

Lectio Divina July 2020

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Lectio Divina Wednesday, July 1, 2020

Ordinary Time

1. Ordinary Time

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 8:28-34

When Jesus came to the territory of the Gadarenes, two demoniacs who were coming from the tombs met him. They were so savage that no one could travel by that road. They cried out, "What have you to do with us, Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the appointed time?" Some distance away a herd of many swine was feeding. The demons pleaded with him, "If you drive us out, send us into the herd of swine." And he said to them, "Go then!" They came out and entered the swine, and the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the sea where they drowned. The swineherds ran away, and when they came to the town they reported everything, including what had happened to the demoniacs. Thereupon the whole town came out to meet Jesus, and when they saw him they begged him to leave their district.

3) Reflection

- Today's Gospel stresses the power of Jesus over the devil. In our text, the devil and the power of evil is associated with three things: 1) the cemetery, the place of the dead. The death which kills life! 2) The pig, which was considered an impure animal. The impurity which separates from God! 3) The sea, which was considered the symbol of chaos before creation. The chaos which destroys nature. The Gospel of Mark, from which Matthew takes his information, associates the power of evil with a fourth element which is the word Legion (Mk 5:9), the name of the army of the Roman Empire. The Empire oppressed and exploited the people. Thus, it is understood that the victory of Jesus over the Devil had an enormous importance for the life of the communities of the years 70's, the time when Matthew wrote his Gospel. The communities lived oppressed and marginalized, because of the official ideology of the Roman Empire and of the Pharisees, which was renewed. The same significance and the same importance continue to be valid today.

- Matthew 8:28: The force of evil oppresses, ill-treats and alienates people. This first verse describes the situation of the people before the coming of Jesus. In describing the behavior of the two demoniacs, the Evangelist associates the force of evil with the cemetery and with death. It is a deadly power, without a goal, without direction, without control and a destructive power, which causes everyone to fear. It deprives people of their conscience, self-control, and autonomy.
- Matthew 8:29: Before the simple presence of Jesus the force of evil breaks up and disintegrates. Here is described the first contact between Jesus and the two possessed men. We see that there is total disproportion. The power, that at first seemed to be so strong, melts and disintegrates before Jesus. They shouted, “What do you want with us, Son of God? Have you come to torture us before the time?” They become aware that they are losing their power.
- Matthew 8:30-32: The power of evil is impure and has no autonomy, nor consistency. The Devil does not have power over his movements. It only gets the power to enter into the pigs with the permission of Jesus! Once they entered into the pigs, the whole herd charged down the cliff into the sea and perished in the water. In the opinion of the people, the pig was a symbol of impurity, which prevented the human being from relating with God and from feeling accepted by Him. The sea was the symbol of the existing chaos before creation and which, according to the belief of that time, continued to threaten life. This episode of the pigs which threw themselves into the sea is strange and difficult to understand. But the message is very clear: before Jesus, the power of evil has no autonomy, no consistency. Anyone who believes in Jesus has already conquered the power of evil and should not fear!
- Matthew 8:33-34: The reaction of the people of that place. The herdsmen of the pigs went to the city and told the story to the people, and they all set out to meet Jesus. Mark says that they saw the “possessed” man sitting down, dressed and in his right mind” (Mk 5:15). But the pigs were still gone! This is why they asked Jesus to leave their neighborhood. For them, the pigs were more important than the person who recovered his senses.
- The expulsion of the demons. At the time of Jesus, the words Devil or Satan were used to indicate the power of evil which drew persons away from the right path. For example, when Peter tried to divert Jesus from His mission, he was Satan for Jesus (Mk 8:33). Other times, those same words were used to indicate the political power of the Roman Empire which oppressed and exploited people. For example, in the Apocalypse, the Roman Empire is identified with “Devil or Satan” (Rev 12:9). While at other times, people used the same words to designate evils and illnesses. They spoke of devil, dumb spirit, deaf spirit, impure or unclean spirit, etc. There was great fear! In the time of Matthew, in the second half of the first century, the fear of demons increased. Some religions from the East taught worship of spirits. They taught that some of our mistaken gestures could irritate the spirits, and these, out of revenge, could prevent us from having access to God and deprive us of divine benefits. For this reason, through rites and writings, intense prayer and complicated ceremonies, people sought to appease these spirits or demons in such a way that they would not cause harm to life. These religions, instead of liberating people, nourished fear and anguish. Now, one of the

objectives of the Good News of Jesus was to help people to liberate themselves from this fear. The coming of the Kingdom of God meant the coming of a stronger power. Jesus is “the strongest man” who can conquer Satan, the power of evil, snatching away from its hands a humanity imprisoned by fear (cf. Mk 3:27). For this reason the Gospels insist on the victory of Jesus over the power of evil, over the devil, over Satan, over sin and over death. The Gospels encourage communities to overcome this fear of the devil! Today, who can say “I am completely free?” Nobody! Then, if I am not totally free, there is some part of me which is possessed by other powers. How can these forces be cast away? The message of today’s Gospel continues to be valid for us.

4) Personal questions

- What oppresses and ill-treats people today? Why is it that so much is said about casting out the Devil today? Is it good to insist so much on the Devil?
- How is the meaning of a statement different when we use the term “evil” or “evil forces” versus “Evil One” or Satan or the Devil? How does modern society try to downplay the existence of Satan? Is this important?
- Who can say that he/she is completely free or liberated? Nobody! And then, we are all somewhat possessed by other forces which occupy some space within us. What can we do to expel this power from within us and from society?
- What is freedom? What is free-will? What is choice? If I go along with the crowd, am I free? Have I freely decided or have I acquiesced? Others, including Satan, cannot force us, but we can “go along”. We may not say “yes”, but did we really say “no” to evil today?

5) Concluding Prayer

Yahweh is tenderness and pity,
slow to anger, full of faithful love.
Yahweh is generous to all;
His tenderness embraces all His creatures. (Ps 145:8-9)

Lectio Divina Thursday, July 2, 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 9:1-8

After entering a boat, Jesus made the crossing, and came into his own town. And there people brought to him a paralytic lying on a stretcher. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Courage, child, your sins are forgiven." At that, some of the scribes said to themselves, "This man is blaspheming." Jesus knew what they were thinking, and said, "Why do you harbor evil thoughts? Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"— he then said to the paralytic, "Rise, pick up your stretcher, and go home." He rose and went home. When the crowds saw this they were struck with awe and glorified God who had given such authority to men.

