to help

the people to liberate themselves from the way of thinking of the past. For Him, fidelity to the past does not mean to close up oneself in the ancient things and not accept renewal. Fidelity to the past means to accept the newness which comes as the fruit of the seed which was planted in the past.

- John 6:34-35: Lord, gives us always of that bread! Jesus answers clearly: "I am the bread of life!" To eat the bread of heaven is the same as to believe in Jesus and accept to follow the road that He teaches us, that is: "My food is to do the will of the one who has sent me and to complete his work!" (Jn 4:34). This is the true food which nourishes the person, which transforms life and gives new life. This last verse of today's Gospel (Jn 6:35) will be taken back as the first verse of tomorrow's Gospel (Jn 6:35-40)

4) Personal questions

- Hungry for bread, hungry for God. Which of these two predominates in me?
- Jesus says: "I am the bread of life". He takes away hunger and thirst. Which of these experiences do I have in my life?

5) Concluding Prayer

Lord turn Your ear to me, make haste.
Be for me a rock-fastness,
a fortified citadel to save me.
You are my rock, my rampart;
true to Your name, lead me and guide me! (Ps 31:1-2)

Lectio Divina Wednesday, April 29, 2020

Easter Time

1) Opening prayer

God, our Father,
You are our faithful God,
even in days of trial for the Church
and for each of us personally;
You stay by our side, even if we are not aware of Your presence.
Give us an unlimited trust in You
and make us ever more aware
that Your Son Jesus is the meaning of our lives
and that He nourishes us with Himself,
today and every day, for ever.

2) Gospel Reading - John 6:35-40

Jesus said to the crowds, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst. But I told you that although you have seen me, you do not believe. Everything that the Father gives me will come to me, and I will not reject anyone who comes to me, because I came down from heaven not to do my

own will but the will of the one who sent me. And this is the will of the one who sent me, that I should not lose anything of what he gave me, but that I should raise it on the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him may have eternal life, and I shall raise him on the last day."

3) Reflection

- John 6:35-36: I am the bread of life. The people, enthusiastic with the perspective of having bread from heaven of which Jesus speaks and which gives life forever (Jn 6:33), ask: "Lord, give us always that bread!" (Jn 6:34). They thought that Jesus was speaking about some particular kind of bread. This is why, the people, interested in getting this bread, ask: "Give us always of this bread!" This petition of the people reminds us of the conversation of Jesus with the Samaritan woman. Jesus had said that she could have had within her a spring of living water, welling up to eternal life, and she, in an interested way, asks: "Lord, give me of that water!" (Jn 4:15). The Samaritan woman is not aware that Jesus is not speaking about material water. Just as the people were not aware that Jesus was not speaking of material bread. Because of this, Jesus responds very clearly: "I am the bread of life! No one who comes to Me will ever hunger; no one who believes in Me will ever thirst". To eat the bread of heaven is the same as believing in Jesus. And to believe that He has come from heaven as a revelation of the Father. It is to accept the way which He has taught. But the people, in spite of having seen Jesus, do not believe in Him. Jesus is aware of the lack of faith and says: "You have seen Me and you do not believe".

- John 6:37-40: To do the will of Him who sent me. After the conversation with the Samaritan woman, Jesus had said to his disciples: "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me!" (Jn 4:34). Here, in the conversation with the people on the bread from heaven, Jesus touches on the same theme: "I have come from heaven not to do My own will, but to do the will of Him who sent Me. And this is the will of Him who sent Me that I should lose nothing of all that He has given to me; but that I should raise it up on the last day". This is the food which people should look for: to do the will of the Heavenly Father. And this is the bread which nourishes the person in life and gives him/her life. Eternal life begins here, a life which is stronger than death! If we were really ready to do the will of the Father, we would have no difficulty to recognize the Father present in Jesus.

- John 6:41-43: The Jews complained. Tomorrow's Gospel begins with verse 44 (John 6:44-51) and skips verses 41 to 43. Verse 41 begins with the conversation with the Jews who criticize Jesus. Here we will give a brief explanation of the meaning of the word Jews in the Gospel of John in order to avoid a superficial reading of it, avoiding the sentiment of anti-Semitism. First of all, it is well to remember that Jesus was a Jew and continues to be a Jew (Jn 4:9). His disciples were Jews. The first Christian communities were all Jewish who accepted Jesus as the Messiah. It was only later, little by little, that in the communities of the beloved disciple, Greeks and Christians began to be accepted on the same level as the Jews. They were more open communities. But this openness was not accepted by all. Some Christians who came from the group of the Pharisees wanted to keep the "separation" between Jews and Pagans (Acts 15:5). The situation was critical after the destruction of Jerusalem in the year 70. The Pharisees became the

dominating religious current in Judaism and began to define the religious directives or norms for the whole People of God: to suppress worship in the Greek language; to adopt solely the biblical text in Hebrew; to define or determine the list of sacred books, and eliminate the books which existed only in the Greek translation of the bible: Tobias, Judith, Esther, Baruch, Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus and the two Books of the Maccabees; to segregate or separate the foreigners; not eat any food suspected to be impure or which had been offered to the idols. All these norms assumed by the Pharisees had repercussions on the communities of the Jews which accepted Jesus as Messiah. These communities had already journeyed very much. The openness for the Pagans was now irreversible. The Greek bible had already been used for a long time. Thus, slowly, a reciprocal separation grew between Christianity and Judaism. In the years 85-90 the Jewish authorities began to discriminate against those who continued to accept Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah (Mt 5:11-12; 24:9-13). Those who continued to remain in the faith in Jesus were expelled from the Synagogue (Jn 9:34). Many Christian communities feared this expulsion (Jn 9:22) because it meant to lose the support of a strong and traditional institution such as the Synagogue. Those who were expelled lost the legal privileges that the Jews had conquered and gained throughout the centuries in the Empire. The expelled persons lost even the possibility of being buried decently. It was an enormous risk. This situation of conflict at the end of the first century had reflections of the conflict of Jesus with the Pharisees. When the Gospel of John speaks of the Jews he is not speaking of the Jewish people as such, but he is thinking much more of those Pharisee authorities which were expelling the Christians from the Synagogues in the years 85-90, the time when the Gospel was written. We cannot allow this affirmation about the Jews to make anti-Semitism grow among Christians.

