

Lectio Divina June 2020

Lectio Divina June 2020.....	1
Lectio Divina Monday, June 1, 2020	2
Lectio Divina Tuesday, June 2, 2020	3
Lectio Divina Wednesday, June 3, 2020	6
Lectio Divina Thursday, June 4, 2020.....	8
Lectio Divina Friday, June 5, 2020	10
Lectio Divina Saturday, June 6, 2020	12
Lectio Divina Sunday, June 7, 2020.....	15
Lectio Divina Monday, June 8, 2020	20
Lectio Divina Tuesday, June 9, 2020	23
Lectio Divina Wednesday, June 10, 2020	26
Lectio Divina Thursday, June 11, 2020.....	27
Lectio Divina Friday, June 12, 2020	30
Lectio Divina Saturday, June 13, 2020	33
Lectio Divina Sunday, June 14, 2020.....	35
Lectio Divina Monday, June 15, 2020	42
Lectio Divina Tuesday, June 16, 2020	44
Lectio Divina Wednesday, June 17, 2020	46
Lectio Divina Thursday, June 18, 2020.....	48
Lectio Divina Friday, June 19, 2020	51
Lectio Divina Saturday, June 20, 2020	53
Lectio Divina Sunday, June 21, 2020.....	56
Lectio Divina Monday, June 22, 2020	61
Lectio Divina Tuesday, June 23, 2020	63
Lectio Divina Wednesday, June 24, 2020	65
Lectio Divina Thursday, June 25, 2020.....	68
Lectio Divina Friday, June 26, 2020	71
Lectio Divina Saturday, June 27, 2020	72
Lectio Divina Sunday, June 28, 2020.....	75

Lectio Divina Monday, June 29, 2020	80
Lectio Divina Tuesday, June 30, 2020	87

Lectio Divina Monday, June 1, 2020

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Father,
 keep before us the wisdom and love
 you have revealed in your Son.
 Help us to be like Him
 in word and deed,
 for He lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit,
 one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

2) Gospel Reading – John 19:25-34

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. 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 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.

3) Reflection

- Jn 19:25-29: Mary, the strong woman who understood the full meaning of this event, will help us cast a contemplative glance at the crucified. The fourth Gospel specifies that these disciples "stood by the cross" (Jn 19:25-26). This detail has a deep meaning. Only the fourth Gospel tells us that these five people 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 23:49). 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 27:55-56). Like Matthew, Mark gives us the names of those who followed the death of Jesus from afar (Mk 15:40-41). 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.

- Jn 19:30-34: They are present courageously at a time when Jesus has already declared that "it is fulfilled" (Jn 19:30). The mother of Jesus is present at the hour that finally "has come". That hour was foretold at the wedding feast of Cana (Jn 2:1ff). 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). The mother standing beneath the cross (cf. Jn 19:25), accepted her Son's testament of love and welcomed all people in the person of the beloved disciple as sons and daughters to be reborn unto life eternal.

- Jesus takes an active part in His death, He does not allow Himself to be killed like the thieves whose legs were broken (Jn 19:31-33), but commits His spirit (Jn 19:30). 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 19:26-27). 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 19:5). 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, Mary of Cleophas and Mary Magdalene, together with the beloved disciple (Jn 19:25).

4) Personal questions

- How has Mary given you a model for parenthood, discipleship, and love? What of these have I applied in my own life?
- Mary exemplified humility and obedience, yet she also led (as at Cana). How do I lead others, in what ways, while also being truly humble and obedient myself?

5) Concluding Prayer

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

Lectio Divina Tuesday, June 2, 2020

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Father,
Your love never fails.

Hear our call.
Keep us from danger
and provide for all our needs.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, Your Son,
who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

2) Gospel Reading - Mark 12:13-17

Next, the priests, the scribes and the elders sent to Jesus some Pharisees and some Herodians to catch Him in what He said. These came and said to Him, 'Master, we know that you are an honest man, that you are not afraid of anyone, because human rank means nothing to you, and that you teach the way of God in all honesty. Is it permissible to pay taxes to Caesar or not? Should we pay or not?' Recognizing their hypocrisy He said to them, 'Why are you putting Me to the test? Hand Me a denarius and let Me see it.'

They handed Him one and He said to them, 'Whose portrait is this? Whose title is this?' They said to Him, 'Caesar's.' Jesus said to them, 'Pay Caesar what belongs to Caesar -- and God what belongs to God.' And they were amazed at Him.

3) Reflection

- In today's Gospel, the confrontation between Jesus and the authority continues. The priests and the Scribes had been criticized and denounced by Jesus in the parable of the vineyard (Mk 12:1-12). Now, they themselves ask the Pharisees and the Herodians to set up a trap against Jesus to be able to condemn Him. They ask questions to Jesus concerning the taxes to be paid to the Romans. This was a controversial theme which divided public opinion. The enemies of Jesus want, at all costs, to accuse Him and diminish the influence that He had on the people. Groups, which before were enemies, now get together to fight against Jesus. This also happens today. Many times, persons or groups, enemies among themselves, get together to defend their privileges against those who inconvenience them with the announcement of truth and of justice.
- Mark 12:13-14: *The question of the Pharisees and the Herodians. The Pharisees and the Herodians were the local leaders in the villages of Galilee.* It was a long time since they had decided to kill Jesus (Mk 3: 6). Now, because of the order of the priests and of the elders, they want to know if Jesus is in favor or against the payment of taxes to the Romans, to Caesar. An underhanded or sly question, full of malice! Under the appearance of fidelity to the Law of God, they look for reasons in order to be able to accuse Him. If Jesus says, "You should pay!" they could accuse Him of being a friend of the Romans. If He said, "No, you do not have to pay!" they could accuse Him to the authority of the Romans of being subversive. This seemed to be a dead alley!
- Mark 12:15-17: *Jesus' answer.* Jesus perceives their hypocrisy. In His response He does not lose time in useless discussion, and goes straight to the heart of the matter. Instead of responding and of discussing the affair of the tribute to Caesar, He asks to be shown a coin and He asks, "Whose portrait and inscription is this?" They answered: "Caesar's!" The answer of Jesus: "Then pay Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God". In practice, they already recognized the authority of Caesar. They were already giving to Caesar what belonged to Caesar, because they used his

currency, his money to buy and to sell and even to pay the taxes of the Temple! What interested Jesus was that they *give “to God what belongs to God!*, that is, that they restore the people to God, from their deviation, because with their teaching they blocked the entrance into the Kingdom (Mk 23:13). Others explained this statement of Jesus in another way: “Give to God what belongs to God!”, that is, practice justice and honesty as the Law of God demands, because your hypocrisy denies to God what is due to Him. The disciples have to be aware!

• *Taxes, tributes, taxes and denarii. In Jesus’ time, the people of Palestine paid many taxes, tributes and the tenth part of their income, both to the Romans as well as to the Temple.* The Roman Empire had invaded Palestine in the year 63 A.D. and they imposed many taxes and tributes. According to the estimates made, half or even more of the family salaries were used to pay the tributes, taxes and the tenth of their income. The taxes which the Romans demanded were of two types: direct and indirect.

a) The *Direct* tax was on property and on persons. The tax on property (*tributum soli*): the fiscal officers of the government verified how large the property was, the production and the number of slaves and they fixed the amount to be paid. Periodically, there was a verification through the *census*. The tax on persons (*tributum capitis*): was for the poor class who owned no land. This included both men and women, between 12 and 65 years of age. It was a tax on the force of work; 20% of the income of every person was used to pay taxes.

b) The *Indirect* tax was placed on transactions of different types. Crown of gold: originally, it was a question of a gift to the Emperor, but then it became an obligatory tax. This was paid on special occasions, for example: the feast and the visits of the Emperor. *The tax on salt*: The salt was the monopoly of the Emperor. It was necessary to pay the tribute on the salt for commercial use, for example, the salt used by fishermen to dry up the fish and to sell it. From this comes the word “*salary*”. *A tax on buying and selling: for every commercial use 1% was paid. This money was paid to the fiscal officers during the holidays.* When a slave was bought they demanded 4%. In every registered commercial contract, they demanded 2%. *The tax for exercising a profession*: There was need for everyone to have a license for everything. For example, a cobbler in the city of Palmira paid one denarius a month. A denarius was equivalent to the salary of one day. And even the prostitutes had to pay. *A tax for the use of public utilities*: Emperor Vespasian introduced the tax to be able to use the public toilets in Rome. He would say, “Money does not stink!”

c) *Other taxes and obligations: toll or customs; forced work; Special expenses for the army (to give hospitality to the soldiers; to pay for the food of the troops); Taxes for the Temple and the worship.*

4) Personal questions

- Do you know some case of groups or of people who were enemies among themselves, but who were then united to follow an honest person who bothered or inconvenienced and denounced them? Has this happened any time with you?
- What is the meaning of this sentence today: “Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God”?

5) Concluding Prayer

Each morning fill us with Your faithful love,
we shall sing and be happy all our days;
Show your servants the deeds You do,
let their children enjoy your splendor! (Ps 90:14, 16)

Lectio Divina Wednesday, June 3, 2020

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Father,
Your love never fails.
Hear our call.
Keep us from danger
and provide for all our needs.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, Your Son,
who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

2) Gospel Reading - Mark 12:18-27

Some Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to Jesus and put this question to him, saying, "Teacher, Moses wrote for us, If someone's brother dies, leaving a wife but no child, his brother must take the wife and raise up descendants for his brother. Now there were seven brothers. The first married a woman and died, leaving no descendants. So the second brother married her and died, leaving no descendants, and the third likewise. And the seven left no descendants. Last of all the woman also died. At the resurrection when they arise whose wife will she be? For all seven had been married to her." Jesus said to them, "Are you not misled because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God? When they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but they are like the angels in heaven. As for the dead being raised, have you not read in the Book of Moses, in the passage about the bush, how God told him, I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? He is not God of the dead but of the living. You are greatly misled."

3) Reflection

- In today's Gospel the confrontation between Jesus and the authorities continues. After the priests, the elders and the scribes (Mk 12:1-12) and the Pharisees and the Herodians (Mk 12:13-17), now the Sadducees appear who ask a question about resurrection. It is a controversial theme, which caused argument and discussion among the Sadducees and the Pharisees (Mk 12:18-27; cf. Acts 23:6-1).
- In the Christian communities of the years seventy, the time when Mark wrote his Gospel, there were some Christians who, in order to not be persecuted, tried to reconcile the teaching of Jesus with the ideas of the Roman Emperor. The others who resisted the

Empire were persecuted, accused and questioned by the authority due to neighbors who felt annoyed, bothered by their witness. The description of the conflicts of Jesus with the authority was a very great help for the Christians so as not to allow themselves to be manipulated by the ideology of the Empire. In reading these episodes of conflict of Jesus with the authorities, the persecuted Christians were encouraged to continue on this road.

- Mark 12:18-23. The Sadducees: The Sadducees were the aristocratic elite of land owners and traders. They were willing to borrow from Hellenism and believed in written, but not oral, law. They did not accept faith in the Resurrection. At that time, this faith was beginning to be challenged by the Pharisees and popular piety. It urged the resistance of the people against the dominion of the Romans, and of the priests, of the elders and of the Sadducees themselves. For the Sadducees, the Messianic Kingdom was already present in the situation of well-being in which they were living. They may have followed what we call today as the “Theology of Retribution,” which distorted reality. According to this theology, God rewards with richness and well-being those who observe the Law of God, and He punishes with suffering and poverty those who do evil. A variation of this today in some independent Christian communities is called “Prosperity Theology”. It is also related to the concept of Deuteronomist Theology, which refers to the agenda of the Deuteronomic authors. This explains why the Sadducees did not want change. They wanted religion to remain as it was, immutable like God Himself in the written law. This is why they did not accept faith in the Resurrection and in the help of angels, who sustained the struggle of those who sought changes and liberation.

- Mark 12:19-23. The question of the Sadducees: They go to Jesus to criticize and to ridicule faith in the Resurrection, to tell about the fictitious case of the woman who got married seven times and at the end she died without having any children. The so-called law of the levirate obliged the widow who had no children to marry the brother of the deceased husband. The son who would have been born from this new marriage would be considered the son of the deceased husband. Thus he would have a descendant. But in the case proposed by the Sadducees, the woman, in spite of having had seven husbands, remained without a son. They asked Jesus: “In the Resurrection, when they will rise, to whom will the woman belong? Because seven had her as wife!” This was in order to say that to believe in the resurrection was absurd.

- Mark 12:24-27: The response of Jesus. Jesus responds harshly: “Surely, the reason why you are wrong is that you understand neither the Scriptures nor the power of God.” Jesus explains that the condition of persons after death will be totally different from the present condition. After death there will be no marriage, but all will be as the angels in Heaven. The Sadducees imagined life in Heaven as life on earth. And at the end Jesus concludes: “He is not the God of the dead, but of the living! You are in great error.” The disciples are warned: those who are on the side of these Sadducees will be on the side opposite to God.

4) Personal questions

- What is the Church’s teaching of Heaven, and what is my own view?
- We in the Church have written laws, doctrine, authoritative teaching (in writing, as in Encyclicals), and the writing of the saints. We also have oral stories, Catholic culture,

devotions, and ‘popular’ personal interpretations. Do I know the difference between these and do I have a grasp on what is firm truth and what is personal opinion?

- Do I also believe in the resurrection? What does the following mean for me: “I believe in the resurrection of the body and in life everlasting?”
- Have you heard or met anyone who believes in the theology of retribution or prosperity theology?

5) Concluding Prayer

Lord, I lift up my eyes to You who are enthroned in heaven.
Just as the eyes of slaves are on their masters' hand,
or the eyes of a slave-girl on the hand of her mistress,
so our eyes are on Yahweh our God,
for Him to take pity on us. (Ps 123:1-2)

Lectio Divina Thursday, June 4, 2020

1) Opening prayer

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

2) Gospel Reading - Mark 12:28-34

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

3) Reflection

- In today's Gospel (Mk 12:28b-34), the scribes and the doctors of the Law want to know from Jesus which is the greatest commandment of all. Even today, many people want to know what is more important in religion. Some say that it is to be baptized. Others say that it is to go to church and to participate in the Sunday Mass. Others still say to love our neighbor and to struggle for a more just world! Others are concerned only with appearances and with tasks in the Church.
- Mark 12:28: The question of the doctor of the Law. Some time before the question of the scribe, the discussion was with the Sadducees concerning faith in the resurrection (Mk 12:23-27). The doctor who had participated in the debate was pleased with Jesus' answer. He perceived in it His great intelligence and wished to take advantage of the occasion to ask a question to clarify something: "Which is the greatest commandment of all?" At that time, the Jews had many norms to regulate the observance of the Ten Commandments of the Law. Some said, "All these norms have the same value, because they all come from God. It is not up to us to introduce any distinction in the things of God." Others said, "Some laws are more important than others, and for this reason, they oblige more!" The doctor wants to know what Jesus thinks.
- Mark 12:29-31: Jesus' response. Jesus responds quoting a passage from the Bible which says that the greatest among the commandments is "to love God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength!" (Dt 6:4-5). At the time of Jesus, pious Jews recited this phrase three times a day: in the morning, at noon and in the evening. It was so well known among them just as the Our Father is among us. The Pharisees would even wear Tefillin (phylacteries) which were tiny scrolls with these words written on them. And Jesus adds, quoting the Bible again, "The second one is: You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev 19:18). There is no other greater commandment than these two." A brief but very profound response! It is the summary of everything that Jesus teaches on God and His life (Mt 7:12).
- Mark 12:32-33: The response of the doctor of the Law. The doctor agrees with Jesus and concludes, "Well said, to love your neighbor as yourself, this is far more important than any burnt offering or sacrifice." That is, the commandment to love is more important than the commandments which concern the worship and sacrifices of the Temple. The Prophets of the Old Testament already had affirmed this (Hos 6:6; Ps 40:6-8; Ps 51:16-17). Today we would say that the practice of love is more important than novenas, promises, sermons and processions.
- Mark 12:34: The summary of the Kingdom. Jesus confirms the doctor's conclusion and says, "You are not far from the Kingdom of God!" In fact, the Kingdom of God consists in the union of two loves: love toward God and love toward neighbor. Because if God is Father/Mother, we are all brothers and sisters, and we should show this in practice, living in community. "On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets!" (Mt 22:40). We, disciples, should keep this law in our mind, in our intelligence, in our heart, in our hands and feet, because one cannot reach God without giving oneself totally to one's neighbor!

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

4) Personal questions

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

5) Concluding Prayer

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

Lectio Divina Friday, June 5, 2020

1) Opening prayer

Father,
Your love never fails.
Hear our call.
Keep us from danger
and provide for all our needs.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, Your Son,
who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

2) Gospel Reading - Mark 12:35-37

While teaching in the Temple, Jesus said, 'How can the scribes maintain that the Christ is the son of David? David himself, moved by the Holy Spirit, said, “The Lord declared to my Lord, take your seat at my right hand till I have made your enemies your footstool.” David himself calls Him Lord; in what way then can He be his son?' And the great crowd listened to Him with delight.

3) Reflection

- In the Gospel of the day before yesterday, Jesus criticizes the doctrine of the Sadducees (Mk 12: 24-27). In today’s Gospel, He criticizes the teaching of the doctors of the Law. And this time His criticism is not directed to the incoherence of their life, but to the teaching which they transmit to the people. On another occasion, Jesus had criticized their incoherence and had said to the people, “*The Scribes and the Pharisees occupy the chair of Moses: You must, therefore, do and observe what they tell you, but do not*

be guided by what they do, since they do not practice what they preach” (Mt 23:2-3). Now, He shows Himself reserved in regard to those who taught the Messianic hope, and He bases His criticism on arguments taken from the Bible.

- *Mark 12: 35-36: The teaching of the Doctors of the Law on the Messiah.* The official propaganda both of the government and of the Doctors of the Law said that the Messiah would come as the *Son of David*. This was the way to teach that the Messiah would be a glorious king, strong and dominating. This is how the people shouted on Palm Sunday: “Blessed the Kingdom that is coming from our Father David!” (Mk 11:10). The blind man of Jericho also cried out in this same way: “Jesus, son of David, have pity on me!” (Mk 10: 47).

- *Mark 12:37: Jesus questions the teaching of the doctors about the Messiah.* Jesus questions this teaching of the Scribes. He quotes a Psalm of David: “*The Lord declared to my Lord, take your seat at my right hand, till I have made your enemies your footstool!*” (Ps 110:1). Jesus adds, “*If David calls Him Lord, how then can He be his son?*” This signifies that Jesus was not completely in agreement with the idea of a Messiah, Glorious Lord, who would come like a powerful king to dominate and to impose Himself on all His enemies. Mark adds that people were pleased with the criticism of Jesus. In fact, history reveals that the “poor of Yahweh” (anawim) were expecting a Messiah who was not a dominator, but the servant of God for humanity.

- *The diverse forms of Messianic hope.* Throughout the centuries, the Messianic hope grew, assuming diverse forms. Almost all the groups and movements of the time of Jesus were waiting for the coming of the Kingdom, but each one in his own way, the Pharisees, the Scribes, the Essenes, the Zealots, the Herodians, the Sadducees, the popular prophets, the disciples of John the Baptist, the poor of Yahweh. In the time of Jesus, three tendencies in the Messianic hope could be distinguished.

a) The Messiah personally sent by God: For some, the future Kingdom should arrive through one sent by God, called Messiah, or Christ. He would have been anointed so as to be able to carry out His mission (Isa 61:1). Some expected that he would be a *prophet*; others, a king, a disciple or a *priest*. Malachi, for example, expects the prophet Elijah (Mal 3:23-24). Psalm 72 expects an ideal king, a new David. Isaiah expects now a disciple (Isa 50:4), now a prophet (Isa 61:1). The unclean spirit shouted, “I know who you are: the Holy One of God!” (Mk 1: 24). This was a sign that there were people who expected a Messiah who would be a priest (Holy or Sanctifier). The poor of Yahweh (anawim) expected the Messiah to be “Servant of God”, announced by Isaiah.

b) Messianism without the Messiah. For others, the future would arrive suddenly, unexpected, without mediations, without help from anyone. God Himself would come in person to fulfill the prophecies. There would not be a Messiah, properly so called. There would be a messianism without a Messiah. Of this we are aware in the Book of Isaiah where God Himself arrives with the victory in hand (Isa 40: 9-10; 52:7-8).

c) The Messiah has already come. There were also some groups which did not expect the Messiah. According to them the present situation should continue as it was, because they thought that the future had already arrived. These groups were not popular. For example, the Sadducees did not expect the Messiah. The Herodians thought that Herod was a messianic king.

- *The light of the Resurrection.* The Resurrection of Jesus is the light which enlightens

unexpectedly all the past. In the light of the Resurrection Christians would begin to read the Old Testament and would discover in it new meaning which before could not be discovered, because the light was missing (cf. 2 Cor 3:15-16). They sought in the Old Testament the words to express the new life which they were living in Christ. There they found the majority of the titles of Jesus: Messiah (Ps 2: 2) Son of man (Dan 7: 13; Ezek 2: 1), Son of God (Ps 2: 7; 2 Sam 7: 13), Servant of Yahweh (Isa 42: 1; 41: 8), Redeemer (Isa 41:14; Ps 19:15; Rut 4:15), Lord (LXX) (almost 6000 times!). All the great themes of the Old Testament spring up in Jesus and find in Him their full realization. In the Resurrection of Jesus springs up the seed and, according to everything that has been said by the Fathers of the Church, the whole Old Testament becomes New Testament.

4) Personal questions

- What is the hope for the future of today's world in which we live?
- Does faith in the Resurrection influence your way of life?

5) Concluding Prayer

I am waiting for Your salvation, Yahweh,
I fulfill Your commandments.
I observe Your precepts, Your judgements,
for all my ways are before You. (Ps 119:166, 168)

Lectio Divina Saturday, June 6, 2020

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Father,
Your love never fails.
Hear our call.
Keep us from danger
and provide for all our needs.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, Your Son,
who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

2) Gospel Reading - Mark 12:38-44

In His teaching Jesus said, 'Beware of the scribes who like to walk about in long robes, to be greeted respectfully in the market squares, to take the front seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets; these are the men who devour the property of widows and for show offer long prayers. The more severe will be the sentence they receive.'

He sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the treasury, and many of the rich put in a great deal. A poor widow came and put in two small coins, the equivalent of a penny. Then He called His disciples and said to them, 'In truth I tell you, this poor widow has put more in than all who have contributed to the

treasury; for they have all put in money they could spare, but she in her poverty has put in everything she possessed, all she had to live on.'