3) Reflection

- The extraordinary authority of Jesus. To the reader, Jesus appears as a person invested with extraordinary authority by means of words and actions (Mt 9:6-8). The authoritative word of Jesus strikes evil at its root: in the case of the paralytic man, on sin that affects the man in his liberty and obstructs his living: "Your sins are forgiven" (v. 5); "Rise, pick up your bed and go home" (v. 6). Truly all the forms of paralysis of the heart and mind to which we are subject are canceled by the authority of Jesus (9:6), because during His life on earth He met all these forms. The authoritative and effective word of Jesus awakens paralyzed humanity (9:5-7) and gives it the gift of walking (9:6) in a renewed faith
- The encounter with the paralytic. After the storm and a visit to the country of the Gadarenes, Jesus returns to Capernaum, His city. And as He was on His way, He met the paralytic. The healing did not take place in a house, but along the road. Therefore, along the road that leads to Capernaum they brought Him a paralytic man. Jesus addresses him, calling him "My son," a gesture of attention that soon becomes a gesture of salvation: "your sins are forgiven you" (v. 2) The forgiveness of sins which Jesus pronounces on the part of God to the paralytic refers to the bond between sickness, failure and sin. This is the first time that the evangelist attributes this particular divine power to Jesus in an explicit way. For the Jews, a person's illness was considered a punishment because of sins committed. The physical illness was always considered a consequence of one's own or one's parents' moral evil (Jn 9:2). Jesus restores to man the condition of salvation freeing him from illness as well as from sin.
- For some of those who were present, for the scribes, the words of Jesus which announced forgiveness of sins was a true and proper blasphemy. According to them, Jesus was arrogant because God alone can forgive sins. They did not manifest openly such a judgment of Jesus but expressed it by murmuring among themselves. Jesus, who penetrates their hearts, sees their considerations and reproves them because of their unbelief. The expression of Jesus "To prove to you that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins..." (v. 6) He is going to indicate that not only God can forgive sins, but with Jesus, also man.
- The crowd, in contrast to the scribes, is seized by fear before the cure of the paralytic and glorifies God. The crowd is struck by the power to forgive sins manifested in the healing. People exult because God has granted such power to the Son of Man. Is it

possible to attribute this to the ecclesial community where forgiveness of sins was granted by order of Jesus? Matthew has presented this episode on forgiveness of sins with the intention of applying it to fraternal relationships within the ecclesial community. In it the practice to forgive sins, by delegation of Jesus, was already in force; a practice which was not shared in the Synagogue. The theme of forgiveness of sins is repeated also in Mt 18 and, at the end of Matthew's Gospel it is affirmed that this is rooted in the death of Jesus on the Cross (26:28). But in our context the forgiveness of sins is linked with the demand of mercy present in the episode which follows, the call of Matthew: "...mercy is what pleases Me, not sacrifice. And indeed, I came to call not the righteous but sinners" (Mt 9:13). Such words of Jesus mean to say that He has made visible the forgiveness of God, above all, in His relationships with the Publicans or tax collectors, and sinners, in sitting at table with them.

- This account takes up again the problem of sin and the forgiveness which should be given. It is a story that should occupy a privileged place in the preaching of our ecclesial communities.

4) Personal questions

- Are you convinced that Jesus, called the friend of sinners, does not despise your weaknesses and your resistance, but He understands and offers you the necessary help to live a life in harmony with God and with the brothers and sisters?
- When you have the experience of betraying or refusing friendship with God do you have recourse to the Sacrament of Reconciliation that reconciles you with the Father and with the Church and makes you a new creature by the force of the Holy Spirit?

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 Friday, July 3, 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 - John 20:24-29

Thomas, called Didymus, one of the Twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples said to him, "We have seen the Lord." But Thomas said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger into the nail marks and put my hand into his side, I will not believe." Now a week later his disciples were again inside and Thomas was with them. Jesus came, although the doors were locked, and stood in their midst and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands, and bring your hand and put it into my side, and do not be unbelieving, but believe." Thomas answered and said to him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you come to believe because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed."

3) Reflection

- Today is the Feast of Saint Thomas, and the Gospel speaks to us about the encounter of Jesus with Thomas, the apostle who wanted to see in order to believe. For this reason many call him "Doubting Thomas."

The message of the Gospel today is much more profound and timely than it might initially appear. Let us look deeper into it:

- John 20:24-25: The doubt of Thomas. Thomas, one of the twelve, was not present when Jesus appeared to the disciples the week before. He did not believe in the witness of the others who said, "We have seen the Lord." He gives some conditions: "Unless I can see the holes that the nails made in His hands and can put my finger into the holes they made, and unless I can put my hand into His side, I refuse to believe." Thomas is very demanding. In order to believe he wants to see! He does not want a miracle in order to believe. No! He wants to see the signs on the hands, on the feet and on the side! He does not believe in the glorious Jesus, separated from the human Jesus who suffered on the Cross. When John writes, at the end of the first century, there were some people who did not accept the coming of the Son of God in the flesh (2Jn 7; 1 Jn 4:2-3). They were the Gnostics, who despised matter and the body. John presents this concern of Thomas to criticize the Gnostics: "To see in order to believe." Thomas' doubt also makes us see the difficulty of believing in the Resurrection!

- John 20:26-27: Do not be unbelieving but believe. The text says "six days later." That means that Thomas was capable of maintaining his opinion for a whole week against the witness of the other apostles. Stubborn! Thank God, for us! Thus, six days later, during the community meeting, they once again had the profound experience of the presence of the risen Lord in their midst. The closed doors could not prevent the presence of Jesus in the midst of those who believe in him. Today, it is also like this. When we are meeting, even when we are meeting with the doors closed, Jesus is in our midst. The first word of Jesus is, and will always be, "Peace be with you!" What impresses us is the kindness of Jesus. He does not criticize, nor does He judge the disbelief of Thomas, but He accepts the challenge and says, "Thomas, put your finger in the hole of My hands!" Jesus confirms the conviction of Thomas and of the communities, that the glorious Risen One is the tortured crucified One! The Jesus who is in the community is not a glorious Jesus who has nothing in common with our life.

He is the same Jesus who lived on this earth and on His body He bears the signs of His Passion. The signs of the Passion are found today in the sufferings of people, in hunger, in the signs of torture and injustice. Jesus becomes present in our midst in the people who react, who struggle for life and who do not allow themselves to be disheartened. Thomas believes in this Christ and so do we!

- John 20:28-29: Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe. Together with Thomas we say: “My Lord and my God!” This gift of Thomas is the ideal attitude of faith. And Jesus concludes with a final message: “You believe because you can see Me. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe!” With this phrase, Jesus declares blessed all of us who find ourselves in the same condition: without having seen, we believe that Jesus, who is in our midst, is the same One who died crucified!