4) Personal questions

- What do I know about Judaism – the religion of Jesus, its history and its beliefs?
- What do I know, or what can I learn, about the various groups within Judaism at the time of Jesus, such as the Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, and so on? With that deeper understanding, can I use it to better understand the life of Jesus?
- To eat the bread of heaven means to believe in Jesus. How does all this help me to live the Eucharist better?

5) Concluding Prayer

Acclaim God, all the earth,
sing psalms to the glory of His name,
glorify Him with your praises,
say to God, “How awesome You are!” (Ps 66:1-3)

Lectio Divina Thursday, April 30, 2020

Easter Time

1) Opening prayer

Father,
You draw all people to You
who believe in Your Son Jesus Christ.
Faith, Lord, faith it is that we need.
Give it to us, we pray You,
a living faith that we can encounter today
Jesus Christ, Your Son,
in Your word that You speak to us
in the bread that You offer us,
and in the food that we can give
and can be to one another,
in Jesus Christ, Your Son and our Lord,
who lives with You and the Holy Spirit
now and for ever.

2) Gospel Reading - John 6:44-51

Jesus said to the crowds: "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draw him, and I will raise him on the last day. It is written in the prophets: They shall all be taught by God. Everyone who listens to my Father and learns from him comes to me. Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father. Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the desert, but they died; this is the bread that comes down from heaven so that one may eat it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my Flesh for the life of the world."

3) Reflection

- Up until now the dialogue had been between Jesus and the people. From now on, the Jewish leaders begin to enter into conversation and the discussion becomes more tense.
- John 6:44-46: Anyone who opens himself to God accepts Jesus and His proposal. The conversation becomes more demanding. Now, it is the Jews, the leaders of the people who complain: "Surely, this is Jesus, son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know. How can He say: I have come down from heaven?" (Jn 6:42). They thought they knew the things of God. But, in reality, they did not know them. If we were truly open and faithful to God, we would feel within us the impulse of God which attracts us toward Jesus and we would recognize that Jesus comes from God, because it is written in the Prophets: "They will all be taught by God; everyone who has listened to the Father and has learned from Him, comes to me."
- John 6:47-50: Your fathers ate manna in the desert and they are dead. In the celebration of the Passover, the Jews recalled the bread of the desert. Jesus helps them to take a step

ahead. Anyone who celebrates the Passover, recalling only the bread that the fathers ate in the past, will die as all of them did! The true sense of the Passover is not to recall the manna which falls from heaven, but to accept Jesus, the new Bread of Life and to follow the way which He has indicated. It is no longer a question of eating the meat of the paschal lamb, but rather of eating the flesh of Jesus, so that the one who eats it will not die, but will have eternal life!

- John 6:51: Anyone who eats of this bread will live for ever. And Jesus ends saying: “I am the living bread which has come down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread he will live for ever and the bread that I shall give is My flesh for the life of the world.” Instead of the manna and the paschal lamb of the first exodus, we are invited to eat the new manna and the new paschal lamb that was sacrificed on the cross for the life of all.

- The new Exodus. The multiplication of the loaves takes place close to the Passover (Jn 6:4). The feast of the Passover was the prodigious remembrance of the Exodus, the liberation of the people from the clutches of Pharaoh. The whole episode which is narrated in chapter 6 of the Gospel of John has a parallel in the episodes related to the feast of the Passover, whether as liberation from Egypt or with the journey of the people in the desert in search of the promised land. The discourse of the Bread of Life, in the Synagogue of Capernaum, is related to chapter 16 of the Book of Exodus which speaks about the Manna. It is worth while to read all of chapter 16 of Exodus. In perceiving the difficulties of the people in the desert we can better understand the teaching of Jesus here in chapter 6 of the Gospel of John. For example, when Jesus speaks of a “food which does not perish, which endures for eternal life” (Jn 6:27) He is recalling the manna which produced worms and became rotten (Ex 16:20). As when the Jews “complained” (Jn 6:41), they do the same thing as the Israelites in the desert, when they doubted of the presence of God in their midst during their journey across the desert (Ex 16:2; 17:3; Nb 11:1). The lack of food made the people doubt about God and they began to complain against Moses and against God. Here too, the Jews doubt God’s presence in Jesus of Nazareth and begin to complain (Jn 6:41-42).

4) Personal questions

- Does the Eucharist help me to live in a permanent state of Exodus? Am I succeeding?
- Anyone who is open to truth finds the response in Jesus. Today, many people withdraw and do not find any response. Whose fault is it? Is it of the persons who know how to listen? Or is it the fault of us, Christians, who do not know how to present the Gospel as a message of life?
- How is one “drawn by the Father”? In what way is this part of evangelization?
- The Pharisees were acting out the norms of their times, as well as being keepers of tradition. Not all were eye-witnesses of Jesus' miracles. What was their culpability? What is the balance between discerning God in our presence and avoiding being swayed by every new belief to come along? This is even more important in the age of “Internet information”.

5) Concluding Prayer

Come and listen, all who fear God,
while I tell what He has done for me.

To Him I cried aloud,
high praise was on my tongue. (Ps 66:16-17)