3) Reflection

- In today's Gospel we are getting to the end of the long teaching of Jesus to His disciples. From the first cure of the blind man (Mk 8:22-26) up to the cure of the blind Bartimaeus in Jericho (10:46-52), the disciples walked with Jesus toward Jerusalem, receiving much instruction from Him about the passion, death and resurrection and the consequences for the life of the disciple. When they reached Jerusalem, they witness the debates of Jesus with the traders in the Temple (Mk 11:15-19), with the high priests and the Scribes (Mk 11: 27 - 12: 12), with the Pharisees, Herodians and the Sadducees (Mk 12:13-27), with the Doctors of the Law (Mk 12:28-37). Now, in today's Gospel, after the last criticism against the Scribes (Mk 12:38-40), Jesus instructs the disciples. Sitting opposite the treasury Jesus called their attention to the gesture of sharing of a poor widow. In that gesture they should look for the manifestation of the will of God (Mk 12: 41-44).
- Mark 12: 38-40: The criticism of the doctors of the Law. Jesus calls the attention of the disciples to the arrogant and hypocritical behavior of some of the doctors of the Law. They liked very much to go around the squares in the city wearing long tunics, and to receive the greeting of the people, to occupy the first places in the Synagogue and to have the place of honor at the banquets. They liked to enter the houses of the widows and to say long prayers in exchange for money! And Jesus says, "These people will receive a great condemnation!"
- Mark 12:41-42. The widow's mite. Jesus and His disciples sitting opposite the treasury of the Temple observed that all left their alms. The poor put in a very small amount, a few cents; the rich put in coins of great value. The Treasury of the Temple received much money. Everyone took something for the maintenance of the cult, to support the clergy and for the maintenance of the building. Part of this money was used to help the poor, because at that time there was no social security. The poor depended on public charity. And the poor who needed greater help were the orphans and the widows. They had nothing. They depended for everything on the help of others. But even without having anything, they tried to share. In this way, a very poor widow, put in her alms into the treasury of the Temple. Just a few cents!
- Mark 12: 43-44. Jesus indicates where God's will is manifested. What has greater value: the ten cents of the widow or the one thousand dollars of the rich? For the disciples, the one thousand dollars of the rich were much more useful than the ten cents of the widow. They thought that the problems of the people could be solved only with much money. On the occasion of the multiplication of the loaves, they had said to Jesus, "Are we to go and spend two hundred denarii on bread for them to eat?" (Mk 6: 37) In fact, for those who think this way, the ten cents of the widow do not serve for anything. But Jesus says, "This widow who is poor has put into the treasury more than all the others". Jesus has different criteria. He calls the attention of His disciples to the gesture of the widow, and teaches them where they and we should seek the manifestation of God's will: in the poor and in sharing. Many poor people today do the same thing. People say, "The poor do not let another poor person starve". But sometimes, not even this is possible. Cicera, the lady of the interior zone of Paraiba, Brazil, who went to live in the periphery of the capital city, would say, "In the interior, people were poor, but

there was always a piece of bread to share with the poor person who knocked at the door. Now that I am in the great city, when I see a poor person who knocks at the door, I hide out of shame, because at home I have nothing to share with him!” On the one hand, rich people who have everything, but who do not want to share; on the other side, poor people who hardly have anything, but who want to share the little that they have.

- Alms, sharing, riches. The practice of giving alms was very important for the Jews. It was considered a “good work”, because the Law of the Old Testament said, “Because the poor will never be missing in the country; this is why I give you this command, and I say to you: Always be open handed with your brother in your country who is in need and poor” (Deut 15:11). The alms, deposited in the treasury of the Temple, whether for the worship, or for the needy, for the orphans and for the widows, were considered an action pleasing to God. To give alms was a way of recognizing that all the goods belong to God and that we are simple administrators of these goods, in such a way that there will be abundant life for all. The practice of sharing and of solidarity is one of the characteristics of the first Christian communities: “None of their members was ever in want, as all those who owned land or houses would sell them and bring the money from the sale of them to present it to the apostles; (Acts 4:34-35; 2:44-45). The money from the sale, offered to the apostles, was not accumulated, but rather “it was then distributed to any who might be in need” (Acts 4:35b; 2: 45). The entrance into the community of persons who were richer introduced into the community the mentality of accumulation and blocked the movement of solidarity and of sharing. James warns these people, “Now you rich! Lament; weep for the miseries that are coming to you. Your wealth is rotting; your clothes are all moth-eaten” (Jas 5: 1-3). To learn the way to the Kingdom, we all need to become pupils of that poor widow, who shared all she had, what was necessary to live (Mk 12:41-44).

4) Personal questions

- How is it that the two cents of the widow can be worth more than one thousand dollars of the rich? Look closely at the text and see why Jesus praises the poor widow. What message does this text contain for us today?
- What difficulties and what joys have you found in your life in the practice of solidarity and in sharing with others?

5) Concluding Prayer

My mouth is full of Your praises,
filled with Your splendor all day long.
Do not reject me in my old age,
nor desert me when my strength is failing. (Ps 71:8-9)

Lectio Divina Sunday, June 7, 2020

"God so loved the world!"

The Trinity is the best community

John 3:16-18

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:

- These few verses are part of a reflection of John the evangelist (Jn 3: 6-21), where he explains to his community of the end of the first century, the meaning of the dialogue between Jesus and Nicodemus (Jn 3:1-15). In this dialogue, Nicodemus finds it difficult to follow Jesus' thinking. The same happened to the communities. Some of them, still under the influence of the criteria of the past, could not understand the newness that Jesus brought. Our text (Jn 3:16-18) is an attempt to overcome this difficulty.

- The Church too has chosen these three verses for the feast of the Blessed Trinity. In fact, they are an important key that reveals the importance of the mystery of the Triune God in our lives. When reading, let us try to keep in mind and in our hearts that in this text God is the Father, the Son is Jesus and love is the Holy Spirit. So, let us not try to penetrate the mystery. Let us halt in silence and in wonder!

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

Jn 3:16: Says that the love of God that saves manifests itself in the gift of the Son.

Jn 3:17: The will of God is to save, not to condemn.

Jn 3:18: God demands of us that we have the courage to believe in this love.

c) The text:



16: For this is how God loved the world: He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him may not perish but may have eternal life.

17: For God sent His Son into the world not to judge the world, but so that through Him the world might be saved.

18: No one who believes in Him will be judged; but whoever does not believe is judged already, because that person does not believe in the Name of God's only Son.

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 pleased or touched you most?
- b) After a careful examination of this brief text, what are the recurring key words?
- c) What is the central experience of the community by the evangelist that reveals itself in the text?
- d) What does the text tell us about the love of God?
- e) What does the text tell us about Jesus?
- f) What does the text tell us about the world?
- g) What does the text reveal to me?

5. A key to the reading

for those who wish to go deeper into the text.

a) The context within which the words of Jesus appear in the Gospel of John:

* Nicodemus was a doctor who thought he knew the things of God. He watches Jesus with the book of the Law of Moses in his hand to see whether the new things announced by Jesus were in accordance with the book. In the conversation, Jesus points out to Nicodemus (and to all of us) that the only way one can understand the things of God is to be born again! The same thing happens today. Often, we are like Nicodemus: we accept only those things that agree with our ideas. We reject all else, thinking it contrary to tradition. But not all are like this. There are those who allow themselves to be surprised by events and who are not afraid of saying to themselves, "Be born again!"

* When recalling the words of Jesus, the evangelist has before his eyes the situation of the community towards the end of the first century, and it is for them that he writes. Nicodemus' doubts were also those of the community. Thus Jesus' reply was also a reply to the community. Quite probably, the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus was part of the baptismal catechesis, because the text says that people have to be reborn of water and the Holy Spirit (Jn 3:6). In the brief commentary that follows, we focus on the key words that appear in the text and that are central to the Gospel of John. They serve as key words for the reading of the whole Gospel.

b) Commentary on the text:

* John 3:16: To love is to give oneself for the sake of love. The word love, first of all, points to a deep experience in the relationship between persons. It includes feelings and

values such as joy, sorrow, suffering, growth, giving up, giving oneself, realization, gift, commitment, life, death, etc. In the OT these values and feelings are summarized in the word *hesed*, which, in our Bibles, is usually translated as charity, mercy, fidelity or love. In the NT, Jesus revealed this love of God in His meetings with people. He revealed this through feelings of friendship, kindness, as, for example, in His relationship with Martha's family in Bethany: "Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus". He weeps at Lazarus' tomb (Jn 11:5, 33-36). Jesus faces His mission as a manifestation of love: "having loved His own....He loved them to the end" (Jn 13:1). In this love, Jesus reveals His deep identity with the Father: "As the Father has loved Me, so I have loved you!" (Jn 15:9). He also says to us, "Love one another as I have loved you!" (Jn 15:12). John defines love this way: "This has taught us love – that He gave up His life for us; and we, too, ought to give up our lives for our brothers" (1Jn 3:16). There was no other commandment apart from this for the community, "living the same kind of life as Jesus" (1Jn 2:6). Those who live love and reveal it in their words and attitudes, become Beloved Disciples.

* John 3:17: He loved the world and gave His life to save the world. The word world is found 78 times in John's Gospel, but with different meanings. First, "world" may mean the earth, the space inhabited by human beings (Jn 11:9; 21:25) or the created universe (17:5, 24). In our text, "world" means those who inhabit this earth, the whole of humanity, loved by God, who gave His Son for its sake (cf. Jn 1:9; 4:42; 6:14; 8:12). It may also mean a large number of people, in the sense of "the whole world" (Jn 12:19; 14:27). But in John's Gospel the word "world" means, above all, that part of humanity that is opposed to Jesus and so becomes his "adversary" or "opposition" (Jn 7:4,7; 8:23, 26; 9:39;12:25). This "world", contrary to the liberating practice of Jesus, is dominated by the Adversary, Satan, also is called "prince of the world" (14:30; 16:11), who persecutes and kills the communities of the faithful (16:33), creating injustice, oppression, kept up by those in authority, by those who rule the empire and the synagogue. They practice injustice in the name of God (16:2). The hope that John's Gospel offers to the communities is that Jesus will conquer the prince of this world (12:31). He is stronger than the "world". "In the world you will have trouble, but be brave: I have conquered the world" (16:33).

* John 3:18: The Only Son of God who gives Himself up for us: One of the most ancient and most beautiful titles that the first Christians chose to describe the mission of Jesus is that of Defender. In Hebrew it is *Go'el*. This term used to indicate the closest relative, the oldest brother, who had to redeem his brothers who might be threatened with the loss of their properties (cf. Lev 25:23-55). At the time of the Babylonian exile, every one, including the closest relative, lost everything. Then God became the *Go'el* of His people. He redeemed His people from slavery. In the NT, it is Jesus, the only son, the first-born, the closest relative, who became our *Go'el*. This term or title is translated diversely as savior, redeemer, liberator, advocate, oldest brother, consoler, and so on (cf. Lk 2:11; Jn 4:42; Acts 5:31, etc.). Jesus takes on the defense and the redemption of His family, of His people. He gave himself entirely, completely, so that we, His brothers and sisters, may live again in fraternal love. This was the service He gave us. It was thus that the prophecy of Isaiah that announced the coming of the Servant Messiah was fulfilled. Jesus Himself said, "For the Son of Man Himself did not come to be served

but to serve and to give His life as a ransom (goêl) for many!" (Mk 10:45). Paul expresses this discovery in the following sentence: "He loved me and sacrificed Himself for me!" (Gal 2:20).

c) The mystery of the Trinity in the writings of John:

* Faith in the Most Blessed Trinity is the beginning and end of our belief. Whatever we say today with so much clarity about the Most Blessed Trinity, may be found in the New Testament. It is found there in seminal form and was developed over the centuries. Of the four evangelists, John is the one who helps us most to understand the mystery of the Triune God.

John emphasizes the deep unity between the Father and the Son. The mission of the Son is to reveal the love of the Father (Jn 17:6-8). Jesus comes to proclaim, "The Father and I are one" (Jn 10:30). There is such unity between Jesus and the Father, that those who see the face of the one see also the face of the other. By revealing the Father, Jesus communicates a new spirit, "the Spirit of Truth who proceeds from the Father" (Jn 15:26). At the Son's request (Jn 14:16), the Father sends to each one of us this new Spirit to stay with us. This Spirit, who comes from the Father (Jn 14:16) and from the Son (Jn 16:7-8), reveals the deep unity that exists between Father and Son (Jn 15:26-27). Christians looked to the unity in God in order to understand the unity that should have existed among them (Jn 13:34-35; 17:21).

Today we say, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Apocalypse says, He who is, who was, and who is to come, from the seven spirits in His presence before His throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the First-born from the dead, the Ruler of the kings of the earth (Rev 1:4-5). With these names, John tells us what the communities thought about and hoped for from the Father, in the Son and in the Holy Spirit.

Let us see:

i) In the name of the Father: Alpha and Omega, Is, Was, Will be, Almighty.

Alpha and Omega. We would say A to Z (cf. Isa 44:6; Rev 1:17). God is the beginning and end of history. There is no room for another God! The Christians could not accept the pretence of the Roman Empire that divinized its emperors. Nothing that happens in life can be interpreted as simple coincidence outside the loving providence of this God of ours.

Is, Was, Will be (Rev 1:4, 8; 4:8). Our God is not a distant God. He was with us in the past, is with us now, will be with us in the future. He guides history, is in history, walks with His people. The history of God is the history of His people.

Almighty. This was an imperial title of kings after Alexander the Great. For Christians, the true king is God. This title expresses the creative power with which He guides His people. The title strengthens the certainty of victory and urges us to sing, even now, the joy of the New Heaven and of the New Earth (Rev 21:2).

ii) The name of the Son: Faithful Witness, First-born among the dead, Prince of the kings of the earth.

Faithful Witness: Witness means the same as martyr. Jesus had the courage to witness to the Good News of God the Father. He was faithful until death, and God's answer was the resurrection (Phil 2:9; Heb 5:7).

First-born among the dead: First-born is like saying oldest brother (Col 1:18). Jesus is

the first-born who rises again. His victory over death will also be ours, His brothers and sisters!

Prince of the kings of the earth: This was a title given to Roman Emperors as official propaganda. The Christians gave this title to Jesus. To believe in Jesus was an act of rebellion against the empire and its ideology.

These three titles come from the messianic psalm 89, where the messiah is called Faithful Witness (Ps 89:38), First-born (Ps 89:28) The Most High above the kings of the earth (Ps 89:28). The first Christians took their inspiration from the Bible in order to formulate their doctrine.

iii) The name of the Holy Spirit: Seven lamps, Seven eyes, Seven spirits.

Seven Lamps: In Revelation 4:5, it is said that the seven spirits are the seven lamps burning before the Throne of God. There are seven because they represent the fullness of the action of God in the world. There are seven burning lamps, because they symbolize the action of the Spirit who enlightens, refreshes and purifies (Acts 2:1). They stand before the Throne always ready to respond to any request from God.

Seven Eyes: In Revelation 5:6, it is said that the Lamb has seven eyes, symbol of the seven spirits of God sent throughout the earth. What a beautiful image! Suffice it to look at the Lamb to see the Spirit working there where the Lamb looks, for his eyes are the eyes of the Spirit. It is He who always looks at us!

Seven Spirits: The seven evoke the seven gifts of the Spirit mentioned in the prophet Isaiah and that will rest on the Messiah (Isa 11:2-3). This prophecy comes true in Jesus. The seven Spirits are, at the same time, of God and of Jesus. The same identification of the Spirit with Jesus appears at the end of the seven letters. It is Jesus who speaks in the letters, and at the end of each letter we read, "He who has ears let him hear what the Spirit says to the Churches." Jesus speaks, the Spirit speaks. They are one.

6. Psalm 63: 1-9

O God, my soul thirsts for thee

O God, Thou art my God, I seek Thee,
my soul thirsts for Thee; my flesh faints for Thee,
as in a dry and weary land without water.

So I have looked upon Thee in the sanctuary,
beholding Thy power and glory.

Because Thy steadfast love is better than life,
my lips will praise Thee.

So I will bless Thee as long as I live;
I will lift up my hands and call on Thy name.
My soul is feasted as with marrow and fat,
and my mouth praises Thee with joyful lips,
when I think of Thee upon my bed,
and meditate on Thee in the watches of the night;
for Thou hast been my help,
and in the shadow of Thy wings I sing for joy.

My soul clings to Thee;
Thy right hand upholds me.

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, June 8, 2020

1) Opening prayer

God of wisdom and love,
source of all good,
send Your Spirit to teach us Your truth
and guide our actions
in Your way of peace.

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

2) Gospel Reading - Matthew 5:1-12

Seeing the crowds, Jesus went up onto the mountain. And when He was seated His disciples came to Him.

Then He began to speak. This is what He taught them:

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

Blessed are the gentle; they shall have the earth as inheritance.

Blessed are those who mourn; they shall be comforted.

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

Blessed are the merciful; they shall have mercy shown them.

Blessed are the pure in heart; they shall see God.

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

Blessed are those who are persecuted in the cause of righteousness; the kingdom of Heaven is theirs.

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

3) Reflection

- From today, beginning of the 10th week of Ordinary Time, up to the end of the 21st Week of Ordinary time, the daily Gospels are taken from Matthew. Starting from the beginning of the 22nd week of Ordinary Time, up to the end of the Liturgical Year, the Gospels are taken from Luke.

- In Matthew's Gospel, written for the communities of the converted Jews of Galilee and Syria, Jesus is presented as the New Moses, the new legislator. In the Old Testament the Law of Moses was codified in five books: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. Imitating the ancient model, Matthew presents the New Law in five great discourses spread over in the Gospel: a) the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5:1 to 7:29); b) the Discourse on the Mission (Mt 10:1-42); c) The Discourse of the Parables (Mt 13:1-52); d) The Discourse of the Community (Mt 18:1-35); e) The Discourse on the Future of the Kingdom (Mt 24:1 – 25:46). The narrative parts, which have been put in among the five Discourses, describe the practice of Jesus and show how He observed the New Law and incarnated it in His life.

- Matthew 5: 1-2: The solemn announcement of the New Law. In agreement with the context of the Gospel of Matthew, in the moment when Jesus pronounces the Sermon on the Mount, there were only four disciples with Him (cf. Mt 4:18-22). Few people. But an immense multitude was behind Him (Mt 4: 25). In the Old Testament, Moses went up to Mount Sinai to receive the Law of God. As it happened to Moses, Jesus went up to the Mountain, and seeing the crowd, He proclaimed the New Law. The solemn way in which Matthew introduces the proclamation of the New Law is significant: "Seeing the crowds, He went onto the mountain. And when He was seated His disciples came to Him. Then He began to speak. This is what He taught them: How blessed are the poor in spirit; the kingdom of Heaven is theirs". The eight Beatitudes open in a solemn way the "Sermon on the Mount" – the sermon on the mountain. In them Jesus defines who can be considered blessed, who can enter into the Kingdom. There are eight categories of persons, eight entrance doors to the Kingdom, for the community. There are no other entrances! Anyone who wants to enter into the Kingdom should identify himself with at least one of these eight categories.

- Matthew 5: 3: Blessed are the poor in spirit. Jesus acknowledges the richness and the value of the poor (Mt 11: 25-26). He defines His own mission in these words: "to proclaim the Good News to the poor" (Lk 4:18). He Himself lives in poverty. He possesses nothing for Himself, not even a stone where to rest His head (Mt 8:20). And to anyone who wants to follow Him, He offers a choice: God or money! (Mt 6:24). In Luke's Gospel it is said, "Blessed are you who are poor!" (Lk 6:20). But who is poor in spirit? It is the poor person who has the same spirit that animated Jesus. It is not the rich person, neither the poor person who has the mentality of a rich person. But rather it is the poor person who acts as Jesus: he thinks of the poor and recognizes the value in him. It is the poor person who says, "I think that the world will be better when the little one who suffers thinks of the least."

1. Blessed the poor in spirit => for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven
2. Blessed the meek => they shall have the earth as inheritance
3. Blessed those who mourn => they will be consoled
4. Blessed those who hunger and thirst for justice => they shall have their fill
5. Blessed are the merciful => they shall have mercy shown them
6. Blessed are the pure in heart => they shall see God
7. Blessed are the peacemakers => they shall be recognized as children of God
8. Blessed those persecuted for the cause of justice => theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.

- Matthew 5: 4-9: The new project of life. Every time that in the Bible they try to renew the Covenant, they begin by re-establishing the rights of the poor and the excluded. Without this, the Covenant cannot be renewed! This is the way the Prophets did, this is how Jesus did. In the Beatitudes, He announces the new Project of God, which accepts the poor and the excluded. It denounces the system which excludes the poor and which persecutes those who fight for justice. The first category of the “poor in spirit” and the last category of those “persecuted for the cause of justice” receive the same promise of the Kingdom of Heaven. And they receive it beginning now, in the present, because Jesus says, “theirs **is** the Kingdom!” The Kingdom is already present in their life. Between the first and the last category, there are six other categories which receive the promise of the Kingdom. In them there is the new project of life which wants to reconstruct life totally through a new type of relationship: with **material goods** (the first two); with **persons among themselves** (2nd two); with **God** (3rd two). The Christian community should be an example of this Kingdom, a place where the Kingdom begins and takes shape, beginning now.

- The three duos: First one: the meek and those who mourn: **the meek** are those poor of whom Psalm 37 speaks. They have been deprived of their land and they will inherit it again (Ps 37: 11; cf. Ps 37:22,29,34). Those who mourn are those who weep in the face of injustices in the world and in people (cf. Ps 119:136; Ezek 9:4; Tob 13:16; 2 Pet 2:7). These two Beatitudes want to reconstruct the relationship with material goods: the possession of the land and of the reconciled world.

Second duo: those who hunger and thirst for justice and the merciful: Those who are **hungry and thirsty for justice** are those who desire to renew human living together, in such a way that once again it may be according to the demands of justice. The **merciful** are those who feel in their heart the misery of others because they want to eliminate the inequality among brothers and sisters. These two Beatitudes want to reconstruct the relationship among persons through the practice of justice and solidarity.

Third duo: The pure in heart and the peacemakers: The **pure in heart** are those who have a contemplative look which allows them to perceive the presence of God in everything. Those **who promote peace, the peacemakers**, will be called children of God, because they make an effort so that a new experience of God can penetrate in everything and can integrate all things. These two Beatitudes want to build up the relationship with God: to see the presence of God which acts in everything, and be called son and daughter of God.