The mandate: “As the Father sent Me so I am sending you!” From this Jesus, who was crucified and rose from the dead, we receive the mission, the same one which He has received from the Father (Jn 20:21). Here, in the second appearance, Jesus repeats, “Peace be with you!” This repetition stresses the importance of peace. Making peace is part of the mission. Peace means much more than the absence of war. It means to build a harmonious human life together in which people can be themselves, having everything necessary to live, living happily together in peace. This was the mission of Jesus and is also our own mission. Jesus breathed and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit” (Jn 20:22), and with the help of the Holy Spirit we will be able to fulfill the mission which He has entrusted to us. Then Jesus communicates the power to forgive sins: “If you forgive anyone’s sins, they are forgiven; if you retain anyone’s sins, they are retained!” The central point of the mission of peace is reconciliation, the effort of trying to overcome barriers which separate us. This power of reconciling and of forgiving is given to the community (Jn 20:23; Mt 18:18). In the Gospel of Matthew, this power is also given to Peter (Mt 16:19). Here we can see that a community without forgiveness and without reconciliation is not a Christian community. In one word, our mission is that of “forming community” according to the example of the community of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

4) Personal questions

- In society today, the divergence and the tensions of race, social class, religion, gender and culture are enormous and they continue to grow every day. How can the mission of reconciliation be carried out today?
- In your community and in your family is there some mustard seed, the sign of a reconciled society?

For further study

Saint Thomas traveled east to India and converted many in the states of Kerala and Tamil Nadu to Christianity in the first century. The history of the Church in India is very diverse, with many rifts. However, one of these communities of “Saint Thomas Christians” (Nasrani) is the Syro-Malabar Church, one of several Eastern Churches which are in full communion with Rome.

Take some time to look at the history of some of these Eastern Churches this week. In addition to the various Roman Rites, there are several other Rites used throughout these Churches. These historical traditions are preserved within the Vatican through the Congregation for the Oriental Churches.

5) Concluding Prayer

Praise Yahweh, all nations,
extol Him, all peoples,
for His faithful love is strong
and His constancy never-ending. (Ps 117)

Lectio Divina Saturday, July 4, 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 9:14-17

The disciples of John approached Jesus and said, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast much, but your disciples do not fast?" Jesus answered them, "Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast. No one patches an old cloak with a piece of unshrunk cloth, for its fullness pulls away from the cloak and the tear gets worse. People do not put new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise the skins burst, the wine spills out, and the skins are ruined. Rather, they pour new wine into fresh wineskins, and both are preserved."

3) Reflection

- Matthew 9:14: *The question of John's disciples concerning the practice of fasting.* Fasting is quite an ancient usage, practiced by almost all religions. Jesus Himself practiced it for forty days (Mt 4:2). But He does not insist that the disciples do the same thing. He leaves them free. Because of this, the disciples of John the Baptist and of the Pharisees, who were obliged to fast, want to know why Jesus does not insist on fasting: "*Why is it that we and the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not?*"

- Matthew 9:15: *Jesus' answer.* Jesus answers with a comparison in the form of a question: “*Surely the bridegroom's attendants cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is still with them?*” Jesus associates fasting with mourning, and He considers Himself the bridegroom. When the bridegroom is with His friends, that is, during the wedding feast, they have no need to fast. When Jesus is with them, with His disciples, it is a feast, the wedding feast. Therefore, they should not fast. But one day the bridegroom will go away. It will be a day of mourning. Then, if they want, they can fast. Jesus refers to His death. He knows and feels that if He continues on this way of liberation, the authorities will want to kill Him.

- Matthew 9:16-17: *New wine in new wineskins!* In these two verses, the Gospel of Matthew gives two separate sayings of Jesus on the patch of new cloth on an old cloak and on the new wine in new skins. These words throw light on the discussions and the conflicts of Jesus with religious authority of the time. A patch of new cloth is not put on an old cloak, because when it is washed, the new piece of cloth shrinks and pulls on the old cloak and tears it and the tear becomes bigger. Nobody puts new wine in old skins, because when the new wine ferments, it tears the old skins. New wine in new skins! The religion defended by the religious authority was like a piece of old cloth, like an old wineskin. Both the disciples of John and the Pharisees tried to renew the religion. In reality, they barely put some patches, and because of this, they ran the risk of compromising and harming both the new and the old uses. The new wine which Jesus brings to us tears the old skins. It is necessary to know how to separate things. Most probably, Matthew presents these words of Jesus to orientate the communities in the years of the 80's. There was a group of Jewish Christians who wanted to replace the newness of Jesus with the Judaism of the time before His coming. Jesus is not against what is “old.” He does not want what is old to be imposed on that which is *new*. Similarly, Vatican II cannot be reread with the mentality before the Council, as some try to do today.

4) Personal questions

- What are the conflicts around religious practices which make many people suffer today and are a reason for heated discussions and polemics? What is the image of God which is behind all these preconceptions, these norms, and these prohibitions?
- How is this saying of Jesus to be understood: “*Nobody puts a piece of new cloth on an old cloak?*” What is the message which we can draw from all of this for your community today?

5) Concluding Prayer

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. (Ps 85:8)

Lectio Divina Sunday, July 5, 2020

*The Good News of the Reign of God revealed to little ones
The Gospel reflects and explains what is happening today
Matthew 11: 25-30*

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:

When Jesus realized that the little ones understood the good news of the Reign, He was very happy. Spontaneously He turned to the Father with a prayer of thanksgiving and extended a generous invitation to all those suffering and oppressed by the burden of life. The text reveals Jesus' kindness in welcoming little ones and His goodness in offering Himself to the poor as the source of rest and peace.

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

Mt 11:25-26: Prayer of thanks to the Father

Mt 11:27: Jesus presents Himself as the way which leads to the Father

Mt 11:28-30: An invitation to all who suffer and are oppressed

c) The text:

25-26: 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.

27: 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.

28-30: '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 in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. Yes, My yoke is easy and my burden light.'

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) Which part of the text caught my attention most and pleased me most?
- b) In the first part (25-27), Jesus turns to the Father. What image of the Father does Jesus reveal in His prayer? What is it that urges Him to praise the Father? What image do I have of God? When and how do I praise the Father?
- c) To whom does Jesus turn in the second part (28-30)? What was the greatest burden carried by the people in those days? What burden is most burdensome today?
- d) Which burden comforts me?
- e) How can Jesus' words help our community to be a place of rest in our lives?
- f) Jesus presents Himself as the one who reveals the Father and as the way to Him. Who is Jesus for me?

5. A key to the reading

for those who wish to go deeper into the text.

a) The literary context of Jesus' words: chapters 10-12 of Matthew's Gospel.

* In Matthew's Gospel, the discourse on the *Mission* takes up the whole of chapter 10. In the narrative after chapters 11 and 12, where we find a description of how Jesus fulfills the *Mission*, Jesus has to face incomprehension and resistance. John the Baptist, who looked at Jesus with an eye to the past, could not understand Him (Mt 11:1-15). The people, who looked at Jesus with an eye to self-interest, were incapable of understanding Him (Mt 11:16-19). The big cities around the lake that had heard the preaching and seen the miracles will not open themselves to His message (Mt 11:20-24). The scribes and doctors, who judged everything according to their knowledge, were not capable of understanding Jesus' words (Mt 11: 25). Not even do his relatives understand Him (Mt 12: 46-50). Only the *little ones* understand Him and accept the good news of the Reign (Mt 11: 25-30). The others look for sacrifices, but Jesus wants mercy (Mt 1:8). This resistance to Jesus leads the Pharisees to want to kill Him (Mt 12:9-14). They call him Beelzebub (Mt 12:22-32). But Jesus does not retreat; He goes on with His mission of Servant as described in the prophet Isaiah (Isa 42: 1-4) and cited in its entirety by Matthew (12:15-21).

* Thus the context in chapters 10-12 suggests that the acceptance of the good news by the *little ones* is the fulfillment of the prophet Isaiah. Jesus is the awaited Messiah, but He is not what the majority expected Him to be. He is not the glorious nationalist Messiah, nor is He a strict judge, nor a powerful king Messiah. He is the humble Messiah, the servant who "will not break the crushed reed, nor put out the smoldering wick" (Mt 12: 20). He will fight on until justice and right prevail in the world (Mt 12: 18, 20-21). The acceptance of the Reign by the little ones is the light that shines (Mt 5: 14) and the salt which flavors (Mt 5:13) and the mustard seed which (when fully grown) will provide room for the birds of the air to nest there among its branches (Mt 13:31-32).

b) A brief comment on Jesus' words:

* Matthew 11: 25-26: *Only the little ones can understand and accept the good news of the Reign.*

Jesus experiences a great joy when the *little ones* welcome the message of the Reign, and, spontaneously, He transforms His joy into a prayer of jubilation and thanksgiving to the Father: *I bless You, Father of heaven and of earth, for hiding these things from the learned and the clever and revealing them to mere children. Yes, Father, for that is what it pleased You to do.* The learned, the doctors of that time, had created a series of laws concerning legal purity, which they then imposed on the people in the name of God (Mt 15:1-9). They thought that God demanded every single observance, so that the people might acquire peace. But the law of love, revealed by Jesus, said otherwise. In fact, what matters is not what we do for God, but rather what God, in His great love, does for us. The *little ones* heard this good news and rejoiced. The learned and the doctors could not understand this teaching. Today, as then, Jesus is teaching many things to the poor and to the *little ones*. The learned and intelligent would do well to learn at the feet of these *little ones*.

Jesus prayed much! He prayed with His disciples, He prayed with the people, He prayed alone. He spent whole nights in prayer. He managed to express His message in one prayer that contains seven concerns, namely, the *Our Father*. Sometimes, as in this case, the Gospels tell us the content of Jesus' prayer (Mt 11: 25-26; 26: 39; Jn 11: 41-42; 17:1-26). At other times, they tell us that Jesus prayed the Psalms (Mt 26:30; 27: 46). In most cases, however, they just say that Jesus prayed. Today, everywhere prayer groups are increasing.

In Matthew's Gospel, the term *little ones* (elakistoi, mikroi, nepioi) sometimes refers to children and sometimes to a group of people excluded from society. It is not easy to distinguish. Sometimes, that which one Gospel calls *little ones*, another Gospel calls *children*. Also, it is not easy to distinguish between what comes from the time of Jesus and what is from the time of the communities for whom the Gospels were written. But even so, what is clear is the context of exclusion that prevailed then and the image of Jesus that the early communities had of Him as a person who welcomed the *little ones*.

* Matthew 11: 27: *The origin of the new Law: the Son who knows the Father*

Jesus, as Son, knows the Father and knows what the Father wanted when, in times gone by, He had called Abraham and Sarah to form a people or when He entrusted the Law to Moses to form a covenant. The experience of God as Father helped Jesus to perceive in a new manner the things that God had said in the past. It helped Him to recognize errors and limitations, where the good news of God was imprisoned by the dominant ideology. His intimacy with the Father gave Him a new criterion that placed Him in direct contact with the author of the Bible. Jesus did not move from the letter to the source, but from the source to the letter. He sought the meaning at its origin. To understand the meaning of a letter, it is important to study the words it contains. But Jesus' friendship with the author of the letter helped Him to uncover a deeper dimension in those words, which study alone could not reveal.

* Matthew 11: 28-30

Jesus invites *all* those who are weary and promises them rest. The people of that time lived wearily, under the double burden of levies and the observances demanded by the

laws of purity. And Jesus says, *Shoulder My yoke and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. Yes, My yoke is easy and My burden light.* Through the prophet Jeremiah, God had invited the people to examine the past in order to discover the right way that could give them rest for their souls (Jer 6:16). This right way now appears in Jesus. Jesus offers rest for souls. He is the way (Jn 14:6). *Learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart.* Like Moses, Jesus was gentle and humble (Num 12:3). Many times this phrase has been manipulated to bring people into submission, meekness and passivity. Jesus wants to say the opposite. He asks that people, in order to understand the things of the Reign, not give so much importance to the "learned and doctors", that is, to the official teachers of religion of the time, and that they trust more in the *little ones*. Those oppressed must begin to learn from Jesus that He is "gentle and humble in heart".

Often, in the Bible the word *humble* is synonymous with *humbled*. Jesus, unlike the scribes who flaunted their knowledge, identified Himself with the humble and humbled people. He, our Master, knew from experience what was in the hearts of people and how much people suffered in their daily lives.

c) Light on Jesus' attitude:

* Jesus' style in proclaiming the good news of the Reign

In His manner of proclaiming the good news of the Reign, Jesus reveals a great passion for the Father and for the humiliated people. Unlike the doctors of His time, Jesus proclaims the good news of God wherever He meets people who will listen to Him: in *synagogues* during the celebration of the Word (Mt 4:23); in the *homes* of friends (Mt 13:36); when walking along the *streets* with His disciples (Mt 12:1-8); at the seashore, at the edge of the *beach*, sitting in a boat (Mt 13:1-3); on the *mountain*, where He proclaims the beatitudes (Mt 5:1); in the *squares* of villages and cities, where people bring their sick (Mt 14:34-36); even in the *temple in Jerusalem*, at the time of pilgrimages (Mt 26: 55)! In Jesus, *everything* is the revelation of that which animates His inner being! He not only proclaims the good news of the Reign, He is living proof of the Reign. In Him we see what happens when someone allows God to *reign* and take possession of his/her life.

* The Divine Wisdom's invitation to all who seek it

Jesus invites all those who suffer under the burden of life to find rest and comfort in Him (Mt 11:25-30). This invitation echoes the beautiful words of Isaiah who comforted the weary people in exile (Isa 55:1-3). This invitation stands in correlation to Divine Wisdom, which calls people to itself (Sir 24:18-19), saying that "her ways are delightful ways, her paths all lead to contentment" (Prov 3:17). Again, Wisdom says, "Wisdom brings up her own sons, and cares for those who seek her. Whoever loves her loves life, those who wait on her early will be filled with happiness" (Sir 4: 11-12). This invitation reveals a very important feminine aspect of God: the gentleness and welcome that comforts, revitalizes the person and makes him/her feel well. Jesus is the comfort that God gives to a weary people!