- Matthew 5:10-12: The persecuted for the cause of justice and of the Gospel. The Beatitudes say exactly the contrary of what society in which we live says. In fact, in society, those who are persecuted for the cause of justice are considered as unhappy, wretched persons. The poor are unhappy. Blessed is the one who has money and can go to the supermarket and spend as she wishes. Blessed is the one who is hungry for power. The unhappy and wretched are the poor, those who weep! In television, the soap operas diffuse this myth of the happy and fulfilled person. And without being aware, the soap operas become the model of life for many of us. Is there still place in our society for these words of Jesus: “Blessed are those who are persecuted for the cause of justice and

of the Gospel? Blessed are the poor! Blessed are those who weep!”? And from my own perspective, being a Christian, whom do I consider blessed?

4) Personal questions

- We all want to be happy. All of us! But are we truly happy? Why yes? Why no? How can we understand that a person can be poor and happy at the same time?
- In which moments of your life have you felt truly happy? Was it a happiness like the one proclaimed by Jesus in the Beatitudes, or was it of another type?

5) Concluding Prayer

I lift up my eyes to the mountains;
where is my help to come from?
My help comes from the Lord,
who made heaven and earth. (Ps 121:1-2)

Lectio Divina Tuesday, June 9, 2020

1) Opening prayer

God of wisdom and love,
source of all good,
send Your Spirit to teach us Your truth
and guide our actions
in Your way of peace.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, Your Son,
who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

2) Gospel Reading - Matthew 5:13-16

Jesus said to his disciples: "You are the salt of the earth. But if salt loses its taste, with what can it be seasoned? It is no longer good for anything but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. You are the light of the world. A city set on a mountain cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and then put it under a bushel basket; it is set on a lampstand, where it gives light to all in the house. Just so, your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father."

3) Reflection

- Today in the Gospel we receive an important instruction on the mission of the community. It should be the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Mt 5:13-16). Salt does not exist for itself, but to give flavor to the food. Light does not exist for itself, but for the service of people. At the time when Matthew wrote his Gospel, this mission was very difficult for the communities of converted Jews. Although they were living in faithful observance of the Law of Moses, they were expelled from the synagogues, cut away from their Jewish past. Regarding this, among the converted pagans, some said, "After the coming of Jesus, the Law of Moses has become obsolete." All this

caused tension and uncertainty. The openness of some seemed to be criticism of the observance of others, and vice versa. This conflict brought about a crisis which led many to become adamant in their own position. Some wanted to advance, to go ahead, while others wanted to place the light under the table. Many asked themselves, "In the final analysis, what is our mission?" Recalling and updating the words of Jesus, Matthew tries to help them.

- Matthew 5:13-16: Salt of the earth. By using images of daily life, with simple and direct words, Jesus makes known what the mission is and the reason for being a Christian community: to be salt. At that time, when it was very hot, people and animals needed to consume much salt. The salt, which was delivered by merchants in great blocks in the public square, was consumed by the people. What remained fell to the ground and lost its savor. "It no longer serves for anything, but it is thrown out and trampled under people's feet." Jesus recalls this practice in order to clarify for the disciples the mission which they have to carry out.

- Matthew 5:14-16: Light of the world. The comparison is obvious. Nobody lights a candle and places it under the tub. A city built on the hill top cannot be hidden. The community should be light; it should enlighten. It should not be afraid to show the good that it does. It does not do it to make itself seen, but what it does can be seen. The salt does not exist for itself. The light does not exist for itself. This is how the community should be. It cannot remain enclosed in itself. "Your light must shine in people's sight, so that seeing your good works, they may give praise to your Father in Heaven."

- Matthew 5:17-19: Not one dot, not one little stroke will disappear from the Law. Among the converted Jews there were two tendencies. Some thought that it was not necessary to observe the laws of the Old Testament because we are saved by the faith in Jesus and not by the observance of the Law (Rm 3:21-26). There are Christian groups today that believe only this as well. Others thought that they should continue to observe the laws of the Old Testament (Acts 15:1-2). In each of the two tendencies there were even more radical groups. Before this conflict, Matthew tries to find a balance, the equilibrium, over and above the two extremes. The community should be the space where this equilibrium can be attained and lived. The response given by Jesus continued to be very timely: "I have not come to abolish the law, but to complete it!" The communities cannot be against the Law, nor can they close themselves off in the observance of the law. Like Jesus, they must move forward and show in a practical way that the objective which the law wants to attain in life is the perfect practice of love.

Jesus completes the law by His summation: to love one another. He sums it up by example, as well as His instruction (Mk 12:31-33). To believe in Jesus is not just believing some history, it is also believing who Jesus is, and therefore, the importance of following His instruction. To love, and to work in imitation of Jesus in love, demands outward action and a sincere concern and care for every brother and sister in the world, all of God's children, starting with our community.

- The different tendencies in the first Christian communities. The plan of salvation has three stages united among themselves from the earth to life: a) the Old Testament: the path of the Hebrew people, orientated, guided by the Law of God. b) The life of Jesus of Nazareth: it renews the Law of Moses starting from His experience of God, Father

and Mother. c) The life of the communities: through the spirit of Jesus, they tried to live as Jesus lived it. The union of these three stages generates the certainty of faith that God is in our midst. The intention to break or weaken the unity of this plan of salvation gave rise to various groups and tendencies in the communities:

i) The Pharisees did not recognize Jesus as Messiah and accepted only the Old Testament. In the communities there were some people who sympathized with the thought of the Pharisees (Acts 15:5).

ii) Some converted Jews accepted Jesus as Messiah, but they did not accept the liberty of spirit with which the communities lived the presence of the risen Jesus. (Acts 15:1).

iii) Others, both converted Jews and pagans, thought that, with Jesus, had come the end of the Old Testament: from now on, Jesus alone and the life in the Spirit.

iv) There were also Christians who lived so fully the life in the liberty of the Spirit, that they no longer looked at the life of Jesus of Nazareth, nor the Old Testament (1Cor 12:3).

v) Now the great concern of the Gospel of Matthew is to show that the Old Testament, Jesus of Nazareth and the life in the Spirit cannot be separated. The three form part of the same and only plan of God and give us the central certainty of faith: The God of Abraham and of Sarah is present in the midst of the communities by faith in Jesus of Nazareth.

4) Personal questions

- Salt and light are taken for granted today. We have salt in all of our food and electric lights at any time. What would you choose to use instead of salt and light for examples today, and why?
- Through modern travel and technology, our community can be seen (observed) by those next door or by other people or communities across the globe. Is our community a “city on a hill” for the worldwide community? How can we be salt and light for someone nearby as well as in another country?
- Those Jesus sent on the mission went out and did not sit at home or in an office waiting to be visited. How do we “go out” to meet others and other communities near and far on our mission, as individuals, as an individual local community, or as a larger community?

5) Concluding Prayer

Yahweh judiciously guides the humble,
instructing the poor in His way.
Kindness unfailing and constancy mark all His paths,
for those who keep His covenant and His decrees. (Ps 25:9-10)

Lectio Divina Wednesday, June 10, 2020

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

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

2) Gospel Reading - Matthew 5:17-19

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

3) Reflection

- Today's Gospel (Mt 5:17-19) teaches how to observe the law of God in such a way that its practice indicates in what its complete fulfillment consists (Mt 5:17-19). Matthew writes in order to help the communities of converted Jews to overcome the criticism of the brothers of their own race who accused them saying, "You are unfaithful to the Law of Moses." Jesus Himself had been accused of infidelity to the Law of God. Matthew has the clarifying response of Jesus concerning His accusers. Thus, he gives some light to help the communities solve their problems.
- Using images of daily life, with simple and direct words, Jesus had said that the mission of the community, its reason for being, is to be salt and light! He had given some advice regarding each one of the two images. Then follow two or three brief verses of today's Gospel.
- Matthew 5:17-18: Not one dot, nor one stroke is to disappear from the Law. There were several different tendencies in the communities of the first Christians. Some thought that it was not necessary to observe the laws of the Old Testament, because we are saved by faith in Jesus and not by the observance of the Law (Rm 3:21-26). Others accepted Jesus, the Messiah, but they did not accept the liberty of spirit with which some of the communities lived the presence of Jesus. They thought that being Jews they had to continue to observe the laws of the Old Testament (Acts 15:1,5). But there were Christians who lived so fully in the freedom of the Spirit, who no longer looked at the life of Jesus of Nazareth, nor to the Old Testament and they even went so far as to say,

“Anathema Jesus!” (1 Cor 12:3). Observing these tensions, Matthew tries to find some balance between both extremes. The community should be a space where the balance can be attained and lived. The answer given by Jesus to those who criticized Him continued to be timely for the communities: “I have not come to abolish the law, but to complete it!” The communities could not be against the Law, nor could they close themselves off in the observance of the law. Like Jesus, they should advance, and show, in practice, what was the objective which the law wanted to attain in the life of people, that is, in the perfect practice of love.

- Matthew 5:19: Not one dot or stroke will disappear from the Law. It is for those who wanted to get rid of all the law that Matthew recalls the other parable of Jesus: “Anyone who infringes even one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be considered the least in the Kingdom of Heaven; but the person who keeps them and teaches them will be considered great in the Kingdom of Heaven.” The great concern in Matthew’s Gospel is to show that the Old Testament, Jesus of Nazareth and the life in the Spirit cannot be separated. The three of them form part of the same and unique plan of God and communicate to us the certainty of faith: The God of Abraham and of Sarah is present in the midst of the community by faith in Jesus of Nazareth who sends us His Spirit.

4) Personal questions

- Laws are written in the negative: “thou shall not...”. Love is performed in the positive: as service, caring, helping. It is the same with virtues and vices, which each address in a positive and negative way. Take each Commandment and rewrite it in a positive way of action that conforms to an act of love. Can it be done? Can you do what it demands?
- What can we do today for our brothers and sisters who believe faith in Jesus does not demand action as well? How would you approach that attitude? Is yours a faith and a life that shows love in action, or would someone who observes you say they see talk, but not much action as well?

5) Concluding Prayer

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

Lectio Divina Thursday, June 11, 2020

1) Opening prayer

Lord our God,
prompted by the Holy Spirit,
the church of Antioch sent Paul and Barnabas
on their missionary mission among pagans.

Let your Church everywhere send
good, zealous men and women as missionaries.
Fill them with the Holy Spirit and with faith,
that they may touch the hearts of people
and win them as disciples and friends
of Jesus Christ our Lord.

2) Gospel Reading - Matthew 10:7-13

Jesus said to his Apostles: "As you go, make this proclamation: 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, drive out demons. Without cost you have received; without cost you are to give. Do not take gold or silver or copper for your belts; no sack for the journey, or a second tunic, or sandals, or walking stick. The laborer deserves his keep. Whatever town or village you enter, look for a worthy person in it, and stay there until you leave. As you enter a house, wish it peace. If the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it; if not, let your peace return to you."

3) Reflection

- Today is the feast of Saint Barnabas. The Gospel speaks about the teachings of Jesus to the disciples on how to announce the Good News of the Kingdom to "the lost sheep of Israel" (Mt 10:6). They have to a) cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, drive out devils (v. 8); b) announce what they have received gratuitously (v. 8); c) provide themselves with no gold or silver, no sandals, or staff, no sack, or a second tunic (v. 9), d) seek a house where they can be received until the end of the mission (v. 11); e) be bearers of peace (v. 13).
- At the time of Jesus there were various movements which, like Him, were seeking a new way of living and of living together with others. For example, John the Baptist, the Pharisees, the Essenes and others. Many of them formed communities of disciples (Jn 1:35; Lk 11:1; Acts 19:3) and had their missionaries (Mt 23:15). But there was a great difference! The Pharisees, for example, when they went on mission, provided for their needs. They thought that they could not trust the food that people would offer them because it was not always "ritually pure." Because of this they always carried a sack and money so as to be able to take care of what they would eat. In this way, the observance of the law of purity, instead of helping to overcome divisions, weakened the living of community values even more. The proposal of Jesus is different. His method was seen in the counsels which He gives to the apostles when He sends them on mission. Through this instruction, He tries to renew and reorganize the communities of Galilee in a way that they would once again be the expression of the covenant, an example of the Kingdom of God.
- Matthew 10:7: The announcement that the kingdom of Heaven is at hand. Jesus invites the disciples to announce the Good News. They should say, "The kingdom of Heaven is close at hand!" What does it mean that the Kingdom is close at hand? It does not mean the closeness of time, in the sense that it is only a short time and then the Kingdom will come. "The Kingdom is close at hand" means that it is already within reach of the people, it is already "in your midst" (Lk 17:21). It is good to take a new look to be able to see its presence or proximity. The coming of the Kingdom is not the fruit of our

observance, as the Pharisees wanted, but it becomes present in the actions which Jesus recommends to the Apostles: to cure the sick, to raise the dead, to cleanse the lepers, to drive out demons.

- Matthew 10:8: To cure, to raise, to purify, to drive out. The sick, the dead, the lepers, the possessed, were all excluded from living together with others and they were excluded in the name of God. They could not participate in the life of the community. Jesus orders the disciples to accept these people, to include them. The kingdom of God becomes present in these gestures of acceptance and inclusion. In these gestures of human gratuity is shown God's love, which reconstructs communal living and mends interpersonal relationships.

- Matthew 10:9-10: Do not take anything. Unlike other missionaries, the Apostles can take nothing: "Provide yourselves with no gold or silver, not even with copper for your belts, with no sack for the journey or a spare tunic or footwear or a staff, for the laborer deserves his keep." The only thing which you can and should take is peace (Mt 10:13). This means that they have to trust in the hospitality and sharing of the people, because the disciple who does not take anything with him and takes peace indicates that he trusts people. He believes that he will be received, and the people will feel appreciated, valued, and confirmed. The laborer has the right to his nourishment. In doing this, the disciple criticizes the laws of exclusion and recovers the ancient values of sharing and of community living.

- Matthew 10:11-13: To live together and to integrate oneself in the community. Arriving at a place, the disciples have to choose a house of peace and they should remain there until the end. They should not go from one house to the next, but rather live in a stable way. They should become members of the community and work for peace, that is, to reconstruct the human relationships which will favor peace. By means of this practice, they recover an ancient tradition of the people, they criticize the culture of accumulation, typical of the politics of the Roman Empire and they announce a new model of living together.

- Summary: The actions recommended by Jesus to announce the Kingdom are the following: accept the excluded, trust hospitality, encourage sharing, and live stably and in a peaceful way. If this happens, then we can and should cry out openly to the four corners of the world, "The Kingdom is among us!" To proclaim the Kingdom does not consist, in the first place, of teaching truth and doctrine, catechism and Canon Law, but to lead persons to a new way of living and of living together with others, to a new way of thinking and acting, starting with the Good News, brought by Jesus: God is Father and Mother, and therefore, we are all brothers and sisters.

4) Personal questions

- Why are all these attitudes recommended by Jesus signs of the Kingdom of God in our midst?
- How would you announce the Kingdom among us today? To whom would you need or want to announce it?
- In making this announcement, by being an example of the Kingdom in action, to go on this mission, it is an invitation to the hearer to come closer to Christ and the Church.

Action goes hand-in-hand with knowledge and an understanding of what the community is about. What would be your next steps in bringing someone closer to the community, Jesus, and His Church?

- Do these instructions help us to discern true disciples of Jesus from those who use His name to distort the truth and build a big bank account for themselves?

For further knowledge

Many religious orders other than the Order of Carmelites, as communities, build on these missionary instructions of Jesus as well. The Benedictines take a vow of stability, to not move from place to place. Others, of the mendicant movement such as Franciscans and Dominicans, rely on the material support of others. Take some time today to look into and read about the various Orders and the ways they have chosen to announce the Kingdom of God in the world.

5) Concluding Prayer

Sing a new song to Yahweh,
for He has performed wonders,
His saving power is in His right hand and His holy arm. (Ps 98:1)

Lectio Divina Friday, June 12, 2020

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

God of wisdom and love,
source of all good,
send Your Spirit to teach us Your truth
and guide our actions
in Your way of peace.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, Your Son,
who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

2) Gospel Reading - Matthew 5:27-32

Jesus said to his disciples: "You have heard that it was said, You shall not commit adultery. But I say to you, everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one of your members than to have your whole body thrown into Gehenna. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one of your members than to have your whole body go into Gehenna. "It was also said, Whoever divorces his wife must give her a bill of divorce. But I say to you, whoever divorces his wife (unless the marriage is unlawful) causes her to commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery."

3) Reflection

- In yesterday's Gospel, Jesus offered a rereading of the commandment: "Do not kill" (Mt 5:20-26). In today's Gospel Jesus rereads the commandment "*You shall not commit adultery.*" Jesus rereads the law starting from the intention that God had which was proclaimed centuries before on Mount Sinai. He seeks the spirit of the Law and does not limit himself to the letter. He takes up again and defends the great values of human life which constitute the background of each one of these Ten Commandments. He insists on love, on fidelity, on mercy, on justice, on truth, on humanity (Mt 9:13; 12:7; 23:23; Mt 5:10; 5:20; Lk 11:42; 18:9). The result of the full observance of the Law of God humanizes the person. In Jesus we can see what happens when a person allows God to fill his life. The last objective is that of uniting both loves and the building up of fraternity in defense of life. The greater the fraternity, the greater will be the fullness of life and greater will be the adoration given by all creatures to God, Creator and Savior.
- In today's Gospel, Jesus looks closely at the man-woman relationship in marriage, a fundamental basis of human living together. There was a commandment which said, "Do not commit adultery" and another one which said, "Anyone who divorces his wife, has to give her a certificate of divorce." Jesus takes up again both commandments, giving them a new meaning.
- Matthew 5:27-28: *Do not commit adultery.* What does this commandment require from us? The ancient response was: a man cannot sleep with somebody else's wife. This was demanded by the letter of the commandment. But Jesus goes beyond, surpasses the letter and says, "*But I say to you, if a man looks at a woman lustfully, he has already committed adultery with her in his heart.*"

The objective of the commandment is reciprocal fidelity between man and woman who assume life together, as a married couple. This fidelity will be complete only if both know how to be faithful to one another in thought and in desire and have a total transparency between them.

- Matthew 5:29-30: *Tear out your eye and cut off your hand.* To illustrate what Jesus has just said, He states a hard word which He uses on another occasion when He speaks of scandal to little ones (Mt 18:9; Mk 9:47). He says that if your right eye should be your downfall tear it out and throw it away, for it will do you less harm to lose one part of yourself than to have to have your whole body thrown into hell. He affirms the same thing concerning the hand. These affirmations cannot be taken literally. They indicate the radical nature and the seriousness with which Jesus insists on the observance of this commandment. It means that if something in your life is causing you to sin, get rid of it!

Today there are many things which might drive or tempt us to sin, or to consider sin. It may be the Internet, a television show, money, etc. These things expose us to consider sinning perhaps, and if so, are best removed from our life in order "To be perfect as the Heavenly Father is perfect!" (Mt 5:48). To rephrase Jesus' advice in today's language: "if the TV causes you to sin, or tempts you to sin, or teaches you how to sin, turn the TV off!"

• Matthew 5:31-32: *The question of divorce. The man was permitted to give a certificate of divorce to the woman. In the discourse of the community, Jesus will say that Moses permitted this because the people were hardhearted (Mt 19:8). “But I say to you: anyone who divorces his wife, give her a certificate of divorce; but I say to you: anyone who divorces his wife, except in the case of concubinage, exposes her to adultery, and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.”* There has been much discussion on this theme. Basing itself on this affirmation of Jesus, the Eastern Church permits divorce in case of “fornication,” that is, of infidelity. Others say that here the word fornication is the translation of an Aramaic or Hebrew word *zenuth* which indicated a marriage among people who were relatives, and which was forbidden. It would not be a valid marriage. In the Western Church as well, this only applies to valid marriages and where both parties are capable of understanding what marriage means, that it is not just a “lifestyle”. Where the marriage is not valid, there is not a divorce.

• Leaving aside the correct interpretation of this word, what is important is to see the objective and the general sense of the affirmation of Jesus in the new reading which is done of the Ten Commandments. Jesus speaks about an ideal which should always be before my eyes. The definitive ideal is “to be perfect as the Heavenly Father is perfect” (Mt 5:48). This ideal is valid for all the commandments reviewed by Jesus. In the rereading of the commandment “Do not commit adultery,” this ideal is translated as transparency, honesty, and chastity between husband and wife. However, nobody can say, “I am perfect as the Heavenly Father is perfect.” We can never merit the reward because we can never be perfect. What is important is to continue walking on the road and always turn our eyes toward the ideal. At the same time, as Jesus did, we have to accept people with the same mercy with which He accepted people and directed them toward the ideal.

4) Personal questions

- How do you live in society today, with a constant flow of advertising based on immodesty, and still live within the advice of Jesus?
- How is this to be understood: “to be perfect like the Heavenly Father is perfect?”

5) Concluding Prayer

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.
(Ps 27:8-9)

Lectio Divina Saturday, June 13, 2020

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

God of wisdom and love,
source of all good,
send Your Spirit to teach us Your truth
and guide our actions
in Your way of peace.

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

2) Gospel Reading - Matthew 5:33-37

Jesus said to his disciples: "You have heard that it was said to your ancestors, Do not take a false oath, but make good to the Lord all that you vow. But I say to you, do not swear at all; not by heaven, for it is God's throne; nor by the earth, for it is his footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. Do not swear by your head, for you cannot make a single hair white or black. Let your 'Yes' mean 'Yes,' and your 'No' mean 'No.' Anything more is from the Evil One."

3) Reflection

- In today's Gospel, Jesus rereads the commandment: "Do not commit perjury." And here also He surpasses the letter, concerning the spirit of the law, and seeks to indicate the ultimate goal of this commandment: to attain total transparency in relationships among people. Here we can apply what we said concerning the two commandments "Do not kill" and "Do not commit adultery." It is a question of a new way of interpreting and setting into practice the law of Moses, starting from the new experience of God the Father which Jesus has brought to us. He rereads the law beginning with the intention that God had in proclaiming it centuries ago on Mount Sinai.