6. Psalm 132

The prayer of the little ones

O Lord, my heart is not lifted up,
my eyes are not raised too high;
I do not occupy myself with things too
great and too marvelous for me.

But I have calmed and quieted my soul,
like a child quieted at its mother's breast;
like a child that is quieted is my soul.
O Israel, hope in the Lord
this time forth and for evermore.

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, July 6, 2020

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Father,
through the obedience of Jesus,
Your servant and Your Son,
You raised a fallen world.
Free us from sin
and bring us the joy that lasts for ever.
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 9:18-26

While Jesus was speaking, an official came forward, knelt down before him, and said, "My daughter has just died. But come, lay your hand on her, and she will live." Jesus rose and followed him, and so did his disciples. A woman suffering hemorrhages for twelve years came up behind him and touched the tassel on his cloak. She said to herself, "If only I can touch his cloak, I shall be cured." Jesus turned around and saw her, and said, "Courage, daughter! Your faith has saved you." And from that hour the woman was cured. When Jesus arrived at the official's house and saw the flute players and the crowd who were making a commotion, he said, "Go away! The girl is not dead but sleeping." And they ridiculed him. When the crowd was put out, he came and took her by the hand, and the little girl arose. And news of this spread throughout all that land.

3) Reflection

- Today's Gospel leads us to meditate on two miracles of Jesus. The first one was in favor of a woman considered unclean because of an irregular hemorrhage which had lasted for more than twelve years; the second one in favor of a girl who had just died. According to the mentality of that time, the person who touched blood or a corpse or dead body was considered unclean and whoever touched that person became unclean. Blood and death were factors of exclusion! This is why those two women were marginalized people, excluded from participation in the community. Whoever touched them became unclean, and therefore, would not be able to participate in the community and could not relate with God. In order to be admitted to participate fully in the community, it was necessary to go through the rite of purification prescribed by the norms of the law. Now, curing the impurity of the woman through faith, Jesus opens a new path toward God which does not depend anymore on the rites of purification, controlled by the priests. In resurrecting the girl, Jesus conquers the power of death and opens a new horizon on life.

- Matthew 9:18-19: The death of the little girl. When Jesus was still speaking, an official of the place came to intercede for his daughter who has just died. He asks Jesus to go to impose His hands on her so that "she will live." The official thinks that Jesus has the power to make his daughter rise from the dead. This is a sign of much faith in Jesus on the part of the little girl's father. Jesus rises and goes with him, taking only His disciples. This is the starting point of both episodes which follow: the cure of the woman who had been suffering for the past twelve years from a hemorrhage, and the resurrection of the little girl. The Gospel of Mark presents both of these episodes, but with many details: the official was called Jairus, and he was the president of the Synagogue. The little girl was not dead as yet, and she was twelve years old, etc. (Mk 5:21-43). Matthew gives a briefer version of Mark's lively narration.

- Matthew 9:20-21: The situation of the woman. While they were on the way to the official's house, a woman who had been suffering for twelve years because of an irregular hemorrhage got close to Jesus seeking to be cured. Twelve years with a hemorrhage! This is why she was marginalized, excluded, because as we have said, at that time blood rendered the person impure. Mark says that the woman had spent all she had with doctors, but instead of improving her situation had become worse (Mk 5:25-26) But she had heard some speak about Jesus (Mk 5:27). This is why a new hope sprang up in her. She told herself, "If I can just touch His clothes, I shall be saved." The catechism of that time said: "If I touch His clothes I will remain impure." The woman thinks exactly the contrary! This was a sign of great courage! It was a sign also that women were not in agreement with everything that the religious authority taught. The teaching of the Pharisees and of the scribes did not succeed in controlling the thinking of the people. Thank God! The woman got close to Jesus from behind. She touched the end of His cloak and she was cured.

- Matthew 9:22. The word of Jesus which enlightens. Jesus turns and seeing the woman declares: "Courage, My daughter, your faith has saved you." A brief utterance, but which makes us see three very important points: (1) In saying "My daughter", Jesus accepts the woman in the new community which has formed around Him. She was no

longer excluded. (2) What she expected and believed takes place in fact: she was cured. This proves that the catechism of the religious authority was not correct and that in Jesus was opened a new path which gave people the possibility of obtaining the purity which the law demanded and also to enter into contact with God. (3) Jesus recognizes that without the faith of this woman, He would not have been able to work the miracle. The cure was not a magic rite, but an act of faith.

- Matthew 9:23-24: In the house of the official. After that Jesus goes to the house of the official. Seeing the agitation of those who were mourning because of the death of the little girl, He asks everybody to get out of the room. And He says: “The little girl is not dead, she is sleeping!” People laugh, because they know how to distinguish when a person sleeps or when she is dead. Death was for them a barrier that nobody could go beyond. It is the laughter of Abraham and of Sarah, that is, of those who do not believe that nothing is impossible for God (Gen 17:17; 18:12-14; Lk 1:27). The words of Jesus still have a very deep significance. The situation of the communities at the time of Matthew seemed to be in a situation of death, even though they heard said, “It is not death, you are asleep! Wake up!”

- Matthew 9:25-26: The resurrection of the little girl. Jesus does not attach any importance to the people’s laughter . He waits for everyone to get out of the house. Then He enters, takes the little girl by the hand, and she gets up. Mark keeps the words of Jesus, “Talita kúmi!” which mean, “Little girl, I tell you to get up!” (Mk 5:41). The news spread throughout that region. The people believed that Jesus is the Lord of life who overcomes death.

4) Personal questions

- Today, what are the categories of people who feel excluded from participating in the Christian community? What are the factors which cause the exclusion of so many people and render life difficult for them in the family and in society?
- “The little girl is not dead. She sleeps!” She is not dead! You are sleeping! Wake up! This is the message of today’s Gospel. What does it tell me? Am I one of those who laugh?
- Have I suffered ridicule from others in society for having Faith? If not, why not? Trusting in God goes against many modern beliefs. Should I expect this reaction?

5) Concluding Prayer

I shall praise You to the heights, God my King,
I shall bless Your name for ever and ever.
Day after day I shall bless You,
I shall praise Your name for ever and ever. (Ps 145:1-2)

Lectio Divina Tuesday, July 7, 2020

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Father,
through the obedience of Jesus,
Your servant and Your Son,
You raised a fallen world.
Free us from sin
and bring us the joy that lasts for ever.
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 9:32-38

A demoniac who could not speak was brought to Jesus, and when the demon was driven out the mute man spoke. The crowds were amazed and said, "Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel." But the Pharisees said, "He drives out demons by the prince of demons." Jesus went around to all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the Gospel of the Kingdom, and curing every disease and illness. At the sight of the crowds, his heart was moved with pity for them because they were troubled and abandoned, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is abundant but the laborers are few; so ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest."

3) Reflection

- Today's Gospel presents two facts: (1) the cure of a possessed mute person (Mt 9:32-34) and (2) a summary of the activity of Jesus (Mt 9:35-38). These two episodes end the narrative part of chapters 8 and 9 of the Gospel of Matthew, in which the Evangelist seeks to indicate how Jesus put into practice the teachings given in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5 and 7). In chapter 10, the meditation which begins in the Gospel of tomorrow, we see the second great discourse of Jesus: The Discourse of the Mission (Mt 10:1-42).
- Matthew 9:32-33a: The cure of a mute person. In just one verse Matthew describes the arrival of the possessed person before Jesus, the expulsion of the demon and the attitude of Jesus. The illnesses were many and social security non-existent. The illnesses were not only deficiencies of the body: deafness, blindness, paralysis, leprosy and so many other sicknesses. In fact, these illnesses were nothing else than a manifestation of a much deeper and vast evil which undermined the health of people, and that is the total abandonment and the depressing and inhumane state in which they were obliged to live. The activity and the cures of Jesus were directed not only against physical sickness, but also and above all against this greater evil of material and spiritual abandonment, in which people were obliged to live the few years of life. Then, in addition to the economic exploitation which stole half of the family stipend, the official

religion of that time, instead of helping people to find strength in God, to resist and have hope, taught that sickness was a punishment from God for sin. This increased in them the sentiment of exclusion and condemnation. Jesus did quite the contrary. The acceptance of Jesus, full of tenderness, and the cure of the sick, form part of the effort to knit together human relationships among people and to re-establish community and fraternal living in the villages of Galilee, His land.

Matthew 9:33b-34: The twofold interpretation of the cure of the mute man. Before the cure of the possessed mute man, the reaction of the people is one of admiration and of gratitude: “Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel!” The reaction of the Pharisee is one of mistrust and malice: “It is through the prince of devils that He drives out devils!” They were not able to deny the facts which cause admiration in the people, the only way which the Pharisees find to neutralize the influence of Jesus before the people is to attribute the expulsion to the power of the evil one. Mark presents an extensive argument of Jesus to demonstrate the lack of coherence and the malice of the interpretation given by the Pharisees (Mk 3:22-27). Matthew does not present any response by Jesus to the interpretation of the Pharisees, because when malice is evident, truth shines by itself.

- Matthew 9:35: Tireless, Jesus goes through the villages. The description of the tireless activity of Jesus is beautiful in which emerges the double concern to which we referred: the acceptance full of tenderness and the cure of the sick: “Jesus went through all the towns, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom and curing all kinds of diseases and all kinds of illness.” In the previous chapters, Matthew had already referred several times to this itinerant activity of Jesus in the villages and towns of Galilee (Mt 4:23-24; 8:16).

- Matthew 9:36: The compassion of Jesus. “Seeing the crowds He felt sorry for them because they were harassed and dejected, like sheep without a shepherd.” Those who should be shepherds were not shepherds; they did not take care of the flock. Jesus tries to be the shepherd (Jn 10:11-14). In this, Matthew sees the realization of the prophecy of the Servant of Yahweh, who took upon Himself our sickness, and bore our infirmities” (Mt 8:17 and Isa 53:4). As it was for Jesus, the great concern of the Servant was “to find a word of comfort for those who were discouraged.” (Isa 50:4). Jesus shows the same compassion toward the abandoned crowd on the occasion of the multiplication of the loaves: they are like sheep without a shepherd (Mt 15:32). The Gospel of Matthew has a constant concern in revealing to the converted Jews of the communities of Galilee and of Syria that Jesus is the Messiah announced by the prophets. For this reason, frequently, he shows that in Jesus’ activity the prophecies are fulfilled (cf. Mt 1:23; 2:5,15,17, 23; 3:3; 4:14-16, etc.).

- Matthew 9:37-38: The harvest is rich, but the laborers are few. Jesus transmits to the disciples the concern and the compassion which are within Him, and in paraphrase: “The harvest is rich, but the laborers are few! Therefore, pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers for His harvest!”

4) Personal questions

- Compassion for the tired and hungry crowds. In the history of humanity, there have never been so many tired and hungry people as today. Television transmits the facts, but does not offer any response. Do we, Christians, have the same compassion of Jesus and communicate it to others?
- The goodness of Jesus toward the poor disturbed the Pharisees. They have recourse to malice to neutralize the discomfort caused by Jesus. Are there many good attitudes in the people who disturb me? How do I interpret them: with pleasant admiration as the crowds or with malice as the Pharisees?

5) Concluding Prayer

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

Lectio Divina Wednesday, July 8, 2020

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Father,
through the obedience of Jesus,
Your servant and Your Son,
You raised a fallen world.
Free us from sin
and bring us the joy that lasts for ever.
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 10:1-7

Jesus summoned his Twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits to drive them out and to cure every disease and every illness. The names of the Twelve Apostles are these: first, Simon called Peter, and his brother Andrew; James, the son of Zebedee, and his brother John; Philip and Bartholomew, Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James, the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddeus; Simon the Cananean, and Judas Iscariot who betrayed Jesus. Jesus sent out these Twelve after instructing them thus, "Do not go into pagan territory or enter a Samaritan town. Go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. As you go, make this proclamation: 'The Kingdom of heaven is at hand.'"

3) Reflection

- The second great Discourse: The Discourse of the Mission begins in chapter 10 of the Gospel of Matthew. Matthew organizes his Gospel as a new edition of the Law of God or like a new “Pentateuch” with its five books. For this reason his Gospel presents five great discourses or teachings of Jesus followed by a narrative part, in which he describes the way in which Jesus puts into practice what He had taught in the discourses. The following is the outline:

Introduction: the birth and preparation of the Messiah (Mt 1 to 4)

a) Sermon on the Mount: the entrance door into the Kingdom (Mt 5 to 7)

Narrative Mt 8 and 9

b) Discourse on the Mission: how to proclaim and spread the Kingdom (Mt 10)

Narrative Mt 11 and 12

c) Discourse on the Parables: The mystery of the Kingdom present in life (Mt 13)

Narrative Mt 14 to 17

d) Discourse on the Community: the new way of living together in the Kingdom (Mt 18)

Narrative 19 to 23

e) Discourse on the future coming of the Kingdom: the utopia which sustains hope (Mt 24 and 25)

Conclusion: Passion, death and Resurrection (Mt 26 to 28)

- Today’s Gospel presents to us the beginning of the Discourse on the Mission in which the accent is placed on three aspects: (a) the call of the disciples (Mt 10:1); (b) the list of the names of the twelve Apostles who will be the recipients of the Discourse on the Mission (Mt 10:2-4); (c) the sending out of the twelve (Mt 10:5-7).