- Matthew 5:33: It was said to our ancestors: you must not swear. The Law of the Old Testament said, "Do not commit perjury" and it added that the person should swear for the Lord. In the Psalms it is said that "one can go up to the Mountain of Yahweh and reach the holy place, if he has innocent hands and a pure heart, and does not confide in idols, nor swear in order to deceive"(Ps 24:4). The same thing is said in other parts of the Old Testament (Eccl 5:3-4), because one must be able to trust the words of others. In order to promote this reciprocal trust, tradition had invented the help of the oath. In order to strengthen one's own word, the person would swear on someone or on something which was greater than he and who could punish him if he did not do what he had promised. Things continue to be like this up to the present time. Whether in the Church or in society, there are some moments and occasions which demand a solemn oath from people. In the final analysis, the oath is the expression of the conviction that nobody can completely trust the word of another.

- Matthew 5:34-36: But I say to you: do not swear. Jesus wants to heal this defect. It is not enough “not to swear.” He goes beyond and affirms: “But I say to you: do not swear at all: either by heaven, since that is God’s throne; or by earth, since that is His footstool, or by Jerusalem, since that is the city of the great King. Do not swear by your own head either, since you cannot turn a single hair white or black. All you need to say is ‘Yes’ if you mean yes, and ‘No’ if you mean no. Anything more than this comes from the Evil One.”

They would swear on heaven and on earth, on the city of Jerusalem, on their own head. Jesus shows that all that does not cure the pain and suffering from the lack of transparency and trust among people. What is the solution which He proposes?

- Matthew 5:37: Let your speech be yes, yes; no, no. The solution which God proposes is the following: Let your speech be yes, yes; no, no; anything more than this comes from the Evil One. He proposes a radical and total honesty. Nothing more. Anything more that you say comes from the Evil One. Here again, we are confronted with an objective which will always remain in our mind and which we will never succeed in fulfilling completely. It is another expression of the new ideal of justice which Jesus proposes: “to be perfect like the Heavenly Father is perfect” (Mt 5:48). Jesus uproots any attempt to create the conviction that I am saved because I observe the law. Nobody can merit God’s grace, because otherwise it would not be a grace. We observe the Law, not in order to merit salvation, but in order to thank with all our heart for the immense gratuitous goodness of God, who accepts us and saves us without any merit on our part.

4) Personal questions

- How honest is my speech? How honest am I with myself as I answer that?
- Is Jesus addressing intent in this instruction, to be trustworthy without external aids?
 - Or is He addressing the hypocrisy of having one truth when speaking and another when under oath?
 - Or is He giving instructions to not do a physical act, as one might be asked to do in a modern courtroom?

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 Sunday, June 14, 2020

Jesus is the Bread of Life

“Anyone who eats this Bread will live forever”

John 6:51-58

1. Opening prayer

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

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

2. Reading

a) A key to the reading:

On the Feast of the Body and Blood of Christ we meditate on the last part of the long discourse on the Bread of Life. During this discourse, the Gospel of John helps us to understand the deep meaning of the multiplication of the bread and of the Eucharist. During the reading, we will try to be attentive to the words of Jesus which help people to understand the sign of the Bread of Life.

b) A division of the Text to help in the reading:

John 6:51: The initial affirmation which summarizes everything

John 6:52: The contrary reaction of the Jews

John 6: 53-54: Jesus’ response affirms what He said before

John 6:55-58: Jesus draws the conclusion for life

c) The Text:

51 I am the living bread which has come down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live for ever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, for the life of the world.' 52 Then the Jews started arguing among themselves, 'How can this man give us his flesh to eat?' 53 Jesus replied to them, ' In all truth I tell you, if you do not eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. 54 Anyone who does eat My flesh and drink My blood has eternal life, and I shall raise that person up on the



last day. 55 For My flesh is real food and My blood is real drink. 56 Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood lives in Me and I live in that person. 57 As the living Father sent Me and I draw life from the Father, so whoever eats Me will also draw life from Me. 58 This is the bread which has come down from heaven; it is not like the bread our ancestors ate: they are dead, but anyone who eats this bread will live forever.

3. A moment of prayerful silence

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

4. Some questions

to help us in our personal reflection.

- a) Which part of the text struck me the most? Why?
- b) How many times in the text is the word **life** used, and what does it tell us about life?
- c) Jesus says, "I am the living Bread which has come down from heaven". What does this mean? Look for an answer in the text.
- d) What does this text tell us about the Person of Jesus: titles, functions, etc.?
- e) In what way does this text help us to understand better the significance of the Eucharist?

5. For those who desire to go deeper into the discourse of the Bread of Life.

a) Context in which our text is situated in the discourse of the Bread of Life:

The discourse on the Bread of Life (Jn 6:22-71) is a sequence of seven brief dialogues between Jesus and the persons who were with Him after the multiplication of the loaves. Jesus tries to open the eyes of people, making them understand that it is not sufficient to struggle to get the material bread. The daily struggle for material bread does not touch the roots if it is not accompanied by mysticism. The human being does not only live by bread! (Deut 8:3) The seven brief dialogues are a very beautiful catechesis which explains to people the profound significance of the multiplication of the loaves and of the Eucharist. Throughout the dialogue appear the exigencies which the living out of faith in Jesus traces for our life. People react. They remain surprised by the words of Jesus. But Jesus does not give in. He does not change His requirements. And because of this, many abandon Him. Even now the same thing happens: when the Gospel begins to demand a commitment, many people abandon it. Insofar as the discourse of Jesus advances, less people remain around Him. At the end, only the twelve remain and Jesus cannot even count on them!

Here is the sequence of the seven dialogues which compose the long discourse on the Bread of Life:

John 6: 22-27:

1st Dialogue: People seek Jesus because they want more bread

John 6: 28-33:

2nd Dialogue: Jesus asks the people to work for the true bread

John 6: 34-40:

3rd Dialogue: The true bread is to do the will of God

John 6: 41-51:

4th Dialogue: He who opens himself to God accepts Jesus and His proposal

John 6: 52-58:

5th Dialogue: Flesh and Blood: expression of life and of the total gift

John 6: 59-66:

6th Dialogue: Without the light of the Spirit these words cannot be understood

John 6: 67-71:

7th Dialogue: Peter's confession

b) Comment on the seven dialogues which make up the discourse of the Bread of Life:

The year 2005 is the Year of the Eucharist. This is the reason why, instead of commenting only on the eight verses of the Gospel of this Sunday (John 6: 51-58), we have thought of giving a general key to understand the seven brief dialogues which make up the whole discourse. A global vision of the whole will help to clarify the meaning and the importance of the eight verses of the liturgical text of this day of Corpus Christi.

1st Dialogue - John 6: 22-27: The people look for Jesus because they want more bread

22 Next day, the crowd that had stayed on the other side saw that only one boat had been there, and that Jesus had not got into the boat with His disciples, but that the disciples had set off by themselves. 23 Other boats, however, had put in from Tiberias, near the place where the bread had been eaten. 24 When the people saw that neither Jesus nor His disciples were there, they got into those boats and crossed to Capernaum to look for Jesus. 25 When they found Him on the other side, they said to Him, 'Rabbi, when did you come here?' 26 Jesus answered, 'In all truth I tell you, you are looking for Me not because you have seen the signs but because you had all the bread you wanted to eat. 27 Do not work for food that goes bad, but work for food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you, for on Him the Father, God Himself, has set His seal.

The people see the miracle, but they do not understand that it is a question of a **sign** of something greater and more profound. They stop only on the superficial aspect of the fact, in the distribution of the food. They look for the bread of life, but only for the body. According to the people, Jesus does something which Moses had already done in the past: feed everyone. And the people wanted the past to be repeated. But Jesus asks the people to take one more step. Do not work for food that goes bad, but work for food that endures for eternal life.

2nd Dialogue – John 6: 28-33: Jesus asks the people to work for the true bread

28 Then they said to Him, 'What must we do if we are to carry out God's work?' 29 Jesus gave them this answer, 'This is carrying out God's work: you must believe in the One He has sent.' 30 So they said, 'What sign will You yourself do, the sight of which will make us believe in You? What work will You do?' 31 Our fathers ate manna in the desert; as scripture says, "He gave them bread from heaven to eat." 32 Jesus answered them. ' In all truth I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, it is my Father who gives you the bread from heaven, the true bread; 33 for the bread of God is the bread which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.'

The people asked, 'What must we do if we are to carry out God's work?' And Jesus answers, 'Believe in the One God has sent!' That is, believe in Jesus. And the people react, 'Give us a sign to understand that You are truly the One sent by God. Our fathers ate the manna that Moses gave them! According to the people, Moses is and continues to be the great leader, in whom to believe. If Jesus wants the people to believe in Him, He has to give them a greater sign than that given by Moses. Jesus answers that the bread given by Moses was not the true bread, because it did not guarantee the life of anyone. All died in the desert. The true bread of God is the one which overcomes death and gives life! Jesus tries to help people to liberate themselves from the schema of the past. For Jesus, fidelity to the past does not mean to close up oneself in the things of the past and to refuse or reject renewal. Fidelity to the past means to accept what is new, which is the fruit of the seed planted in the past.

3rd Dialogue - John 6: 34-40: The true bread is to do the will of God.

34 'Sir,' they said, 'give us that bread always.' 35 Jesus answered them, 'I am the bread of life. No one who comes to Me will ever hunger; no one who believes in Me will ever thirst. 36 But, as I have told you, you can see Me and still you do not believe. 37 Everyone whom the Father gives Me will come to Me; I will certainly not reject anyone who comes to Me, 38 because I have come from heaven, not to do My own will, but to do the will of Him who sent Me. 39 Now the will of Him who sent Me is that I should lose nothing of all that He has given to Me, but that I should raise it up on the last day. 40 It is my Father's will that whoever sees the Son and believes in Him should have eternal life, and that I should raise that person up on the last day.'

The people said, 'Lord, give us that bread always!' They thought that Jesus was speaking of a special bread. Then, Jesus answers clearly, 'I am the bread of life!' To eat the bread of heaven is the same as believing in Jesus and accepting the path that He has shown us, that is, "My food is to do the will of the Father who is in heaven!" (Jn 4: 34). This is the true food which nourishes the person, which always gives us new life. It is a seed that guarantees resurrection!

4th Dialogue – John 6: 41-51: He who opens himself to God accepts Jesus and His proposal

41 Meanwhile the Jews were complaining to each other about Him, because He had said, 'I am the bread that has come down from heaven.' 42 They were saying, 'Surely this is Jesus son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know. How can He now say, "I have come down from heaven?" ' 43 Jesus said in reply to them, 'Stop complaining to each other. 44 'No one can come to Me unless drawn by the Father who sent Me, and I will raise that person up on the last day. 45 It is written in the prophets, They will all be taught by God; everyone who has listened to the Father, and learned from Him, comes to me. 46 Not that anybody has seen the Father, except Him who has His being from God: He has seen the Father. 47 In all truth I tell you, everyone who believes has eternal life. 48 I am the bread of life. 49 Your fathers ate manna in the desert and they are dead; 50 but this is the bread which comes down from heaven, so that a person may eat it and not die. 51 I am the living bread which has come down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live for ever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, for the life of the world.'

The discourse becomes more demanding. Now it is the Jews, that is, the leaders of the people, who murmur, “Is He not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can He say that He has come down from heaven?” They considered themselves capable of knowing and of recognizing the things that come from God. But they are mistaken. If they were truly open to the things of God, they would feel the impulse of God in themselves which attracts them toward Jesus and would recognize that Jesus comes from God (Jn 6: 45). In the celebration of the Passover, the Jews remembered the bread of the desert. Jesus helps them to take a step forward. The one who celebrates the Passover remembering only the bread which the fathers ate in the desert, will die just as all of them died! The true meaning of the Passover is not that of recalling the manna which in the past fell from heaven, but to accept Jesus, the Bread of Life who came down from Heaven and to follow the path that He has traced. It does not mean to eat the flesh of the paschal lamb, but the flesh of Jesus, who came down from heaven to give life to the world!

5th Dialogue - John 6: 52-58: Flesh and Blood: the expression of life and of the total gift.

52 Then the Jews started arguing among themselves, 'How can this man give us His flesh to eat?' 53 Jesus replied to them, ' In all truth I tell you, if you do not eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. 54 Anyone who does eat My flesh and drink My blood has eternal life, and I shall raise that person up on the last day. 55 For My flesh is real food and My blood is real drink. 56 Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood lives in Me and I live in that person. 57 As the living Father sent Me and I draw life from the Father, so whoever eats Me will also draw life from Me. 58 This is the bread which has come down from heaven; it is not like the bread our ancestors ate: they are dead, but anyone who eats this bread will live for ever.'

The Jews reacted, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” They did not understand these words of Jesus, because the profound respect for life demanded that from the time of the Old Testament it was forbidden to drink blood, because the blood was the sign of life (Deut 12:16, 23). Besides, it was close to the Passover and in a few days everyone would have eaten the meat and the blood of the Paschal Lamb in the celebration of the night of the Passover. They took the words of Jesus literally. That is why they did not understand. To eat the flesh of Jesus meant to accept Jesus as the new Paschal Lamb. His blood will free them from slavery. To drink the blood of Jesus meant to assimilate His way of life which characterized the life of Jesus. What gives life is not to celebrate the manna of the past, but rather to eat this new bread which is Jesus, His flesh and His blood. Participating in the Eucharistic Supper, we assimilate His life, His gift of self, His dedication.

6th Dialogue – John 6:59-66: Without the light of the Spirit these words cannot be understood,

59 This is what He taught at Capernaum in the synagogue. 60 After hearing it, many of His followers said, 'This is intolerable language. How could anyone accept it?' 61 Jesus was aware that His followers were complaining about it and said, 'Does this disturb you? 62 What if you should see the Son of Man ascend to where He was before? 63 'It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh has nothing to offer. The words I have spoken to

you are spirit and they are life. 64 'But there are some of you who do not believe.' For Jesus knew from the outset who did not believe and who was to betray Him. 65 He went on, 'This is why I told you that no one could come to Me except by the gift of the Father.' 66 After this, many of His disciples went away and accompanied Him no more.

Here ends the discourse of Jesus in the synagogue at Capernaum. Many of His disciples thought, 'Jesus is exaggerating too much! He is putting an end to the celebration of the Passover! He is taking the central place of our religion!' For this reason many people abandoned the community and no longer followed Jesus. Jesus reacted by saying, "It is the spirit who gives life; the flesh has nothing to offer. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life". We should not take what he says literally. It is only with the help of the light of the Holy Spirit that it is possible to understand the full meaning of everything that Jesus says (Jn 14: 25-26; 16: 12-13).

7th Dialogue - Jn 6: 67-71: Confession of Peter.

67 Then Jesus said to the Twelve, 'What about you, do you want to go away too?' 68 Simon Peter answered, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the message of eternal life, 69 and we believe; we have come to know that You are the Holy One of God.' 70 Jesus replied to them, 'Did I not choose the Twelve of you? Yet one of you is a devil.' 71 He meant Judas son of Simon Iscariot, since this was the man, one of the Twelve, who was to betray Him.

At the end only the twelve remained. Jesus said to them, "What about you, do you want to go away too?" For Jesus, what is important is not the number of people who are around Him. He does not change the discourse when the message does not please others. Jesus speaks to reveal the Father and not to please others.

He prefers to remain alone, more than being accompanied by persons who do not accept the Father's project. The response of Peter is beautiful: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the message of eternal life!" Even without understanding everything, Peter accepts Jesus and believes in Him. In spite of all his limitations, Peter is not like Nicodemus, who wished to see everything clearly, to confirm his own ideas.

a) To deepen more: Eucharist and New Exodus

In describing the multiplication of the loaves, the Gospel of John suggests a parallel with Exodus: Jesus who walks on the water and the discourse of the Bread of Life. This parallel shows that through the Eucharist a new Exodus takes place. The Eucharist helps us to live in a permanent state of Exodus:

i) The multiplication of the loaves (Jn 6:1-15):

Jesus has before Him a hungry crowd and the challenge to guarantee bread for all. Even though Moses had to face this challenge during the time of itinerancy of the people in the desert (Ex 16: 1-35; Num 11: 18-23). After having eaten, the people fed and satisfied recognize in Jesus the new Moses, the "Prophet who is to come into the world" (Jn 6:14), according to what has been announced in the Law of the Covenant (Deut 18:15-22).

ii) Jesus walks on the water (Jn 6:16-21):

In Exodus, the people are itinerant in order to obtain freedom and face and overcome the sea (Ex 14:22). Jesus also, like Moses, dominates and overcomes the sea, preventing the boat of his disciples from being swallowed up by the waves, and does in such a way that they get safely to the other shore.

iii) The discourse on the Bread of Life (Jn 6: 22-58):

The discourse evokes Chapter 16 of the book of Exodus which describes the story of the manna. When Jesus speaks of “a food which does not perish” (Jn 6:27) He hears some people “murmuring” or complaining against Jesus (Jn 6: 41), do the same thing that the Israelites in the desert, who doubted the presence of God in their long journey (Ex 16: 2; 17: 3; Num 11:1). The Jews doubted the presence of God in Jesus of Nazareth (Jn 6: 42). Jesus is the true Manna who gives us eternal life.

6. Psalm 85 (84)

Justice and Peace embrace one another

Yahweh, You are gracious to Your land,
You bring back the captives of Jacob,
You take away the guilt of Your people,
You blot out all their sins.
You retract all Your anger,
you renounce the heat of your fury.

Bring us back, God our Savior,
appease Your indignation against us!
Will You be angry with us for ever?
Will You prolong your wrath age after age?
Will You not give us life again,
for Your people to rejoice in You?
Show us, Lord, Your faithful love,
grant us Your saving help.

I am listening. What is God's message?
Yahweh's message is peace for His people,
for His faithful, if only they renounce their folly.
His saving help is near for those who fear Him,
His glory will dwell in our land.
Faithful love and loyalty join together,
Saving justice and peace embrace.
Loyalty will spring up from the earth,
and justice will lean down from heaven.

Yahweh will Himself give prosperity,
and our soil will yield its harvest.
Justice will walk before Him,
treading out a path.

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, June 15, 2020

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Almighty God,
our hope and our strength,
without You we falter.
Help us to follow Christ
and to live according to Your will.
Who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

2) Gospel Reading - Matthew 5:38-42

Jesus said to his disciples: "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, offer no resistance to one who is evil. When someone strikes you on your right cheek, turn the other one to him as well. If anyone wants to go to law with you over your tunic, hand him your cloak as well. Should anyone press you into service for one mile, go with him for two miles. Give to the one who asks of you, and do not turn your back on one who wants to borrow."

3) Reflection

- Today's Gospel forms part of a small literary unit which goes from Mt 5:17 to Mt 5:48, which describes how to pass from the ancient justice of the Pharisees (Mt 5:20) to the new justice of the Kingdom of God (Mt 5:48). It describes how to go up to the Mount of the Beatitudes, from where Jesus announces the new Law of love. The great desire of the Pharisees was to live in justice, to be just before God. This is the desire of all of us. Just is the one who succeeds in living where God wants him/her to live. The Pharisees tried to attain justice through the strict observance of the Law. They thought that with their own effort they could succeed in being where God wanted them to be. Jesus takes a stand concerning this practice and announces the new justice which should surpass the justice of the Pharisees (Mt 5:20). In today's Gospel we are almost reaching the summit of the mountain. Only a little is lacking. The summit is described in one sentence: "Be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 5:48), on which we will meditate in tomorrow's Gospel. Let us look closely at this last degree which is still lacking to reach the summit of the mountain, of which Saint John of the Cross says, "Here reign silence and love."

- Matthew 5:38: Eye for eye and tooth for tooth. Jesus quotes a text of the Ancient Law saying, “You have heard how it was said: Eye for eye and tooth for tooth!” He shortened the text, because the complete text said: “Life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, blow for blow” (Ex 21:23-25). As in the previous cases, here Jesus makes a completely new rereading. The principle “eye for eye, tooth for tooth” was already found in the origin of the interpretation which the scribes made of the law. This principle should be overthrown, because it perverts and destroys the relationship among people and with God.

- Matthew 5:39^a: Do not give back evil for evil received. Jesus affirms exactly the contrary: “But I say to you do not offer resistance to the wicked.” When some violence is received, our natural reaction is to pay the other one with the same coin. Vengeance asks for “eye for eye, tooth for tooth.” Jesus asks to pay back the evil not with evil, but with good. Because if we do not know how to overcome the violence received, the spiral of violence will take up everything and we will not know what to do. Lamech said: For a wound received I will kill a man, and for a scar I would kill a young person. If the vengeance of Cain was worth seven, then Lamech will count for seventy-seven” (Gen 4:24). And it was precisely because of this terrible act of vengeance that everything ended in the confusion of the Tower of Babel. (Gen 11:1-9). Faithful to the teaching of Jesus, Paul writes in the letter to the Romans: “Never pay back evil with evil; let your concern be to do good to all men. Do not allow yourselves to be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good” (Rom 12:17,21). To be able to have this attitude it is necessary to have much faith in the possibility of recovery that the human being has. How can we do this in practice? Jesus offers four concrete examples.

- Matthew 5:39b-42: the four examples to overcome the spiral of violence. Jesus says: “rather (a) if anyone hits you on the right cheek, offer him the other as well; (b) if anyone wishes to go to Law with you to get your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. (c) And if anyone requires you to go one mile, go two miles with him. (d) Give to anyone who asks you, and if anyone wants to borrow, do not turn away” (Mt 5:40-42). How are these four affirmations to be understood? Jesus Himself helps us to understand. When the soldier hit Him on the cheek, He did not offer the other cheek explicitly and invite another strike. Rather, by not threatening or not blocking another blow, He still “offers” the other cheek. At the same time, He reacted with energy: “If there is some offense in what I said, point it out, but if not, why do you strike Me?” (Jn 18:23) Jesus does not teach us to be passive. Saint Paul thinks that paying evil with good “you will make others be ashamed” (Rom 12:20). This faith in the possibility to recover the human being is possible only beginning from the root which comes from the total gratuity of the creative love which God shows us in the life and the attitudes of Jesus.

4) Personal questions

- Have you ever felt within you such a great anger as to want to apply the vengeance “eye for eye, tooth for tooth”? What did you do to overcome this?
- In your daily life, how would you implement or act out the four examples in Matthew 5:39b-42?
- How can these affirmations of Jesus be applied to immigration and allowing immigration into the country?

- Many times, people will *agree* with affirmations such as these, and then give a *BUT*... and proclaim exclusions, exceptions, and limitations. Consider real-life modern situations that suggest an opportunity for “turning the other cheek”, “giving more than is asked”, “eye for an eye”, etc. Do you too have a *BUT*, or *ONLY IF* limitation in your answer? Would Jesus say the same thing?

5) Concluding Prayer

Give ear to my words, Yahweh,
spare a thought for my sighing.
Listen to my cry for help,
my King and my God! To You I pray. (Ps 5:1-2)

Lectio Divina Tuesday, June 16, 2020

1) OPENING PRAYER

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

2) GOSPEL READING - MATTHEW 5:43-48

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

3) REFLECTION

In today's Gospel we see how Jesus has interpreted the commandment "You shall not kill" in such a way that its observance leads to the practice of love. Besides saying "You shall not kill" (Mt 5:21), Jesus quoted four other commandments of the ancient law: you shall not commit adultery (Mt 5:27), you shall not bear false witness (Mt 5:33), eye for eye, and tooth for tooth (Mt 5:38) and, in today's Gospel, you shall love your

neighbor and will hate your enemy (Mt 5:43), five times, Jesus criticizes and completes the ancient way of observing these commandments and indicates the new way to attain the objective of the law, which is the practice of love (Mt 5:22-26; 5:28-32; 5:34-37; 5:39-42; 5:44-48).

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

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

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

4) PERSONAL QUESTIONS

Am I capable to love my enemies?

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

5) CONCLUDING PRAYER

How blessed are those whose way is blameless,
who walk in the Law of Yahweh!

Blessed are those who observe His instructions,
who seek Him with all their hearts (Ps 119,1-2)

Lectio Divina Wednesday, June 17, 2020

1) Opening prayer

Almighty God,
our hope and our strength,
without You we falter.
Help us to follow Christ
and to live according to Your will.
Who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

2) Gospel Reading - Matthew 6:1-6,16-18

Jesus said to his disciples: "Take care not to perform righteous deeds in order that people may see them; otherwise, you will have no recompense from your heavenly Father. When you give alms, do not blow a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets to win the praise of others. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right is doing, so that your almsgiving may be secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you. "When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, who love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on street corners so that others may see them. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you. "When you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites. They neglect their appearance, so that they may appear to others to be fasting. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you may not appear to others to be fasting, except to your Father who is hidden. And your Father who sees what is hidden will repay you."

3) Reflection

- The Gospel of today continues the meditation on the Sermon on the Mount. In the previous days we have reflected at length on the message of chapter 5 of Matthew's Gospel. In today's Gospel, and the following days, we meditate on the message of

chapter 6 of this Gospel. The sequence of chapters 5 and 6 can help us to understand it. The following is the schema:

Matthew 5:13-12: The Beatitudes: solemn opening of the new Law

Matthew 5:13-16: The new presence in the world: Salt of the earth and light of the world

Matthew 5:17-19: The new practice of justice; relationship with the ancient law

Matthew 5:20-48: The new practice of justice: observing the new Law.

Matthew 6:1-4: The new practice of piety: alms

Matthew 6:5-15: The new practice of the works of piety: prayer

Matthew 6:16-18: The new practice of the works of piety: fasting

Matthew 6:19-21: New relationship to material goods: do not accumulate

Matthew 6:22-23: New relationship to material goods: correct vision

Matthew 6:24: New relationship to material goods: God and money

Matthew 6:25-34: New relationship to material goods: abandonment to Providence.

Today's Gospel treats three themes: almsgiving (6:1-4), prayer (6:5-6) and fasting (6:16-18). These are three works of piety of the Jews.

- Matthew 6:1: Be careful not to parade your uprightness to attract attention. Jesus criticizes those who do good works to be seen by others (Mt 6:1). Jesus says to build up interior security not in what we do for God, but in what God does for us. From the advice that He gives comes a new type of relationship with God: "Your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you" (Mt 6:4). "Your Father knows what you need before you ask him" (Mt 6:8). "If you forgive others their failings, your heavenly Father will forgive your failings" (Mt 6:14). It is a new way which opens itself now to have access to the heart of God our Father. Jesus does not allow the practice of justice and piety to be used as a means for self promotion before God and before the community (Mt 6:2,5,16).

- Matthew 6:2-4: How to practice almsgiving. To give alms is a way of sharing, and highly recommended by the first Christians (Acts 2:44-45; 4:32-35). The person who practices almsgiving and sharing to promote themselves before others merits exclusion from the community, as it happened to Ananias and Saphira (Acts 5:1-11). Today, in society as well as in the Church, there are people who make great publicity of the good that they do for others. Jesus asks the contrary: do good in such a way that the left hand does not know what the right hand does. It is the total detachment and the total gift in total gratuity of the love which believes in God the Father and imitates all that He does.

- Matthew 6:5-6: How to practice prayer. Prayer places the person in direct relationship with God. Some Pharisees transformed prayer into an occasion to show themselves before others. At that time, when the trumpet sounded at the three moments of prayer; morning, noon and evening, they should stop where they were to pray. There were people who sought to be in the corners in public places, in such a way that everybody would see that they were praying. Well, such an attitude perverts our relationship with God. This is false and has no sense. This is why Jesus says that it is better to close up ourselves in our rooms to pray in secret, maintaining the authenticity of the relationship. God sees you even in secret, and He always listens to you. It is a question of a personal prayer, not of a community prayer.

- Matthew 6:16-18: How to practice fasting. At that time the practice of fasting was accompanied by some very visible external gestures: not to wash one's face, not to comb one's hair, to wear sober dress. These were visible signs of fasting. Jesus criticizes this form of fasting and orders the contrary, so others cannot be aware that you are fasting: bathe, use perfume, and comb your hair well. In this way, only your Father who sees in secret knows that you are fasting and He will reward you.

4) Personal questions

- When you pray where others can see you, such as at Mass, do you make a show of your praying, or do you do it humbly and without grand showy gestures?
- When you give or help someone, either at the collection, or on the street, or near others, do you talk louder or make a show of it, or do you become quieter and more private with the other person?
- It is rare these days that anyone fasts and also goes out in the manner Jesus describes. But, we have other ways to do that. When giving, or doing some manner of sacrifice for others, do you complain, or groan to others about it, or give subtle clues that you are doing this thing?

5) Concluding Prayer

Yahweh, what quantities of good things You have in store
for those who fear You,
and bestow on those who make You their refuge,
for all humanity to see. (Ps 31:19)

Lectio Divina Thursday, June 18, 2020

1) OPENING PRAYER

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

2) GOSPEL READING - MATTHEW 6:7-15

Jesus said to his disciples: "In praying, do not babble like the pagans, who think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them. Your Father knows what you need before you ask him. "This is how you are to pray: Our Father who art in

heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. "If you forgive men their transgressions, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you do not forgive men, neither will your Father forgive your transgressions."

3) REFLECTION

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

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

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

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

Matthew 6:11-13: Four petitions for the cause of the brothers: Bread, Pardon, Victory, Liberty. In the second part of the Our Father we ask that the relationship among persons may be restored. The four requests show how necessary it is to transform or change the

structures of the community and society in order that all the sons and daughters of God may have the same dignity. The daily bread. In Exodus the people received the manna in the desert every day (Ex 16:35). Divine Providence passed through the fraternal organization, the sharing. Jesus invites us to live a new Exodus, a new fraternal way of living together which will guarantee the daily bread for all (Mt 6:34-44; Jo 6:48-51). Forgive us our debts: Every 50 years, the Jubilee Year obliged people to forgive their debts. It was a new beginning (Lv 25:8-55). Jesus announces a new Jubilee Year, a year of grace from the Lord (Lk 4:19). The Gospel wants to begin everything anew! Do not lead us into temptation, do not put us to the test: In Exodus, people were tempted and fell (Dt 9:6-12). The people complained and wanted to go back (Ex 16:3; 17:3). In the new Exodus, the temptation will be overcome by the strength which people receive from God (I Co 10:12-13). Deliver us from evil: The Evil One is Satan, who draws away from God and is a cause of scandal. He succeeds in entering in Peter (Mt 16:23) and to tempt Jesus in the desert. Jesus overcomes him (Mt 4:1-11). He tells us: Courage, I have conquered the world! (Jn 16:33).

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

4) PERSONAL QUESTIONS

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

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

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

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

5) CONCLUDING PRAYER

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

I seek Yahweh and He answers me,
frees me from all my fears. (Ps 34,3-4)

Lectio Divina Friday, June 19, 2020

1) Opening prayer

Holy God,
we often turn our hearts
into houses of pride and greed
rather than into homes of love and goodness
where You can feel at home.
Destroy the temple of sin in us,
drive out all evil from our hearts
and make us living stones of a community
in which can live and reign
Your Son Jesus Christ,
our living Lord for ever and ever.

2) Gospel Reading - Matthew 11:25-30

At that time Jesus exclaimed, 'I bless You, Father, Lord of heaven and of earth, for hiding these things from the learned and the clever and revealing them to little children. Yes, Father, for that is what it pleased You to do.

Everything has been entrusted to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, just as no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him.

'Come to Me, all you who labor and are overburdened, and I will give you rest. Shoulder My yoke and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble of heart, and you will find rest for your souls. Yes, My yoke is easy and My burden light.'



3) Reflection

- Today we celebrate the feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. In the Gospel we will listen to the invitation of Jesus: “Learn from me for I am meek and humble of heart”. The Gospel shows the tenderness with which Jesus welcomes, accepts the little ones. He wanted the poor to find rest and peace in Him.

- The context of chapters 11 and 12 of Matthew. In this context is stressed and made evident the fact that the poor are the only ones to understand and to accept the wisdom of the Kingdom. Many people did not understand Jesus’ preference for the poor and the excluded.

a) John the Baptist, who looked at Jesus with the eyes of the past, had doubts (Mt 11: 1-15)

b) The people, who looked at Jesus with a purpose of their own interests, were not able

to understand him (Mt 11:16-19).

c) The great cities around the lake, which listened to Jesus' preaching and saw the miracles, did not want to open themselves to His message (Mt 11: 20-24).

d) The wise and the Doctors, who judged everything according to their own science, were not able to understand Jesus' preaching (Mt 11: 25).

e) Not even his relatives understood Him (Mt 12: 46-50).

f) Only the little ones understood Him and accepted the Good News of the Kingdom (Mt 11:25-30).

g) The others want sacrifice, but Jesus wants mercy (Mt 12:1-8).

h) The reaction against Jesus impels the Pharisees to want to kill Him (Mt 12: 9-14).

i) They said that Jesus was Beelzebul (Mt 12:22-32).

j) But Jesus did not draw back. He continues to assume the mission of Servant, as described in the prophecies (Mt 12:15-21). This is why He was persecuted and condemned to death.

- Matthew 11: 25-26: Only the little ones understand and accept the Good News of the Kingdom. Jesus addresses a prayer to the Father: "I bless you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for hiding these things from the learned and the clever and revealing them to little children. Yes, Father, for that is what it pleased You to do!" The wise, the doctors of that time, had created a series of laws which they imposed upon the people in the name of God. They thought that God demanded this observance from the people. But the Law of love, brought by Jesus, said the contrary. What is important is not what we do for God, but rather what God, in His great love, does for us! People understood Jesus' words and were filled with joy. The wise thought that Jesus was not right. They could not understand this teaching which modified the relationship of the people of God.

- Matthew 11: 27: The origin of the New Law: The Son knows the Father. Jesus, the Son, knows the Father. He knows what the Father wanted when, centuries before, He gave the Law to Moses. What the Father wants to tell us He handed to Jesus, and Jesus revealed it to the little ones, because they opened themselves to His message. Today, also, Jesus continues to teach many things to the poor and to the little ones. The wise and the intelligent do well if they become pupils of the little ones!

- **Matthew 11: 28-30:** "Come to me all you who labor and are overburdened, and I will give you rest". Jesus invites all those who are tired to find rest in Him. These are the people who are tired under the weight of the impositions and the observances which the law of purity demanded. And He says, "Learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart". Many times this sentence has been manipulated to ask people to submit themselves, to be passive. What Jesus wants to say is the contrary. He asks people to leave aside the professors of religion of that time, to rest and to begin to learn from Him, from Jesus, who is "gentle and humble of heart". Jesus does not do like the Scribes take pride in their own science, but He is like the people who live humiliated and exploited. Jesus, the new teacher, knows from experience what happens in the heart of the people and how much the people suffer.

- The invitation of divine wisdom to all those who seek it. Jesus invites all those who are oppressed under the weight of the observance of the law to find rest in Him, because He is gentle and humble of heart, capable of relieving and consoling the people who suffer, who feel tired and depressed (Mt 11:25-30). In this invitation resound the

beautiful words of Isaiah who consoled the people who lived in exile (Isa 55:1-3). This invitation is bound to divine wisdom, which invites people to the encounter with her (Wis 24: 19), saying, “her ways are filled with delight; her paths all lead to contentment” (Prov 3:17). And He adds: “Wisdom brings up her own children and cares for those who seek her. Whoever loves her, loves life, those who seek her early will be filled with joy” (Sir 4:11-12). This invitation reveals a very important characteristic of the feminine face of God: tenderness and acceptance which consoles, which gives life to persons and leads them to feel well. Jesus is defense, the protection and the maternal womb which the Father offers to people who are tired (cfr. Isa 66:10-13).

4) Personal questions

- What produces tension in you and what gives you peace? For you, to live in community, is it a source of tension or of peace?
- How can Jesus’ words help our community to be a place of rest for our life?

5) Concluding Prayer

Yahweh is tenderness and pity,
slow to anger and rich in faithful love;
His indignation does not last for ever,
nor His resentment remain for all time. (Ps 103:8-9)

Lectio Divina Saturday, June 20, 2020

1. Opening Prayer

O God, who has prepared a worthy dwelling place of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the Blessed Virgin Mary, through her intercession grant that we, your faithful, may be a living temple of Your glory. We ask this, through Christ our Lord ...

2. Reading

Luke 2:41-51

Each year Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for the feast of Passover, and when he was twelve years old, they went up according to festival custom. After they had completed its days, as they were returning, the boy Jesus remained behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. Thinking that he was in the caravan, they journeyed for a day and looked for him among their relatives and acquaintances, but not finding him, they returned to Jerusalem to look for him. After three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions, and all who heard him were astounded at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him, they were astonished, and his mother said to him, "Son, why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been looking for you with great anxiety." And he said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" But they did not understand what he said to them. He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them; and his mother kept all these things in her heart.

3. Meditation

* **"Every year the feast of Passover."** These words help us to define the spiritual context in which the passage takes place and thus become, for us, the gateway to enter the mystery of His encounter with the Lord and His work of grace and mercy upon us.

Together with Mary and Joseph, with Jesus, we too can live the gift of a new Passover, a "crossing," an excess, a spiritual movement that takes us "beyond." The passage is clear and strong. What the Virgin Mary intuits in this experience with her son Jesus is the step from the street to the heart of the dispersion to interiority, from anguish to peace.

All that remains is to journey down the street and join the feast, the feast of pilgrims on their way up to Jerusalem for the celebration of Passover.

* **"Their way"** This is only the first of a series of verbs of motion, which follow one another along the verses of this passage: "they went", "return to the path", "group" (from the Latin cum-ire, "walking together"); "journey"; "back"; "went down with them, " " arrive ."

In parallel with this great physical movement, there is also a deep spiritual movement characterized by the verb "look", expressed over and over again: "they began to look for," "returned in search of Him," "looking for You anxiously," " why you sought Me?"

This tells us that the journey, the true path to which the Lord's word calls us, is not a physical journey, but a journey in search of Jesus, of His presence in our lives. And this is the direction in which we move, together with Mary and Joseph.

* **"They began to look for Him"** Here we can identify the core of the text, its fundamental message. It is important that we open ourselves to a deeper understanding of this reality. Also because Luke uses two different verbs to express the "search," the first indicating accurate, repeated, careful, as some of those who browse, from bottom to top, and second which indicates the search for something that is lost and you want to find. Jesus is the object of all this movement and deep inner being, is the object of desire, the longing of the heart.

* **"Distressed"** It is great to see how Mary opens her heart to Jesus, telling Him what she felt within herself. She is not afraid to tell the truth to her Son, to tell Him the feelings and experiences that they felt deeply. But what is this anguish, this pain that you saw in Mary and Joseph in search of Jesus, who went missing?

These 3 days of looking, the journey to Jerusalem, and not understanding His words afterward, may also be considered a prefiguring the narrative of His death and Resurrection.

* **"Kept all these sayings in her heart"** Mary does not understand the words of Jesus, the mystery of His life and His mission and for this remains silent, accepts, makes space, keeps them in her heart. This is the true path of growth in faith and relationship with the Lord.

Once again, Luke gives us a very beautiful and meaningful word which means literally "keeping through." That is the spiritual operation that Mary carries within herself and that give us as a precious gift, a legacy for our good relationship with the Lord, so that it can take us into a journey deep, deep, that does not stop at the surface, or half, which is not coming back, but it goes deep down. Mary takes us by the hand and guides us through all her heart, all her feelings, her experiences. And there, in the secrecy of ourselves, in our hearts, we can learn to find the Lord Jesus, whom perhaps we had lost.

There is also a loss for Mary and Joseph. Up until now, Joseph was identified with "my father". Now it is changed. He is not just her son, or their son, but son of our Heavenly Father. In all this is another sorrow, one of parents, that they do not understand their child: "But they did not understand what He said to them."

4. Some questions

- * There are many foreshadows of the Passion in this passage. Can I identify the depth of things symbolized here?
- * Do I feel like I am seeking the Lord? Or does it not seem important? Is it an active part of my life every day?
- * Has anxiety, spoken by Mary, ever been my companion on the journey of my life? Maybe, thanks to this passage, I discover that the anxiety is caused by the absence of the Lord, the loss of God. Does this passage help me, give me a light and a key for my life?
- * As a parent (past, future, or present), do I see a relationship and partnership with God the Father in raising my children, and do I give room for God to be an active participant in this? Am I a wall between God and them, or am I translator, or do I allow them to build their relationship at the same time?

5. Closing Prayer

And as she worshiped the LORD, she said:
"My heart exults in the LORD,
my horn is exalted in my God.
I have swallowed up my enemies;
I rejoice in my victory.
There is no Holy One like the LORD;
there is no Rock like our God.
"Speak boastfully no longer,
nor let arrogance issue from your mouths.
For an all-knowing God is the LORD,
a God who judges deeds.
The bows of the mighty are broken,
while the tottering gird on strength.
The well-fed hire themselves out for bread,
while the hungry batten on spoil.
The barren wife bears seven sons, while the mother of many languishes.
The LORD puts to death and gives life;
He casts down to the nether world; He raises up again.

The LORD makes poor and makes rich,
He humbles, He also exalts.
He raises the needy from the dust;
from the ash heap He lifts up the poor,
To seat them with nobles
and make a glorious throne their heritage.
For the pillars of the earth are the LORD'S,
and He has set the world upon them.

1 Samuel 2:1-8

Lectio Divina Sunday, June 21, 2020

Witness to the Gospel without fear
Matthew 10: 26-33

1. OPENING PRAYER

In the darkness of a starless night,
a night of no sense,
You, the Word of life,
like lightning in the storm of forgetfulness,
entered within the bounds of doubt
under cover of the limits of precariousness
to hide the light.

Words made of silence and of the ordinary,
Your human words, heralds of the secrets of the Most High:
like hooks cast into the waters of death
to find man once more, immersed in his anxious follies,
and reclaim him, plundered,
through the attractive radiance of forgiveness.
To You, Ocean of Peace and shadow of eternal Glory,
I render thanks:
Calm waters on my shore that awaits the wave, I wish to seek You!
And may the friendship of the brothers protect me
when night falls on my desire for You. Amen.

2. READING

a) The text:

26 'So do not be afraid of them. Everything now covered up will be uncovered, and everything now hidden will be made clear. 27 What I say to you in the dark, tell in the daylight; what you hear in whispers, proclaim from the housetops. 28 'Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; fear him rather who can destroy both body and soul in hell. 29 Can you not buy two sparrows for a penny? And yet not one falls to the ground without your Father knowing. 30 Why, every hair on your head has been counted. 31 So there is no need to be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows. 32 'So if anyone declares himself for Me in the presence of human beings, I will declare Myself for him in the presence of My Father in heaven. 33 But the one who disowns Me in the presence of human beings, I will disown in the presence of My Father in heaven.



b) A moment of silence:

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

3. MEDITATION

a) Questions for reflection:

There is nothing hidden which will not be revealed: the truth under the veil of silence is spread more than if it is exposed in the avid or greedy hands of people who are deaf to the breath of the Spirit. Where do you place the Word of God that you listen to: in the power of your adventurous thoughts or in the sacrarium of your profound acceptance?

That which I tell you in the dark, tell it in the daylight: Christ speaks in the dark, in the secret of the heart. To offer His words to the light, these must go through your thought, within your feelings, in your entrails before they come to your lips. The words which you habitually say to others, are they words said in the secret of Him or rather syllables of thoughts which just come to mind?

And do not be afraid of those who kill the body: not anything nor anybody can do you harm if God is with you. They can make you a prisoner, but they cannot take away liberty and dignity from you because these cannot be seized by anybody. Fears, worry, suspicions, anxieties... can become a souvenir which is far away. When will you leave all this aside, trusting that God will not abandon you ever and will take care of you?

Can you not buy two sparrows for a penny? And yet not one falls to the ground without your Father knowing. God's Providence can be similar to destiny, but it is something different. Think of the sparrows which fall to the ground. It is not God who throws them down, but when they fall the Father is there. It is not God who sends

sickness, but when people become ill, the Father is there with them. Our things belong to Him. Solitude, which frequently presses on us, is not abandonment. Will we look around to encounter the eyes of Christ who lives with us in that moment of desolation?

If anyone declares himself to be for Me in the presence of human beings, I will declare myself for him in the presence of my Father: Give Christ the courage of our faith in Him... this is a requirement of life in which God is not an accessory, but daily bread and the identity card of Himself. Does this challenge you or does it remain only a hidden desire? Even among the heads or leaders, says John, many believed in Him, but did not recognize Him openly because of the Pharisees, so as not to be expelled from the Synagogue. Would you risk your name for Him?

b) Key for the reading:

Do not fear! This is a key word, which, repeated three times, gives unity to the passage. Probably it is a literary unity which joins together four isolated sayings. Faith requires as a basic disposition, not to fear. The themes which emerge: public proclamation of the Gospel (vv. 26-27), the availability to face martyrdom sacrificing physical life in order to attain eternal life (v. 28), images of trust in Providence (vv. 29-31), the courageous profession of faith in Christ (vv. 32-33).