- Matthew 10:1: The call of the twelve disciples. Matthew had already spoken about the call of the disciples (Mt 4:18-22; 9:9). Here, at the beginning of the Discourse on the Mission, he presents a summary: “He summoned His twelve disciples, and gave them authority over unclean spirits with power to drive them out and to cure all kinds of diseases and all kinds of illness.” The task, or the mission, of the disciple is to follow Jesus, the Master, forming community with Him and carrying out the same mission of Jesus: to drive out unclean spirits, to cure all sorts of diseases and all sorts of illness. In Mark’s Gospel they receive the same two-fold mission, formulated with other words: Jesus constituted the group of twelve to remain with Him and to send them out to preach and cast out devils” (Mk 3:14-15). 1) To be with Him, that is to form a community, in which Jesus is the center. 2) To preach and to be able to cast out devils, that is, to announce the Good News and to conquer the force of evil which destroys the life of the people and alienates people. Luke says that Jesus prayed the whole night, and the following day He called the disciples. He prayed to God so as to know whom to choose (Lk 6:12-13).

- Matthew 10:2-4: The list of the names of the Twelve Apostles. A good number of these names come from the Old Testament. For example, Simon is the name of one of the sons of the Patriarch Jacob (Gen 29:33). James is the same as Jacob (Gen 25:26).

Judas is the name of another son of Jacob (Gen 35:23). Matthew also had the name of Levi (Mk 2:14), who was another son of Jacob (Gen 35:23). Of the Twelve Apostles seven have a name which comes from the time of the Patriarchs. Two are called Simon; two are called James; two are called Judas; one Levi! Only one has a Greek name: Philip. This reveals the people's desire to start history again from the beginning! Perhaps it is good to think about the names which are given today to children when they are born, because each one of us is called by God by his/her name.

- Matthew 10:5-7: The sending out or the mission of the twelve apostles to the lost sheep of Israel. After having given the list of the names of the twelve, Jesus sends them out with the following command: "Do not make your way to gentile territory, and do not enter any Samaritan town. Go instead to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as you go, proclaim that the Kingdom of Heaven is close at hand." In this one command there is a three-fold insistence on showing that the preference of the mission is for the house of Israel: (1) Do not go among the gentiles, (2) do not enter into the towns of the Samaritans, (3) rather go to the lost sheep of Israel. Here appears a response to the doubt of the first Christians concerning opening up to pagans. Paul, who strongly affirmed the openness to the gentiles, agrees in saying that the Good News of Jesus should first be announced to the Jews and then to the gentiles (Rm 9:1-11, 36; cf. Acts 1:8; 11:3; 13:46; 15:1, 5, 23-29). But then, in the same Gospel of Matthew, in the conversation of Jesus with the Canaanite woman, openness to the gentiles will occur (Mt 15:21-29).

- The sending out of the Apostles to all peoples. After the Resurrection of Jesus, there are several episodes on the sending out of the Apostles not only to the Jews, but to all peoples. In Matthew: "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to observe everything which I have commanded. And I will be with you until the end of time" (Mt 28:19-20). In Mark: "Go to the entire world, proclaim the Good News to all creatures. Those who will believe and will be baptized will be saved; those who will not believe will be condemned" (Mk 16:15). In Luke: "So it is written that the Christ would suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that in His name, repentance for the forgiveness of sins would be preached to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses to this" (Lk 24:46-48; Acts 1:8) John summarizes all in one sentence: "As the Father has sent Me, so I also send you!" (Jn 20:21).

4) Personal questions

- Have you ever thought about the meaning of your name? Have you asked your parents why they gave you the name that you have? Do you like your name?
- How has your name influenced who you have become and how your life was formed?
- Jesus calls the disciples. His call has a two-fold purpose: to form a community and to go on mission. How do I live this two-fold purpose in my life?

5) Concluding Prayer

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

Lectio Divina Thursday, July 9, 2020

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Father,
through the obedience of Jesus,
Your servant and Your Son,
You raised a fallen world.
Free us from sin
and bring us the joy that lasts for ever.
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 10:7-15

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 the 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. Whoever will not receive you or listen to your words, go outside that house or town and shake the dust from your feet. Amen, I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town.”

3) Reflection

- The Gospel today presents the second part of the sending out of the disciples. Yesterday we saw that Jesus insists on directing them first toward the lost sheep of Israel. Today, we see concrete instructions to carry out the mission.
- Matthew 10:7: *The objective of the mission: to reveal the presence of the Kingdom. “Go and announce the Kingdom of Heaven is close at hand.”* The principal objective is that of announcing that the Kingdom is close at hand. This is the novelty which Christ brings to us. For the other Jews there was still a long time before the coming of the Kingdom. It would have come only after they had done their own part. The coming of the Kingdom depended, according to them, on their effort. For the *Pharisees*, for example, the Kingdom would be attained only after the perfect observance of the Law. For the *Essenes*, when the country would have purified itself. But Jesus thinks in a different way. He has a different way of reading the facts of life. He says that the hour has already arrived (Mk 1:15). When He says that the Kingdom is close at hand or that the Kingdom is already among us, in our midst, He does not mean to say that the Kingdom is just arriving at that moment, but that it is *already there*, independently of the effort made by the people. What they all expected was already present among the people, gratuitously, but the people did not know it, nor perceive it (cf. Lk 17:21). Jesus

is aware of this, because He sees reality with different eyes. He reveals and announces to the poor of His land this hidden presence of the Kingdom in our midst (Lk 4:18). It is the mustard seed which will receive the rain of His word and the warmth of His love.

- Matthew 10:8: *The signs of the presence of the Kingdom: accept the excluded.* How should the presence of the Kingdom be announced? Only through words and discourses? No! The signs of the presence of the Kingdom are above all concrete gestures or acts, done gratuitously: “*Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out the devils. You received without charge; give without charge.*” This means that the disciples should accept within the community those who have been excluded. This practice of solidarity both criticizes religion and society which exclude and proposes concrete solutions.

- Matthew 10:9-10: *Do not take anything for the journey.* Unlike other missionaries, the disciples of Jesus should not take anything: “*Provide yourselves with no gold or silver, not even with coppers for your purses, with no haversack for the journey or a spare tunic or footwear or a staff, for the laborer deserves his keep.*” This means that they have to trust in the hospitality of the people. The disciples who go without anything, taking only peace (Mk 10:13), show that they trust the people. It shows a trust in grace from God to act in people and to provide for them. It is certain that they will be welcomed, that they will be able to participate in the life and the work of the people of the place and that they will be able to survive with what they will receive in exchange, because the laborer *deserves his keep*. This means that the disciples should trust in sharing. It is also another way of respecting the poor, by not taking from them, and of contrasting the Good News with the laws of the time that demanded payment and tax for so many things. The social structure of the day was built on taking. Jesus builds a structure and community built on giving freely. By means of this practice they criticize the laws of exclusion and recover the ancient values of community life.