The counter-positions are of a remarkable efficacy: veiled/unveiled, or covered/uncovered, hidden/known, darkness/light, body/soul, acknowledge/deny... which make evident the shore of a life lived evangelically. The veils of knowledge open themselves in the light and on the roofs of the universe the word heard in secret goes forth. The whole person is present to the heart of God, and if the creatures of the earth arouse tenderness, how much more the life of a creature-child. Belonging makes the difference in the witness.

v. 26. Do not be afraid of them, for everything now covered up will be uncovered, and everything now hidden will be made clear. That which is covered is not reserved for few but it is simply kept waiting to be manifested. There is a time to keep hidden and a time to make manifest, as Qoheleth would say... to know how to keep the truth in the secret of the days that go by: this is what forges the credibility of the manifestation. A seed cannot be thrown into the air, it is put into the furrow of the heart, it is left to itself while it is transformed in dying, and it is attentively followed until it germinates and comes to light, until the spike is ripe and ready to be harvested. Every word of God requires that it pass through the furrow of one's own history in order to bear abundant fruit in due time.

v. 27. What I say to you in the dark, tell it in the daylight, and what you hear in whispers, proclaim from the housetops. Jesus speaks in secret; we speak in the light. God speaks, we listen and we become His mouth for others. The darkness of the listening, of putting it in, of assimilation, precedes the dawn of every proclamation. And when from the housetops the good news will be heard, people will be obliged to look up. A treasure of glory is enclosed in every moment of listening. It is a moment of waiting which leads to the birth of light.

v. 28. Do not be afraid of those who kill the body, but cannot kill the soul; fear him rather who can destroy both body and soul in hell. One can be afraid of those who

can strike that which is not man in fullness: to stop earthly life is not equal to death. The only really fearful is God. But God also after death preserves the life for the human being. That is why we should not fear. Whatever can happen, God is with humanity. This is a certainty which permits us to sail on even in the midst of the most devastating storms, because the treasures of humanity are taken care of in God, and from the hands of God nobody can snatch the elect.

v. 29. Can you not buy two sparrows for a penny? And yet not one falls to the ground without your Father knowing. There are two sparrows, one penny. A minimum value but which is in the thought of the Father. Where life beats, there God is, completely. This attentive care enchants and consoles... and invites listening to everything that vibrates and presents holy images of the Eternal splendor. Two sparrows: two very small creatures, of a brief life. The value of things is not given to them because of the greatness or the strength, but from what animates, that which is “body”. Therefore, every space where there is life which accepts the print of the Creator is a place of encounter with Him. It bears witness to His solicitude.

v. 30. Why every hair on your head has been counted. The solicitude or thoughtfulness of God extends itself even to counting the hair on our head. It is absurd, the way the Lord loves! When desolation and abandonment become the words of our today, it will be enough to count some of our hair to remember the presence of God with us. The protection of the Heavenly Father will not be lacking for the disciples of Jesus. The Mystery which embraces all cannot be less towards those who have chosen to follow His Son, leaving the earth of their human securities.

v. 31. So there is no need to be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows! If God uses His thought for two sparrows how much more will He think of us! Fear disappears before this living image of human and religious sensibility of Christ. God is in favor of humanity, not against humanity. And if He keeps silence it is not because of lack of care, but because His thoughts of us have broader perspectives which go beyond the horizons of earthly temporality.

v. 32. If anyone declares himself for Me in the presence of human beings, I will declare Myself for him in the presence of My Father in Heaven. One must acknowledge oneself. When you find yourself in a square crowded to the full among unknown faces, you have the experience of being a foreigner. But as soon as you see a familiar face, your heart expands and you make your way until you get close to him. This recognizing others allows one to manifest oneself before others and to expose oneself. Christ in the midst of the crowd is the familiar face to recognize Him as the Master and Lord of our life. And what fear can we have if we think that He will declare us before His Father in Heaven?

v. 33. But the one who disowns Me in the presence of human beings, I will disown in the presence of My Father in Heaven. Could we think of a vengeful God? This is not a discourse to “put wood into the fire”, but a discourse which comes from an existential encounter. Christ will not be able to recognize as His own the one who will have chosen everything outside of Him. It is a discourse of fidelity and of respect for human liberty. God respects the creature to the point of not interfering in the space of

his error. The Gospel demands belonging, not words and actions. The heart lives in heaven, when Christ is its beating of life!

4. PRAYER (Psalm 22:22-31)

I shall proclaim Your name to my brothers,
praise You in full assembly:
'You who fear Yahweh, praise Him!
All the race of Jacob,
honor Him! Revere Him,
all the race of Israel!'

For He has not despised nor disregarded
the poverty of the poor,
has not turned away His face,
but has listened to the cry for help.

Of You is my praise in the thronged assembly,
I will perform my vows before all who fear Him.
The poor will eat and be filled,
those who seek Yahweh will praise Him,
'May your heart live for ever.'

The whole wide world will remember
and return to Yahweh,
all the families of nations bow down before Him.
For to Yahweh, ruler of the nations,
belongs kingly power!
All who prosper on earth will bow before Him,
all who go down to the dust will do reverence before Him.

And those who are dead,
their descendants will serve Him,
will proclaim His name to generations
still to come;
and these will tell of His saving justice
to a people yet unborn:
He has fulfilled it.

5. CONTEMPLATION

Lord, among the veils of what I have received and have not given, may I be able to meditate and to accept everything from you. Let not my proclamation be an unconscious repeater, but rather a word possessed in so far as it has indwelling and digested for a long time. May the beauty of Your presence be unveiled to my senses, and in the mystery of Your unceasing giving may the veil of the encounter descend bringing You closer. The treasure hidden for centuries is now known, and from darkness to light, the dawn has raised for centuries, in a day without sunset which, shining on that which love has created and the sin being broken, it makes all things new. I will acknowledge You, my God, before my brothers because it will be impossible for me to hide the lamp that

You have lit in my life. Who will give me the words which create me and make of my limitations a marvelous definition of what I am, I, in particular, like nobody else? Only You, Lord, have words of eternal life. And I will eat them and will offer them, at the cost of being devoured with them. It will be sufficient for me to feel that I am a sparrow to find again the hope when the tempest will fall on me, because the pennies that You give for the sparrows are not counted in Your knapsack. Amen.

Lectio Divina Monday, June 22, 2020

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Father,
guide and protector of Your people,
grant us an unfailing respect for Your name,
and keep us always in Your love.

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

2) Gospel Reading - Matthew 7:1-5

Jesus said to his disciples: "Stop judging, that you may not be judged. For as you judge, so will you be judged, and the measure with which you measure will be measured out to you. Why do you notice the splinter in your brother's eye, but do not perceive the wooden beam in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove that splinter from your eye,' while the wooden beam is in your eye? You hypocrite, remove the wooden beam from your eye first; then you will see clearly to remove the splinter from your brother's eye."

3) Reflection

- In today's Gospel we continue to meditate on the Sermon on the Mount, found in chapters 5 to 7 of the Gospel of Matthew. During the 10th and 11th week we have seen chapters 5 and 6. Beginning today, we will see chapter 7. These three chapters, 5, 6, and 7, offer an idea of how the catechesis was done in the communities of the converted Jews in the second half of the first century in Galilee and in Syria. Matthew unites and organizes the words of Jesus to teach how the new way of living the law of God should be.

- After having explained how to re-establish justice (Mt 5:17 to 6:18) and how to restore the order of creation (Mt 6:19-34), Jesus teaches how the life in community should be (Mt 7:1-12). At the end He presents some recommendations and final advice (Mt 7:13-27). Then follows an outline of the entire Sermon on the Mount:

Matthew 5:1-12: The Beatitudes: solemn openness of the New Law.

Matthew 5:13-16: The new presence in the world: Salt of the earth and light of the

world.

Matthew 5:17-19: The new practice of justice: relationship with the ancient law.

Matthew 5:20-48: The new practice of justice: observing the new law.

Matthew 6:1-4: The new practice of the works of piety: alms giving.

Matthew 6:5-15: The new practice of the works of piety: prayer.

Matthew 6:16-18: The new practice of the works of piety: fasting.

Matthew 6:19-21: The new relationship to material goods: do not store up.

Matthew 6:22-23: The new relationship to material goods: a correct vision.

Matthew 6:24: The new relationship to material goods: God or money.

Matthew 6:25-34: The new relationship to material goods: trust in Providence

Matthew 7:1-5: The new community life together: do not judge.

Matthew 7:6: The new community life together: do not despise the community.

Matthew 7:7-11: The new community life: trust in God produces sharing.

Matthew 7:12: The new community life together: the Golden Rule.

Matthew 7:13-14: Final recommendations to choose the sure way.

Matthew 7:15-20: Final recommendations, the prophet is known by his fruits.

Matthew 7:21-23: Final recommendations to not only speak but also practice.

Matthew 7:24-27: Final recommendations to construct the house on rock.

The community-lived experience of the Gospel (Mt 7:1-12) is the touchstone. It is where the seriousness of the commitment is defined. The new proposal of life in community embraces many aspects: do not observe the splinter in your brother's eye (Mt 7:1-5), do not throw your pearls in front of pigs (Mt 7:6), do not be afraid to ask God for things (Mt 7:7-11). This advice reaches the summit in the Golden Rule: Always treat others as you would like them to treat you (Mt 7:12). The Gospel of today presents the first part: Matthew 7:1-5.

- Matthew 7:1-2: Do not judge and you will not be judged. The first condition for a good life together in community is not to judge brother or sister. That is, to eliminate the preconceptions which prevent a transparent community life. What does this mean concretely? John's Gospel gives an example of how Jesus lived in community with the disciples. Jesus says: "I shall no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know the master's business; I call you friends, because I have made known to you everything I have learned from My Father" (Jn 15:15). Jesus is an open book for His companions. This transparency comes from His total trust in the brothers and sisters and has its origin in His intimacy with the Father who gives Him the force of opening himself up totally to others. Anyone who lives in this way with his brothers and sisters accepts others as they are, without any preconceptions, without previously imposing any conditions, without judging. Mutual acceptance without any pretension and with total transparency! This is the ideal of the new community life, which has come from the Good News which Jesus has brought to us: God is our Father, and therefore, we are all brothers and sisters. It is a difficult ideal, but as beautiful and attractive as the other one: "Be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect.

- Matthew 7:3-5: You observe the splinter in your brother's eye and never notice the great log in your own. Immediately Jesus gives an example: Why do you observe the splinter in your brother's eye, and never notice the great log in your own? And how dare you say to your brother, "Let me take that splinter out of your eye, when look, there is

a great log in your own? Hypocrite! Take the log out of your own eye first, and then you will see clearly enough to take the splinter out of your brother's eye". When hearing this phrase we usually think of the Pharisees who despised the common people, considering them ignorant and they considered themselves better than others (cf. Jn 7:49; 9:34). In reality, this statement of Jesus serves for all of us. For example, it is often the case that we criticize the very thing in others that we do ourselves. We observe the splinter in the eye of our brothers and we do not see the big log in our own eyes. These logs can cause many people today to have difficulty in believing in the Good News of Jesus.

4) Personal questions

- Think about the things I criticize other for. Does it reveal the same behavior, in some way, in me?
- Does this show that we all have more in common than in differences, and that it is only the log in the eye that is the problem in understanding this?
- Splinters and logs share a similar nature: both are wood. What faults do I share with others in my community or family which I seem to be blind to in myself?

5) Concluding Prayer

Your kindnesses to me are countless, Yahweh;
true to Your judgments,
give me life. (Ps 119:156)

Lectio Divina Tuesday, June 23, 2020

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Father,
guide and protector of Your people,
grant us an unflinching respect for Your name,
and keep us always in Your love.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, Your Son,
who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

2) Gospel Reading - Matthew 7:6,12-14

Jesus said to his disciples: "Do not give what is holy to dogs, or throw your pearls before swine, lest they trample them underfoot, and turn and tear you to pieces. "Do to others whatever you would have them do to you. This is the Law and the Prophets. "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road broad that leads to destruction, and those who enter through it are many. How narrow the gate and constricted the road that leads to life. And those who find it are few."

3) Reflection

- Discernment and prudence in offering things of value. In relationships with others Jesus, warns about certain dangerous attitudes. The first one of these is to not judge (7:1-5): it is a true and proper prohibition, “do not judge”. It is an action that influences and drives contempt or condemnation of others. The last judgment is the exclusive competence of God. Our figures of measure and our criteria are relative and they are conditioned by our subjectivity. Any condemnation of others becomes a condemnation of oneself, in so far as it places us under the judgment of God and we exclude ourselves from pardon. If your eye is pure, that is to say, is free from every judgment of the brothers, then you can relate with them in a true way before God. Now we consider the words of Jesus offered to us by the liturgical text: “Do not give dogs what is holy; and do not throw your pearls in front of pigs, or they may trample them and then turn on you and tear you to pieces” (Mt 7:6). At first sight, this “saying” of Jesus sounds strange to the sensibility of today’s reader. It may represent a true enigma. But it is a way of saying in a Semitic language that has to be interpreted. At the time of Jesus, just as in ancient culture, dogs were not greatly appreciated because they were considered somewhat savage and wild. But let us now consider the positive and didactic-wisdom aspect of the words of Jesus: do not profane holy things. In the last instance, it is an invitation to use prudence and discernment. In the Old Testament, the holy things are the meat for the sacrifice (Lv 22:14; Ex 29:33 ff; Nb 18:8-19). The act of throwing pearls to the pigs is incomprehensible. For the Hebrews, the pigs are impure animals, the quintessence of repugnance. On the contrary, the pearls are the most precious things that can exist. The warning of Jesus refers to those who feed the stray dogs with consecrated meat destined to the sacrifice. Such behavior is evil and imprudent because those dogs were usually not fed and therefore, because of their insatiable hunger, they could turn back and attack their “benefactors”.

The pearls at the metaphoric level could indicate the teachings of the wise or the interpretation of the Torah. In Matthew’s Gospel the pearl is the image of the kingdom of God (Mt 13:45ff). The interpretation which the evangelist gives is above all theological. Surely, this is the interpretation which seems to be more in harmony with the text and with the ecclesial reading of the words of Jesus: a warning to the Christian missionaries not to preach the Gospel to just anybody.

- To follow a path. In the final part of the discourse (7:13-27), Matthew includes, among the others, an admonition of Jesus who invites us to make a choice in order to enter the kingdom of Heaven: through the narrow door (7:13-14). The word of Jesus is not only something to be understood and to interpret, but above all, it should become life. Now, to enter into the kingdom of Heaven it is necessary to follow a path and to enter into the fullness of life through a “door”. The theme of the “path, the way” is very dear to the Old Testament (Dt 11:26-28; 30, 15-20; Jr 21:8; Ps 1:6; Ps 118:29-30; Ps 138:4; Ws 5:6-7 etc.). The road represented by two doors leads to different goals. A significance that is consistent with the admonishments of Jesus would be that the wide door is joined to the wide path which leads to perdition or damnation, that is to say, to walk on a wide road is something pleasant, and capable of handling a great many travelers, but this is not said in our text. Rather it seems that Matthew agrees with the Jewish conception of the “road”; on the trail of Dt 30:19 and Jr 21:8 there are two roads that are in counter-position, that of death and that of life. To know how to choose among the many ways

of life is decisive for entering into the kingdom of Heaven. Anyone who chooses the narrow road, that of life, should know that it is full of afflictions; narrow means tried by suffering for the sake of faith. Narrow paths, especially with a cart, are tricky and tough to travel. It is also less traveled. Matthew is telling his readers that most may not choose this path, so don't expect it to be the way of the majority. Christianity was a new way, a new path, and many of the people of that time may not want to travel that path.

4) Personal questions

- Examine your day today. Are there instances where you did not treat a brother or sister as you would want to be treated? Do you make excuses as you ask yourself, saying "oh, it wouldn't matter to me if he did that" rather than taking responsibility?
- The word of Jesus, or rather, Jesus Himself, is the door who makes us enter into the filial and fraternal life. Do you allow yourself to be guided and attracted by the narrow and demanding path of the Gospel? Or do you follow the wide and easy road that consists in doing what pleases or that leads you to satisfy all your desires, neglecting the needs of others?

5) Concluding Prayer

We reflect on Your faithful love, God,
in Your temple!
Both Your name and Your praise, God,
are over the whole wide world.
Your right hand is full of saving justice. (Ps 48:9-10)

Lectio Divina Wednesday, June 24, 2020

Birth of the Precursor of the Lord

1. Let us recollect ourselves in Prayer – Statio

Prayer of Cardinal Mercier to the Holy Spirit

Oh God, who has instructed Your faithful, enlightening their hearts with the light of the Holy Spirit, grant us that in the same Spirit we may have the desire to do good and to enjoy always His comfort.

May there be glory, adoration, love, and blessing to You Eternal Divine Spirit, who has brought to earth for us the Savior of our souls. And may there be glory and honor to His most adorable heart who loves us with an infinite love.

Oh Holy Spirit, soul of my soul, I adore You: enlighten me, guide me, strengthen me, console me, teach me what I should do, give me your orders.

I promise to submit myself to all that will happen to me, allowed by You: I ask only that I may know Your will.

2. Prayerful Reading of the Word - Lectio

From the Gospel according to Luke (1:57-66,80)

When the time arrived for Elizabeth to have her child she gave birth to a son. Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown his great mercy toward her, and they rejoiced with her. When they came on the eighth day to circumcise the child, they were going to call him Zechariah after his father, but his mother said in reply, "No. He will be called John." But they answered her, "There is no one among your relatives who has this name." So they made signs, asking his father what he wished him to be called. He asked for a tablet and wrote, "John is his name," and all were amazed. Immediately his mouth was opened, his tongue freed, and he spoke blessing God. Then fear came upon all their neighbors, and all these matters were discussed throughout the hill country of Judea. All who heard these things took them to heart, saying, "What, then, will this child be?" For surely the hand of the Lord was with him. The child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the desert until the day of his manifestation to Israel.



3. Pondering the Word - Meditatio

3.1 Key to the Reading

This passage of the Gospel forms part of the account of the infancy of Jesus. In a particular way this text follows the scene of the visitation of Mary “in the house of Zechariah” (Lk 1:40) after the event of the Annunciation by the Angel, the messenger of the new creation.

In fact, the Annunciation inaugurates, in a joyful way, the fulfillment of God’s promise to His people (Lk 1:26-38). The joy of the new times, which filled Mary, now inundates the heart of Elizabeth. She rejoices with the announcement brought by Mary (Lk 1:41). Mary, on the other hand, “magnifies the Lord” (Lk 1:46) because He has worked great things in her, just as He has worked great marvels for His people in need of salvation.

The expression “the time came” reminds us that this reality does not only strike Elizabeth who is about to give birth, but also reveals something of God’s plan. In fact, Saint Paul tells us that when the completion of the time came, God sent His Only Begotten Son “born of a woman, born a subject of the Law, to redeem the subjects of the Law, so that we could receive adoption as children” of God (Gal 4:4).

In the Gospel, Jesus speaks about the completion of times, especially in the Gospel of John. Two of these times are the wedding at Cana (Jn 2:1-12) and the agony on the cross where Jesus exclaims that “all is fulfilled” (Jn 19:30). In the fulfillment of the times,

Jesus inaugurates an era of salvation. The birth of John the Baptist inaugurates this time of salvation. In fact, at the arrival of the Messiah, he exults and leaps in the womb of his mother, Elizabeth (Lk 1:44). Later on, he will define himself as the friend of the bridegroom (Jesus) who exults and rejoices because of the event of the wedding with the bride, the Church (Jn 3:29).

The son will not be named after his father Zechariah, but John. Zechariah reminds us that God does not forget His people. In fact, his name means “God remembers”. His son will now be called “God remembers”, because God’s promises were being fulfilled. The prophetic mission of John has to indicate God’s mercy. In fact, he will be called Johanan, which is “God is mercy”. This mercy is manifested in the visit to the people, precisely “as he had promised by the mouth of His holy prophets of ancient times” (Lk 1:67-70). Thus, the name indicates the mission of the one about to be born. Zechariah will write the name of his son on a tablet so that all could see with admiration (Lk 1:63). This tablet is the echo of another inscription, written by Pilate to be fixed on the cross of Jesus. This inscription revealed the identity of the mission of the crucified: “Jesus, the Nazarene, King of the Jews” (Jn 19:19). This writing also provoked the admiration of those who were in Jerusalem for the feast.

John is the precursor of Jesus in everything. Since his birth and childhood he points out to Christ. “Who will this child be? He is “the voice which cries out in the desert” (Jn 1:23), impelling all to prepare the way of the Lord. He is not the Messiah (Jn 1:20), but he indicates this with his preaching, and above all, with his lifestyle of asceticism in the desert. Meanwhile, the child grew up and his spirit grew strong. He lived in the desert until the day he appeared openly to Israel” (Lk 1:80).

3.2 Questions to direct the meditation and the carrying out

- Do you or your community rejoice when God shows great mercy on another in the community, or do you grumble or even ignore it?
- John identifies himself as the friend of the bridegroom. According to you, what is the meaning of this image?
- John the Baptist is the one who prepares the way for the Lord. How is this relevant in our daily life?

4. Oratio

Let us bless the Lord together with Zechariah (Lk 1:68-79)

Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel,
for He has visited His people, He has set them free,
and He has established for us a saving power
in the House of His servant David,
just as He proclaimed,
by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient times,
that He would save us from our enemies
and from the hands of all those who hate us,
and show faithful love to our ancestors,

and so keep in mind His holy covenant.
This was the oath He swore to our father Abraham,
that He would grant us, free from fear,
to be delivered from the hands of our enemies,
to serve Him in holiness and uprightness in His presence,
all our days.
And you, little child,
you shall be called prophet of the Most High,
for you will go before the Lord to prepare a way for Him,
to give His people knowledge of salvation
through the forgiveness of their sins,
because of the faithful love of our God
in which the daybreak on high will visit us,
to give light to those who live in darkness
and the shadow dark as death,
and to guide our feet into the way of peace.

5. Contemplatio

Let us all together adore the mercy and the goodness of God repeating in silence:
Glory be to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.
As it was in the beginning is now and ever shall be,
world without end. Amen

Lectio Divina Thursday, June 25, 2020

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Father,
guide and protector of your people,
grant us an unfailing respect for your name,
and keep us always in your love.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

2) Gospel Reading - Matthew 7:21-29

Jesus said to his disciples: “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the Kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name? Did we not drive out demons in your name? Did we not do mighty deeds in your name?’ Then I will declare to them solemnly, ‘I never knew you. Depart from me, you evildoers.’ “Everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and buffeted the house. But it did not collapse; it had been set solidly on rock. And everyone

who listens to these words of mine but does not act on them will be like a fool who built his house on sand. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and buffeted the house. And it collapsed and was completely ruined.” When Jesus finished these words, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes.

3) Reflection

- Today’s Gospel presents the last part of the Sermon on the Mount: (a) it is not sufficient to talk and sing, it is necessary to live and to practice (Mt 7:21-23). (b) the community constructed on the foundation of the new law of the discourse on the mount will remain standing at the moment of the storm (Mt 7:24-27). (c) the words of Jesus are a severe judgment on the contemporary religious leaders, the scribes (Mt 7:28-29).
- The end of the Sermon on the Mount presents some opposition and a few contradictions which exist even in our time: (a) people who continually speak of God, but who do not do God’s will. They use the name of Jesus, but do not practice a relationship with the Lord in their life (Mt 7:21). (b) There are people who live in the illusion of working for the Lord, but on the day of encounter with Him, they will discover, tragically, that they have never known Him (Mt 7:22-23). The two last scenarios of the Sermon on the Mount, the house built on the rock (Mt 7:24-25) and the house built on sand (Mt 7:26-27), illustrate these contradictions. By means of these, Matthew denounces, and at the same time tries to correct, the separation between faith and life, between speaking and doing, between teaching and practicing.
- Matthew 7:21: It is not sufficient to speak, it is necessary to practice. What is important is not to speak of God in a beautiful way or to know how to explain the bible well to others, but rather to do the will of the Father, and in this way, be a revelation of His face and of His presence in the world. Jesus made the same recommendation to the woman who praised Mary, His Mother. Jesus answered: “Blessed rather are those who listen to the Word of God and put it into practice” (Lk 11:28).
- Matthew 7:22-23: The gifts should be at the service of the Kingdom and the community. There were people with extraordinary gifts, for example the gift of prophecy, of exorcism, of healing, but they used these gifts for themselves, outside the context of the community. In the Day of Judgment, they will hear a hard sentence from Jesus: “Away from Me all evil doers”. Evil is the opposite of justice. It is to do with Jesus what the doctors did with the law: to teach and not to practice (Mt 23:3). Paul will say the same thing with other words and arguments: “Though I have the power of prophecy, to penetrate all mysteries and knowledge, and though I have all the faith necessary to move mountains, if I am without love, I am nothing. Though I should give away to the poor all that I possess, and even give up my body to be burned, if I am without love, it will do me no good whatever”. (1Cor 13:2-3).
- Matthew 7:24-27: The parable of the house built on the rock. The final conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount is to open oneself and to practice. Many people entrust their security to extraordinary gifts or to observance. But their true security does not come from prestige or from observance. It comes from God! It comes from the love of God who has loved us first (1 Jn 4:19). His love for us, manifested in Jesus, exceeds

everything (Rm 8:38-39). God becomes our source of security when we seek to do His will. There He will be the rock which supports us in the moments of difficulty and storm.

- Matthew 7:28-29: To teach with authority. The Evangelist closes the Sermon on the Mount saying that the crowds admired the teaching of Jesus, “because He taught with authority, and not like the scribes”. The result from the teaching of Jesus is a critical understanding of the people in regard to the religious authority of the time. His simple and clear words resulted from His experience of God, from His life dedicated to the Father’s plan. People admired and approved the teaching of Jesus.

- Community: the house built on the rock. In the Book of Psalms, we frequently find the expression: “God is my **rock** and my fortress... My God, my **rock**, my refuge, my stronghold, my saving strength...” (Ps 18:3). He is the defense and the strength of the one who seeks justice (Ps 18:21,24). The people who trust in this God, become in turn, a **rock** for others. Thus, the Prophet Isaiah invites people in the exile saying: “Listen to me you who pursue saving justice, you who seek Yahweh! Consider the **rock** from which you were hewn, the quarry from which you were dug. Consider Abraham your father and Sarah who gave you birth” (Is 51:1-2). The prophet asks people not to forget the past. The people should remember that Abraham and Sarah, because of their faith in God, became **rock**, the beginning of the People of God. Looking toward this rock, the people should acquire courage to struggle and to escape from slavery. Matthew also exhorts the community similarly to have rock as foundation (Mt 7:24-25) and thus, they themselves can be rock to strengthen their brothers and sisters in their faith. This is the sense of the name which Jesus gave to Peter: “You are Peter and on this **rock** I will build my Church” (Mt 16: 18). This was the vocation of the first community, called to unite itself with God, the living rock, so as to become also a living rock, because they listen and put into practice the Word. (Ps 2:4-10; 2:5; Ep 2:19-22).

4) Personal questions

- How does our community seek to balance prayer and action, prayer and practice, to speak and to do, to teach and to practice? What could improve in our community, so that it will be a rock, a secure and welcoming house for all?
- To be rock for another is also to be in truth. Do I, and my community, know and understand Church teaching and the bible well enough and in truth such that I and we can be rock for others who need help in their Faith?
- There is another kind of rock. The rock in the parable of the sower. The seed (the Word) could not grow on rock. Do I read, learn and grow from the Word and from the saints that have given example before us, and from Church teaching? Am I like the rocky ground in the parable where the seed dries up or am I like a strong rock who gives stability to my brothers and sisters?

5) Concluding Prayer

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

Lectio Divina Friday, June 26, 2020

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Father,
guide and protector of Your people,
grant us an unfailing respect for Your name,
and keep us always in Your love.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, Your Son,
who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

2) Gospel Reading - Matthew 8:1-4

After Jesus had come down from the mountain, large crowds followed Him. Suddenly a man with a virulent skin-disease came up and bowed low in front of Him, saying, 'Lord, if You are willing, You can cleanse me.' Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him saying, 'I am willing. Be cleansed.' And his skin-disease was cleansed at once. Then Jesus said to him, 'Mind you tell no one, but go and show yourself to the priest and make the offering prescribed by Moses, as evidence to them.'

3) Reflection

• In chapters 5 to 7 we have heard the words of the New Law proclaimed on the Mountain by Jesus. Now, in chapters 8 and 9, Matthew indicates how Jesus put into practice what He had just taught. In today's Gospel (Mt 8:1-4) and tomorrow's (Mt 8:5-17), we see closely the following episodes which reveal how Jesus practiced the Law: the cure of a leper (Mt 8:1-4), the cure of the servant of the Roman soldier (Mt 8:5-13), the cure of Peter's mother-in law (Mt 8:14-15) and the healing of numerous sick people (Mt 8:14-17).

• Matthew 8:1-2: The leper asks, "Lord, if You are willing You can cleanse me". A leper comes close to Jesus. The leper was one who was excluded. Anybody who touched him would remain unclean! This is why the lepers had to remain far away (Lev 13:45-46). But that leper had great courage. He transgresses the norms of religion in order to be able to enter into contact with Jesus. Getting close to Him he says, 'If You are willing You can cleanse me! That is to say, 'It is not necessary for You to touch me!' It suffices that the Lord wants it and he will be cured". This statement reveals two things: 1) the sickness of leprosy which made people unclean; 2) the sickness of solitude to which the person was condemned, separated from society and from religion. It reveals also the man's great faith in the power of Jesus.

• Matthew 8:3: Jesus touches him and says, 'I am willing. Be cleansed.' Filled with compassion, Jesus cures two sicknesses. In the first place, in order to cure solitude, loneliness, before saying any word, He touches the leper. It is as if he said, "For Me, you are not excluded. I am not afraid to become unclean by touching you! And I accept you as a brother!" Then He cures the leper, saying, "I am willing! Be cleansed!" The leper, in order to be able to enter in contact with Jesus, had transgressed the norms of the Law. Thus Jesus, in order to help that excluded person and reveal the new face of

God, transgresses the norms of his religion and touches the leper.

- Matthew 8:4: Jesus orders the man to go and show himself to the priest. At that time, a leper, in order to be reintegrated into the community, needed a certificate of healing confirmed by the priest. It is the same thing today. The sick person gets out of the hospital only if he has a certificate signed by the physician. Jesus obliges the person to obtain that document in order to be able to live normally. He obliges the authority to recognize that the man has been cured. Jesus not only heals but wants the healed person to be able to live with others. He reintegrates the person into the fraternal life of the community. The Gospel of Mark adds that the man did not present himself to the priest. Instead, “He went away and started freely proclaiming and telling the story everywhere, so that Jesus could no longer go openly into the town, but stayed outside in deserted places” (Mk 1: 45). Why could Jesus no longer enter openly into the town? Because He had touched the leper and had become unclean before the religious authority who embodied the law of that time. And now, because of this, Jesus was unclean and had to be far from everybody. He could no longer enter into the city. But Mark shows that people cared very little for these official norms, because people came to Jesus from all parts! This was totally overthrowing things! The message which Mark gives us is the following: In order to take the Good News of God to the people, we should not be afraid to transgress the religious norms which are contrary to God’s project and which prevent a fraternal spirit and love, even if this causes some difficulty to the people, as it did to Jesus.

- In Jesus everything is revelation of what He has within himself! He does not only announce the Good News of the Kingdom. He is an example, a living witness of the Kingdom, a revelation of God. In Him appears what happens when a human being allows God to reign, allows God to occupy the center of his life.

4) Personal questions

- In the name of the Law of God, the lepers were excluded and they could not live with others. In our Church are there norms and customs which are not written and marginalize persons and exclude them from living together with others and from communion? Do you know any such persons? What is your opinion concerning this?
- Jesus had the courage to touch the leper. Would you have this courage?

5) Concluding Prayer

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

Lectio Divina Saturday, June 27, 2020

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Father,
guide and protector of Your people,
grant us an unfailing respect for Your name,

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

2) Gospel Reading - Matthew 8:5-17

When Jesus entered Capernaum, a centurion approached him and appealed to him, saying, "Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, suffering dreadfully." He said to him, "I will come and cure him." The centurion said in reply, "Lord, I am not worthy to have you enter under my roof; only say the word and my servant will be healed. For I too am a man subject to authority, with soldiers subject to me. And I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes; and to another, 'Come here,' and he comes; and to my slave, 'Do this,' and he does it." When Jesus heard this, he was amazed and said to those following him, "Amen, I say to you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith. I say to you, many will come from the east and the west, and will recline with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob at the banquet in the Kingdom of heaven, but the children of the Kingdom will be driven out into the outer darkness, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth." And Jesus said to the centurion, "You may go; as you have believed, let it be done for you." And at that very hour his servant was healed. Jesus entered the house of Peter, and saw his mother-in-law lying in bed with a fever. He touched her hand, the fever left her, and she rose and waited on him. When it was evening, they brought him many who were possessed by demons, and he drove out the spirits by a word and cured all the sick, to fulfill what had been said by Isaiah the prophet: He took away our infirmities and bore our diseases.

3) Reflection

- The Gospel today continues the description of the activity of Jesus to indicate how He put into practice the law of God, proclaimed on the mountain of the Beatitudes. After the cure of the leper in the Gospel of yesterday (Mt 8:1-4), it now follows the description of other cures.
- Matthew 8:5-7: The petition of the centurion and the answer of Jesus. When analyzing the texts of the Gospel, it is always good to be attentive to small details. The centurion is a pagan, a foreigner. He does not ask for anything, he only informs Jesus, telling him that his servant is sick and suffers terribly. Behind this attitude of people in regard to Jesus, there is the conviction that it was not necessary to ask things of Jesus. It was sufficient to communicate the problem to Him, and Jesus will do the rest. An attitude of unlimited trust! In fact, the reaction of Jesus is immediate: "I will come Myself and cure him!"
- Matthew 8:8: The reaction of the centurion. The centurion did not expect such an immediate and generous gesture. He did not expect that Jesus would go to his house. Beginning with his own experience of "head" he gives an example to express his faith and the trust that he had in Jesus. He tells Him: "Lord, I am not worthy to have You under my roof, just say a word and my servant will be cured. For I am under authority myself and have soldiers under me; and I say to one man, 'Go' and he goes, to another, 'Come here' and he comes, to my servant, 'Do this' and he does it". This reaction of a foreigner before Jesus reveals what the opinion of the people was in regard to Jesus.

Jesus was a person who could be trusted. He would not have driven away those who would go to Him to tell Him their problems. This is the image of Jesus which the Gospel of Matthew communicates to us even now that we read it in the XXI century.

- Matthew 8:10-13: Jesus' comment. The official admired the reaction of Jesus and Jesus admired the reaction of the official: "In truth I tell you, in no one in Israel have I found faith as great as this". Jesus already foresaw what was happening when Matthew wrote the Gospel: "And I tell you many will come from east and west and sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob at the feast in the Kingdom of Heaven, but the children of the Kingdom will be thrown out into the darkness outside where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth". The message of Jesus, the new law of God proclaimed from the top of the mount of the Beatitudes is a response to the deepest desires of the human heart. The sincere and honest pagans like the centurion and so many others coming from the east and the west saw in Jesus the response to their yearning and they accepted it. The message of Jesus is not, in the first place, a doctrine or morals, nor a rite or a series of norms, but a deep experience of God which responds to what the human heart desires. It is this experience of God that people look for in the Church, or in their seeking through other religions, and we should live and radiate this way of God to others and to seekers.

- Matthew 8:14-15: The cure of Peter's mother-in-law. Jesus goes to Peter's house and cures his mother-in-law. She was sick. In the second half of the first century, when Matthew writes, the expression "Peter's house" evoked the Church, constructed on the rock which was Peter. Jesus enters into this house and cures Peter's mother-in-law. "He touched her hand and the fever left her and she got up and began to serve Him". In Greek, the word used is diakonew, to serve. A woman becomes deaconess in Peter's house. This is what was happening in the communities of that time. In the letter to the Romans, Paul mentions the deaconess Phoebe of the community of Cenchreae (Rm 16:1). Service was a hallmark of the first Christians.

- Matthew 8, 16-17: The fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah. Matthew says that "when evening came", they brought many people to Jesus who were possessed by the devil. Why only at night? Because in Mark's Gospel, from where Matthew takes his information, it was a Saturday (Mk 1:21), and Saturday ended at sunset. Then people could go out of the house, carry a burden and take the sick to the place where Jesus was. "Jesus, with His word, cast out the evil spirits and cured all the sick! Using a text of Isaiah, Matthew throws light on the meaning of Jesus' actions: "So that which Isaiah had said would be fulfilled". "Ours were the sufferings He was bearing, ours the sorrows He was carrying". In this way, Matthew teaches that Jesus was the Messiah-Servant, announced by Isaiah (Is 53:4; cf. Is 42:1-9; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; 52:13-53:12). Matthew was doing what our communities do today: to use the Bible to enlighten and interpret the events and discover the presence of the creative word of God.

4) Personal questions

- Notice how Jesus didn't wait to be asked. In our imitation of Him, do we wait to help others until we are asked? Why?
- The Good News of Jesus is not, in the first place, a doctrine or morals, nor a rite or a series of norms, but it is a profound and authentic experience of God that responds to what the human heart yearns for, and contained in the summation of the two greatest

commandments. However, how can Church doctrine, morality, and instruction work in bringing us this profound and authentic experience of God? What spiritual practices help to bring this experience?

- Many people and religions claim to offer a profound experience of God. This is also an area where Satan, the deceiver, is expert in. How do we discern authentic experience from one that is just “feel good” or one that merely satisfies our earthly desires at the moment?
- Two thousand years ago there was no Internet, no shopping malls, no television or movies, no printing presses, etc. Religion filled peoples’ lives. Is the experience of the centurion possible today with so many doubts, alternatives, and distractions? How can we move to make God central to our lives again?

5) Concluding Prayer

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

Lectio Divina Sunday, June 28, 2020

Renouncing all to follow Jesus

*"No one who prefers father or mother to me
is worthy of Me!"
Matthew 10:37-42*

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

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

Matthew 10:37: Love of Jesus must be above love of father and mother and children

Matthew 10:38: The cross is part of the following of Jesus

Matthew 10:39: To know how to lose one’s life so as to keep it

Matthew 10:40-41: Jesus identifies Himself with the missionary and the disciple
Matthew 10:42: The least deed done to one of the least is rewarded

b) A key to the reading:

In the 13th Sunday of ordinary time, we meditate on the last section of the *Discourse on Mission* (Mt 10:1-42). This discourse contains words and counsels of Jesus, teaching us to carry out the mission of proclaiming the Good News of God. Jesus does not deceive, and points out clearly the difficulties that this mission implies. As we read this text, it is good to pay attention to what follows: “What is Jesus’ basic demand of those who go on mission?”

c) Text:

37 'No one who prefers father or mother to Me is worthy of Me. No one who prefers son or daughter to Me is worthy of Me. 38 Anyone who does not take his cross and follow in My footsteps is not worthy of Me. 39 Anyone who finds his life will lose it; anyone who loses his life for My sake will find it.

40 'Anyone who welcomes you welcomes Me; and anyone who welcomes Me welcomes the one who sent Me. 41 'Anyone who welcomes a prophet because he is a prophet will have a prophet's reward; and anyone who welcomes a righteous person because he is righteous will have the reward of a righteous person. 42 'If anyone gives so much as a cup of cold water to



one of these little ones because he is a disciple, then in truth I tell you, he will most certainly not go without his reward.'

3. A moment of prayerful silence

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

4. Some questions

to help us in our personal reflection.

- a) What part of the text touched you most? Why?
- b) What recommendations does this text hold for us? What is its basic demand?
- c) Jesus says, "No one who prefers father or mother to Me is worthy of Me" – How are we to understand this statement?
- d) What does the text tell us about the mission we must undertake as disciples of Jesus?

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

a) The context of our text in the Gospel of Matthew:

The Gospel of Matthew organizes the words and actions of Jesus around *five* great discourses: (i) Matthew 5 to 7: The Sermon **on the Mount** describes the gateway to the

Kingdom. (ii) Matthew 10: the **Discourse on the Mission** describes the way those who follow Jesus must proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom and the difficulties involved. (iii) Matthew 13: the **Discourse of the Parables**, by means of parallels taken from daily life, Jesus reveals the presence of the Kingdom in people's lives. (iv) Matthew 18: the **Discourse on Community** describes how Christians ought to live together in such a way that the community becomes a revelation of the Kingdom. (v) Matthew 24 and 25: the **Eschatological Discourse** describes the future coming of the Kingdom of God. Through this literary device, Matthew imitates *the five books of the Pentateuch*, and thus presents the Good News of the Kingdom as the *New Law of God*. In the Discourse on the Mission (Mt 10:1-42), the Evangelist puts together words and recommendations of Jesus that shed light on the difficult situation of the Judeo-Christians towards the second half of the first century. He wants to encourage them not to lose heart in spite of the many and grave difficulties they have to face in proclaiming the Good News to the brothers and sisters of their race. It is indeed at this time, the 80's, that the Jews are recovering from the disaster of the destruction of Jerusalem which took place in the 70's, and are beginning to reorganize themselves in the regions of Syria and Galilee. A tension is growing between the "Synagogue" and the "Ecclesia". This tension, source of much suffering and persecution, forms the background to the Discourse on the Mission and, therefore, to the Gospel of the 13th Sunday of ordinary time.

b) A commentary on the text:

Matthew 10:37: *Love of Jesus must be greater than love of parents and children*

Jesus says, "No one who prefers father or mother to Me is worthy of Me; no one who prefers son or daughter to Me is worthy of Me". We find this same statement in the Gospel of Luke with even greater force: "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, and wife and children, and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple" (Lk 14:26). Does Jesus then want to disintegrate family life? This cannot be so, because elsewhere He insists on the observance of the fourth commandment which binds us to love father and mother (Mk 7:8-13; 10:17-19). He Himself obeyed His parents (Lk 2:51). These seem to be contradictory statements. One thing is certain: Jesus does not contradict Himself. We shall give an interpretation to show that the two statements are both true and not mutually exclusive.

Matthew 10:38: *The cross is part of following Jesus*

Jesus says, "Anyone who does not take up his cross and follow in My footsteps is not worthy of Me". In Mark's Gospel Jesus says, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me!" (Mk 8:34). In those days, the cross was the death sentence imposed by the Roman Empire for thieves and the marginalized. To take up one's cross and follow Jesus was equivalent to agreeing to be marginalized by the unjust system of the Empire. Jesus' cross is the consequence of the free commitment taken on to reveal the Good News that God is Father and that, therefore, all are to be accepted and treated as brothers and sisters. Because of this revolutionary proclamation, Jesus was persecuted and was not afraid to give up His life. *Greater love than this no man has, that he lay down his life for his friends.*

Matthew 10:39: *To know how to lose one's life so as to keep it*

This manner of speaking was quite common among the early Christians because it expressed what they were living through. For instance, for Paul to be faithful to Jesus and obtain life, he had to lose everything he had: career, the respect of his people, and suffer persecution. The same happened to many Christians. Christians were persecuted for being Christian. Paul says, "I am crucified with Christ". "I wish to experience His cross and his death, so that I may also experience His resurrection." "I am crucified to the world and the world to me". This is the paradox of the Gospel: The last is first, the one who loses wins, the one who gives all keeps all, the one who dies lives. The one who has the courage to lose life obtains it. This is a logic that is quite different from the neo-liberal system that rules the world today.

Matthew 10:40-41: *Jesus identifies Himself with the missionary and the disciple*

For the missionary and the disciple, it is very important to know that he/she will never be alone. If she/he remains faithful to her/his mission, she/he will have the certainty that Jesus identifies Himself with her/him, and through Jesus the Father will reveal Himself to those to whom the missionary and disciple proclaim the Good News. And so, just as Jesus reflected the face of the Father, so also the disciple should be a mirror where people can glimpse something of the love of Jesus.

Matthew 10:42: *The least deed done for the little ones, reveals the presence of the Father*

In order to change the world and human relationships, the political decisions of powerful people are not enough, nor are the decrees of Councils and of bishops. What is needed is a change in the lives of people, in interpersonal and community relationships; otherwise, nothing will change. That is why Jesus puts so much importance on small acts of sharing: a glass of water given to a poor person!

c) A deepening: To love father and mother, to hate father and mother!

One of the things that Jesus insists on for those who wish to follow Him is that of leaving behind father, mother, wife, children, sisters, house, land, to leave everything for love of Him and His Gospel (Lk 18: 29; Mt 19:29; Mk 10:29). He even commands us "to hate father, mother, wife, children, sisters, brothers. Otherwise, you cannot be my disciples" (cf. Lk 14:28). These demands are not just for some but for all those who wish to follow Him (Lk 14:25-26, 33). How can we understand these statements that seem to dismantle and break up all family ties? We cannot imagine Jesus demanding of all men and women in Galilee to leave their families, lands, villages to follow Him. In fact, this did not happen except for a small group of followers. So what is the meaning of these demands?

If we place the demand to leave one's family within the social context of the period, we can see another meaning, much more fundamental and practical. The invasion of Palestine in 64 B.C. and the imposition of the tribute by Herod (35 to 3 B.C.) and his son Herod Antipas (3 B.C. to 37 A.D.), a policy in favor of the Roman government, brought progressive impoverishment and growing unemployment. Through Herod's policy, supported by the Roman Empire, the Hellenic ideology permeated daily life, thus bringing with it growing individualism. All this caused the larger family, the clan and the community to disintegrate. Thus the small family began to feel bound to turn in

on itself and not able to practice the law. Besides, the practice of ritual purity caused people to despise and exclude those persons and families that lived in legal impurity. The economic, social, political and religious context made it possible for families to turn in on themselves and weaken the clan. Preoccupation with family problems stopped people from uniting in **community**. It stopped the clan from realizing the aim for which it was created, that is, to offer real and adequate protection for families and persons, to preserve identity, to defend land, to prevent exclusion and to welcome the excluded and the poor, and thus to reveal the face of God. Now, for the Kingdom to reveal itself again in the sharing, it was necessary to break the vicious cycle. People had to overcome the strict limits of the small family to open themselves to the larger family and the Community. This is the context that forms the background to the words proclaimed by Jesus.

Jesus Himself gives an example. When His family tries to claim Him, He reacts and says, “Who are My mother and My brethren?” And, looking around, He says, “Behold My mother and My brethren! For whoever does the will God, he is My brother and sister and mother” (Mk 3:33-35). He stretched the family. He created community. The people He attracted and called were the poor and the excluded (Lk 4:18; Mt 11:25). He asked the same thing of those who wished to follow Him. The excluded and marginalized must be welcomed again into the sharing and thus feel welcomed by God (cf. Lk 14:12-14). This was the way to achieve the end of the Law that said, “There should be no one of you in need” (Deut 15:4).

Jesus tries to change the process of disintegration of the clan, of the community. Like the great prophets of the past, He seeks to consolidate community life in the villages of Galilee. He takes up again the deep meaning of the clan, of the family, of the community as an expression of the incarnation of the love of God in the love of neighbor. That is why He asks of those who wish to be His disciples to leave father, mother, wife, brother, sister, house, all! They have to lose their life in order to possess it! He is the guarantor of this: “Amen I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands for My sake and for the Gospel’s sake, who shall not receive now in the present time a hundredfold as much, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands – along with persecutions, and in the age to come life everlasting” (Mk 10:29-30). Truly, those who have the courage to break the closed circle of their family will find again, in the clan, in the community, a hundredfold whatever they have left: brother, sister, mother, child, land! Jesus does what people expected in messianic times: to lead back the hearts of parents to their children, and the hearts of children to their parents, to rebuild the clan, reweave the social pattern.

6. Psalm 19:7-14

The Law of Yahweh is perfect

The Law of Yahweh is perfect,
refreshment to the soul;
the decree of Yahweh is trustworthy,
wisdom for the simple.
The precepts of Yahweh are honest,

joy for the heart;
the commandment of Yahweh is pure,
light for the eyes.
The fear of Yahweh is pure,
lasting forever;
the judgements of Yahweh are true,
upright, every one,
more desirable than gold,
even than the finest gold;
His words are sweeter than honey,
that drips from the comb.

Thus Your servant is formed by them;
observing them brings great reward.
But who can detect his own failings?
Wash away my hidden faults.
And from pride preserve Your servant,
never let it be my master.
So shall I be above reproach,
free from grave sin.

May the words of my mouth always find favor,
and the whispering of my heart, in Your presence,
Yahweh, my rock, my redeemer.

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, June 29, 2020

Jesus said to Peter, "You are the Rock!"
The Rock of support and of scandal
Matthew 16:13-23

1. Opening prayer

"Lord Jesus, send Your Spirit to help us to read the Scriptures with the same mind with which 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 suffering and death. Thus, the cross which had seemed to be the end of all hope became for them the resurrection and source of new life.

Create in us silence so that we may listen to Your voice in creation, 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 from Emmaus, may experience the power 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 to us the Father and sent us your Spirit. Amen.”

2. Reading

a) A key to the reading:

The liturgical text of the feast of Saints Peter and Paul is taken from the Gospel of Matthew: 16:13-19. In our commentary we also include verses 20 -23, because in the entirety of the text, verses 13 to 23, Jesus turns to Peter and twice calls him "rock". Once he calls him the foundation stone (Mt 16:18) and once the rock of scandal (Mt 16:23). Both statements complement each other. While reading the text, it is good to pay attention to Peter's attitude and to the solemn words that Jesus addresses to him on two occasions.

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

13-14: Jesus wishes to know what people think of him.

15-16: Jesus asks the disciples and Peter makes his confession: "You are the Christ, the Son of God!"

17-20: Then we have Jesus' solemn reply to Peter (a key phrase for today's feast).

21-22: Jesus explains the meaning of Messiah, but Peter reacts and refuses to accept.

22-23: Jesus' solemn reply to Peter.

c) The text:

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

3. A moment of prayerful silence

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

4. Some questions

to help us in our personal reflection.

- a) Today there are many who want to put themselves before Jesus and His message. They come with an attitude that distorts His words, often for personal gain. Can you see and identify some of them? What rebuke might they be deserving of?
- b) Who do the people think Jesus is? Who do Peter and the disciples think Jesus is?
- c) There can be many ways to deny Jesus, for instance, to be embarrassed to discuss such things in “polite company”. Have I ever denied Jesus?
- d) Peter is rock in two ways: what are they?
- e) What kind of rock is our community?
- f) In the text we find several opinions as to who Jesus is and several ways of presenting the faith. Today too, there are several opinions as to who Jesus is. Which opinions does our community know? What kind of mission does that imply for us?

5. A key to the reading

to enter deeper into the theme.

i) The context:

In the narrative parts of his Gospel, Matthew follows the sequence of Mark's Gospel. However, he also quotes a source known to him and Luke. Rarely does he give information that is solely his, as in today's Gospel. This text and the dialogue between Jesus and Peter is interpreted variously, even in opposite directions in the various Christian churches. In the Catholic Church, this text forms the basis for the primacy of Peter. Without diminishing in any way the importance of this text, it might be good to situate it in the context of Matthew's Gospel, where elsewhere the qualities ascribed to Peter are also attributed to other people. They do not belong exclusively to Peter.

ii) Commentary on the text:

a) **Matthew 16:13-16 The opinions of the people and those of the disciples concerning Jesus.**

Jesus wishes to know what people think of Him. The answers are quite varied: John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah or one of the prophets. When Jesus asks the disciples' opinion, Peter replies in their name: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God!" Peter's reply is not new. On a previous occasion, when Jesus walked on the water, the other disciples had made a similar profession of faith: "Truly You are the Son of God!" (Mt 14:33). This is an acknowledgment that in Jesus the prophecies of the Old Testament are fulfilled. In John's Gospel, Martha makes the same profession of faith: "You are the Christ, the Son of God who is come into the world" (Jn 11:27).

b) **Matthew 16:17 Jesus' reply to Peter: Blessed are you, Peter!**

Jesus proclaims Peter "blessed" because he has been given a revelation from the Father. Jesus' reply is not new. On a previous occasion, Jesus had made the same proclamation of blessedness to the disciples because they were hearing and seeing that which no one else knew before (Mt 13:16), and He praised the Father because He had revealed the Son to little ones and not to the learned (Mt 11:25). Peter is one of the little ones to whom the Father reveals Himself. The perception that God is present in Jesus does not "come from flesh and blood", it is not the result of study or merit of human effort, but a gift that God gives to whom He pleases.

c) Matthew 16:18-20 Peter's qualifications: Being foundation stone and taking possession of the keys of the Kingdom.

1. Being Rock: Peter has to be rock, that is, he has to be a strong foundation for the Church, so that she may stand up to the assaults of the gates of hell. Through these words addressed by Jesus to Peter, Matthew encourages the suffering and persecuted communities in Syria and Palestine, who saw in Peter the leadership that had marked them from the beginning. In spite of being weak and persecuted, they had a solid foundation, guaranteed by the words of Jesus. In those days, the communities cultivated a very strong sentimental tie with the leaders who had established them. Thus, the communities of Syria and Palestine cultivated their relationship with the person of Peter; those of Greece with the person of Paul; some communities in Asia with the person of the beloved disciple and others with the person of John of the Apocalypse. Identifying themselves with the leader of their origin helped them to grow better in their identity and spirituality. But this also gave rise to conflict as in the case of the community of Corinth (1Cor 1:11-12). Even today, there are Christian communities, ecclesial communities, who follow a particular leader and identify with him or her.

Being rock as foundation of the faith, recalls to mind the word of God to the people in exile in Babylonia: "Listen to me, you who pursue justice, who seek the Lord; look to the rock from which you were hewn, to the pit from which you were quarried; look to Abraham, your father, and to Sara, who gave you birth; when he was but one, I called him, I blessed him and made him many" (Is 51:1-2). When applied to Peter, this quality of foundation stone points to a new beginning for the people of God.

2. The keys of the Kingdom: Peter receives the keys of the Kingdom to bind and to loose, that is, to reconcile people with God. The same power of binding and loosing is given to the communities (Mt 18:8) and to the disciples (Jn 20:23). One of the points on which the Gospel of Matthew insists is reconciliation and pardon (Mt 5:7,23-24,38-42,44-48; 6:14-15; 18:15-35). The reality is that in the 80s and 90s, there were many tensions and divisions within families in the communities in Syria because of faith in Jesus. Some accepted Him as Messiah whereas others did not, and this was the source of many contrasting views and conflicts. Matthew insists on reconciliation. Reconciliation kept on being one of the most important tasks of coordinators of the communities. Like Peter they must bind and loose, that is, work so as to bring about reconciliation, mutual acceptance, and build up true fraternity.

3. The Church: the word Church, in Greek, ekklesia, is found 105 times in the New Testament, almost always in the Acts and the Epistles. We find the word only three times in the Gospels and only in Matthew. The word means "a called assembly" or

"chosen assembly". The word applies to the people gathered, called by the Word of God, a people that seeks to live the message of the Kingdom brought by Jesus. The Church is not the Kingdom, but an instrument and a sign of the Kingdom. The Kingdom is greater. In the Church, the community, all must see or should see what happens when a group of people allows God to rule and take possession of their life.

d) Matthew 16:21-22 Jesus completes what is lacking in Peter's reply, and Peter reacts by not accepting.

Peter had confessed: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God!" In keeping with the prevailing ideology of the time, he imagined a glorious Messiah. Jesus corrects him: "It is necessary that the Messiah suffer and be killed in Jerusalem". With the words "it is necessary", He says that suffering had been foreseen in the prophecies (Is 53:2-8). If the disciples accept Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God, then they must accept Him also as the Servant Messiah who must die. Not just the triumph of glory but also the way of the cross! But Peter will not accept Jesus' correction and tries to change His mind.

e) Matthew 16:23 Jesus' reply to Peter: rock of scandal.

Jesus' reply is surprising: "Get behind me, Satan, you are a scandal to me, for you do not mind the things of God, but those of men!" Satan is the one who leads us away from the path marked out for us by God. Jesus literally says: "Get behind me!" (in Latin, *vada retro!*). Peter wanted to steer and point the way. Jesus says: "Get behind me!" Jesus, not Peter, is the one who points the way and sets the rhythm. The disciple must follow the master. He must live in constant conversion. Jesus' word was also a message to all those who led the communities. They must "follow" Jesus and they may not go before as Peter wished to do. It is not only they who are able to point the way or the manner. On the contrary, like Peter, instead of being a rock of support, they can become rock of scandal, a stumbling block. Such were some leaders of the communities at the time of Matthew. There were ambiguities. The same may happen among us today.

iii) A further explanation of the Gospels concerning Peter:

A portrait of St. Peter.

Peter was transformed from fisherman of fish to fisherman of men (Mk 1:7). He was married (Mk 1:30). He was a good man and very human. He tended naturally to a role of leadership among the twelve disciples of Jesus. Jesus respected this natural quality and made Peter the leader of His first community (Jn 21:17). Before joining Jesus' community, Peter's name was Simon bar Jona (Mt 16:17), Simon son of Jonah. Jesus nicknamed him Cephas or Rock, and this then became Peter (Lk 6:14).

By nature, Peter could have been anything but rock. He was courageous in speech, but at the hour of danger he fell victim to fear and fled. For instance, when Jesus came walking on the water, Peter asked: "Jesus, can I too come to you on the water?" Jesus replied: "Come, Peter!" Peter then went out of the boat and started walking on the water. But when a bigger wave came along, he was afraid and began to sink. He then cried out: "Save me, Lord!" Jesus took hold of him and saved him (Mt 14:28-31). At the last supper, Peter said to Jesus: "I shall never deny you, Lord!" (Mk 14:31); yet a few hours

later, in the palace of the high priest, in front of a servant girl, when Jesus had already been arrested, Peter denied Jesus, swearing that he had no connection with Him (Mk 14:66-72). In the garden of olives, when Jesus had been arrested, he even used his word (Jn 18:10), but then fled, leaving Jesus alone (Mk 14:50). Peter was not naturally rock! And yet the weak and human Peter, so like us, did become rock because Jesus had prayed for him: "Peter, I have prayed for you so that your faith may not fail; and, when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren" (Lk 22:31-32). That is why Jesus was able to say: "You are Peter and upon this rock I will build My Church" (Mt 16:18). Jesus helped him to become rock. After the resurrection, in Galilee, Jesus appeared to Peter and asked him twice: "Peter, do you love Me?" And Peter replied twice: "Lord, you know that I love you" (Jn 21:15,16). When Jesus put the same question to him the third time, Peter was hurt. He must have remembered that he had denied Him three times. So he answered: "Lord, you know all things! You know that I love you!" It was then that Jesus entrusted to him the care of the sheep: "Peter, feed My sheep!" (Jn 21:17). With Jesus' help, the strength of the rock grew in Peter and He revealed Himself on the day of Pentecost. On that day, when the Holy Spirit descended upon the disciples, Peter opened the doors of the upper room where they were all gathered behind closed doors for fear of the Jews (Jn 20:19), and, infused with courage, began to announce the Good News of Jesus to the people (Acts 2:14-40). From then on he never stopped! On account of this courageous proclamation of the resurrection, he was arrested (Acts 4:3). During the interrogation he was forbidden to announce the good news (Acts 4:18), but Peter did not obey the prohibition. He said: "We must obey God rather than man!" (Acts 4:19; 5:29). He was arrested again (Acts 5:18,26). He was scourged (Acts 5:40). But he said: "Thank you very much. But we shall go on!" (cf. Acts 5:42).

Tradition tells us that at the end of his life, when he was in Rome, Peter had another moment of fear. But then he went back, was arrested and condemned to death on the cross. However, he asked that he might be crucified with his head down. He thought that he was not worthy to die in the same way as his master, Jesus. Peter was true to himself and to Jesus to the very end.

6. Psalm 103 (102)

Thanksgiving: Bless the Lord, O my soul;
and all that is within me, bless His holy name!

Bless the Lord, O my soul,
and forget not all His benefits,
who forgives all your iniquity,
who heals all your diseases,
who redeems your life from the pit,
who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,
who satisfies you with good as long as you live
so that your youth is renewed like the eagles.

The Lord works vindication
and justice for all who are oppressed.

He made known His ways to Moses,
His acts to the people of Israel.

The Lord is merciful and gracious,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
He will not always chide,
nor will He keep His anger for ever.
He does not deal with us according to our sins,
nor requite us according to our iniquities.

For as the heavens are high above the earth,
so great is His steadfast love toward those who fear Him;
as far as the east is from the west,
so far does He remove our transgressions from us.
As a father pities his children,
so the Lord pities those who fear Him.

For He knows our frame;
He remembers that we are dust.
As for man, his days are like grass;
he flourishes like a flower of the field;
for the wind passes over it, and it is gone,
and its place knows it no more.

But the steadfast love of the Lord
is from everlasting to everlasting upon those who fear Him,
and His righteousness to children's children,
to those who keep His covenant
and remember to do His commandments.

The Lord has established His throne in the heavens,
and His kingdom rules over all.
Bless the Lord, O you His angels,
you mighty ones who do His word,
hearkening to the voice of His word!

Bless the Lord, all His hosts,
his ministers that do His will!
Bless the Lord, all His works,
in all places of His dominion.
Bless the Lord, O my soul!

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 that which Your Word has revealed to us. May we, like Mary, Your mother, not only listen the Word but also practice it. You who live and reign with the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit forever and ever. Amen.

Lectio Divina Tuesday, June 30, 2020

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Father,
You call Your children to
walk in the light of Christ.
Free us from darkness
and keep us in the radiance of Your truth.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, Your Son,
who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

2) Gospel Reading - Matthew 8:23-27

As Jesus got into a boat, his disciples followed him. Suddenly a violent storm came up on the sea, so that the boat was being swamped by waves; but he was asleep. They came and woke him, saying, "Lord, save us! We are perishing!" He said to them, "Why are you terrified, O you of little faith?" Then he got up, rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was great calm. The men were amazed and said, "What sort of man is this, whom even the winds and the sea obey?"

3) Reflection

- Matthew writes for the converted Jews of the years 70's who felt lost like a boat in the middle of a stormy sea, without the hope of being able to get to the desired port. Jesus seems to be asleep in the boat and it seems to them that no divine power will come to save them from the persecution. In the face of this desperate and anguished situation, Matthew puts together several episodes of the life of Jesus to help the community discover, in the midst of an apparent absence, the welcoming and powerful presence of Jesus the conqueror who dominates the sea (Mt 8:23-27), who conquers and casts away the power of evil (Mt 9:28-34) and who has the power to forgive sins (Mt 9:1-8). In other words, Matthew wants to communicate hope and to suggest that the communities have no reason to fear. This is the reason for the narration of the storm calmed by Jesus in today's Gospel.
- Matthew 8:23: *The starting point: to enter into the boat.* Matthew follows the Gospel of Mark, but makes it shorter and inserts it in the new outline which he has adopted. In Mark, the day had been very tiring because of the work that they had done. Having finished the discourse of the parables (Mk 4:3-34), the disciples take Jesus into the boat and He was so tired that He fell asleep on a cushion (Mk 4:38). Matthew's text is very brief. It only says that Jesus went into the boat and that the disciples accompanied Him. Jesus is the Master. The disciples *follow* the Master.
- Matthew 8:24-25: *The desperate situation: "We are lost!"* The Lake of Galilee is close to high mountains. Sometimes, as the wind is forced upward by the mountains, moisture condenses over the lake causing a sudden storm. Strong wind, agitated sea, and a boat full of water are the result! The disciples were experienced fishermen. If

they thought that they were about to sink, it meant that the situation was truly dangerous! Jesus, however, is not aware and continues to sleep. They cried out, “*Save us, Lord, we are lost!*” In Matthew the profound sleep of Jesus is not only a sign of tiredness. It is also the expression of the calm trust of Jesus in God. The contrast between the attitude of Jesus and that of the disciples is enormous!

- Matthew 8:26: *The reaction of Jesus: “Why are you so frightened, you who have so little faith!”* Jesus wakes up, not because of the waves, but because of the desperate cry of the disciples. He turns to them saying, “*Why are you so frightened, you who have so little faith!*” He then stood up and rebuked the winds and the sea, because there was no danger. It is like when one arrives at a friend’s house, and the dog, at the side of his master, barks very much. One should not be afraid, because the master is present and controls the situation. The episode of the storm calmed by Jesus evokes the episode, when people, without fear, passed across the water of the sea (Ex 14:22). Jesus recreates this episode. He recalls the prophet Isaiah who said to the people: “*If you have to go across the water, I will be with you!*” (Isa 43:2). The episode of the calmed storm recalls and fulfills the prophecy announced in Psalm 107:

Those who ploughed the waves in the sea on the ships, plying their trade on the great ocean, they have seen the works of the Lord, His wonders in the deep.

By His word He raised a storm-wind lashing up towering waves.

Up to the sky then down to the depths; their stomachs were turned to water.

They staggered and reeled like drunkards, and all their skill went under.

They cried out to Yahweh in their distress. He rescued them from their plight.

He reduced the storm to calm, and all the waters subsided.

He brought them overjoyed at the stillness, to the port where they were bound (Ps 107: 23-30)

- Matthew 8:27: *The fear of the disciples: “Who is this man?”* Jesus asks, “*Why are you so frightened?*” The disciples do not know what to answer. Astounded, they ask themselves, “*What kind of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?*” In spite of the long time that they had lived with Jesus, they still do not know who He is. Jesus seems to be a foreigner to them! Who is this man?

- *Who is this man? Who is Jesus for us, for me?* This should be the question which urges us to continue to read the Gospel, every day, with the desire always to better know the significance and the importance of the person of Jesus for our life. From this question comes Christology. It does not come from elevated theological considerations, but from the desire of the first Christians to always find new names and titles to express what Jesus meant for them. There are tens of names, titles, and attributes, from that of *carpenter to Son of God*, which Jesus expresses: Messiah, Christ, Lord, Beloved Son, Holy One of God, Nazarene, Son of Man, Spouse, Son of God, Son of the Most High God, Carpenter, Son of Mary, Prophet, Master, Son of David, Rabboni, Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord; Son, Shepherd, Bread of Life, Resurrection, Light of the world, Way, Truth, Life, King of the Jews, King of Israel, etc. Every name, every image, is an effort to express what Jesus means for them. A name, no matter how beautiful it is, never succeeds in revealing the mystery of a person, and much less of the person of Jesus. Jesus does not enter into any of these names, outlines, or titles. He exceeds everything; He is the greatest! He cannot be put into a frame. Love takes up

all this, not the mind! Starting from this experience of a love which is alive, the names, the titles and the images receive their full significance. Definitively, who is Jesus for me, for us?

4) Personal questions

- What was the agitated sea at the time of Jesus? What was the agitated sea at the time when Matthew wrote his Gospel? Today, what is the agitated sea for us? Have you ever been on the point of drowning in the agitated waters of the sea of your life? What saved you?
- Who is Jesus for me? Which is the name of Jesus which expresses my faith and my love better?
- Do I take time to ask and pray for “the peace of Christ”, to have calm in my personal storms?

5) Concluding Prayer

Each age will praise Your deeds to the next,
proclaiming Your mighty works.
Your renown is the splendor of Your glory,
I will ponder the story of Your wonders. (Ps 145:4-5)