- Matthew 10:11-13: *To share peace in the community.* The disciples should not go from house to house, but should seek people of peace and remain in that house. That is, they should practice stability. Thus, through that new practice, they criticize the culture of accumulation which characterized the politics of the Roman Empire, and they announced a new model of living together. Once all these requirements were respected, the disciples could cry out: *The Kingdom of God has arrived!* To announce the Kingdom does not mean, in the first place, to teach truths and doctrine, but lead toward a new fraternal manner of living and of sharing starting from the Good News which Jesus has brought to us: God and Father and Mother of all men and women.

- Matthew 10:14-15: *The severity of the menace.* How is such a severe menace to be understood? Jesus has brought us something completely new. He has come to rescue the community values of the past: hospitality, sharing, communion around the table, acceptance of the excluded. That explains the severity toward those who reject the message, because they do not reject something new, but their own past, their own culture and wisdom! The objective of the pedagogy of Jesus is to dig out from the memory, to recover the wisdom of the people, to reconstruct the community, to renew the Covenant, to rebuild life.

4) Personal questions

- Today, how can we put into practice the recommendation not to take anything for the journey when going to a mission?
- Jesus orders His disciples to look for people of peace, so as to be able to remain in their house. Today, who would be a person of peace to whom to address oneself in the announcement of the Good News?
- Why would stability, as in not going from house to house while staying in a town, be important?

For further study

Most, if not all, monastic traditions include a vow of stability – to stay in one place. Take some time to read the ancient rules which guide our various communities, such as the Rule of St Benedict, St Albert, St Bruno, and so on. The authors of these rules often explain why a particular rule is made, and from where in the Gospel it is inspired. This can give insight into these instructions of Jesus and a historical perspective on the development of Christianity through the Middle Ages.

5) Concluding Prayer

God Sabaoth, come back, we pray,
look down from heaven and see,
visit this vine;
protect what Your own hand has planted. (Ps 80:14-15)

Lectio Divina Friday, July 10, 2020

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Father,
through the obedience of Jesus,
Your servant and Your Son,
You raised a fallen world.
Free us from sin
and bring us the joy that lasts for ever.
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 10:16-23

Jesus said to his Apostles: “Behold, I am sending you like sheep in the midst of wolves; so be shrewd as serpents and simple as doves. But beware of men, for they will hand you over to courts and scourge you in their synagogues, and you will be led before governors and kings for my sake as a witness before them and the pagans. When they

hand you over, do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say. You will be given at that moment what you are to say. For it will not be you who speak but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. Brother will hand over brother to death, and the father his child; children will rise up against parents and have them put to death. You will be hated by all because of my name, but whoever endures to the end will be saved. When they persecute you in one town, flee to another. Amen, I say to you, you will not finish the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.”

3) Reflection

- To the community of His disciples, called and gathered together around Him and invested with His same authority as collaborators, Jesus entrusts them with directives in view of their future mission.
- Matthew 10:16-19: Danger and trust in God. Jesus introduces this part of His discourse with two metaphors: sheep in the midst of wolves; prudent as serpents, simple as doves. The first one serves to show the difficult and dangerous context to which the disciples are sent. On the one hand, the dangerous situation is made evident; on the other, the expression “I send you” expresses protection. Also regarding the astuteness of the serpent and the simplicity of the dove Jesus seems to put together two attitudes: trust in God, and prolonged and attentive reflection on the way in which we should relate with others.

Jesus, then, following this, gives an order that seems at first sight filled with mistrust: “Beware of men...”, but, in reality, it means to be attentive to possible persecutions, hostility, and denouncement. The expression “will deliver you” does not only refer to the accusation in the tribunal, but above all, it has a theological value: the disciples who are following Jesus can experience the same experience of the Master of “being delivered into the hands of men” (17:22). The disciples must be strong and resist in order “to give witness.” The fact of being delivered to the tribunal should become a witness for the Jews and for the pagans. It bears the possibility of being able to draw them to the person and the cause of Jesus and, therefore, to the knowledge of the Gospel. This positive implication is important as a result of witnessing, characterized by credible and fascinating faith.

- Matthew 10:20: the divine help. So that all this may take place in the mission-witness of the disciples it is essential to have the help that comes from God. That is to say, we should not trust our own security and resources, but the disciples, in critical, dangerous, and aggressive situations, found help and solidarity in God for their lives. The Spirit of the Father is also promised for their mission (v.20). He is the one who acts in them when they are committed to their mission of evangelization and of witnessing. The Spirit will speak through them.
- Matthew 10:21-22: Threat-consolation. Once again the announcement of threat is repeated in the expression “will be delivered”: Brother will betray brother, a father against his son, the sons against the parents. It is a question of a true and great disorder in social relationships, the breaking up of the family. Persons who are bound by the most intimate family relationships – such as parents, children, brothers and sisters – will fall in the misfortune of mutually hating and eliminating one another. In what sense

does such a division of the family have to do with witness on behalf of Jesus? Such breaking up of the family relationships could be caused by the diverse attitudes that are taken within the family, regarding Jesus. The expression “you will be hated” seems to indicate the theme of the hostile rejection on the part of the contemporaries and of those He sent. This phrasing can also apply to the larger community, using the sense of the word “brother” as we have done earlier. The community of Israel will find one against another as those following the Good News will be persecuted and rejected by those remaining in the old law. The strong sense of Jesus’ words find a comparison in another part of the New Testament: “Blessed are you if you are insulted for the sake of Christ’s name, because the Spirit of glory, the Spirit of God, rests upon you. No one of you should suffer as a murderer or thief or evil doer or as a spy. But if one suffers as a Christian, do not blush, because of this name, rather give glory to God.” The promise of consolation follows the threat (v.3). The greatest consolation for the disciples will be that of “being saved,” of being able to live the experience of the Savior, that is to say, to participate in His victories.

4) Personal questions

- What do these pronouncements of Jesus teach us today for understanding the mission of the Christian?
- Do you know how to trust in divine help when you experience conflicts, persecutions and trials?
- In what ways have you been persecuted? Was it for standing with Jesus or was I in the wrong? Did I find strength at any of these times, or did I fold?
- Has the Spirit spoken through you to others?

For further study

In all the day-to-day interactions with others, in business, the market, in school, and in community and family, it is often difficult to discern whether persecutions that day were for His name or our own views and wants, and whether the Spirit did the talking or our own pride did. St Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Jesuits, wrote the *Spiritual Exercises* to help one discern the action of the Spirit in one’s Life. The theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar points out that the Exercises direct one to choosing God’s choice in life, a self-abandonment to God, which is ultimately what today’s Gospel says to do. There are many books on St Ignatius’ Spiritual Exercises, besides his original work, which explain what and how. Take time to read one or more and perhaps practice them.

5) Concluding Prayer

Give me back the joy of Your salvation,
sustain in me a generous spirit.
Lord, open my lips,
and my mouth will speak out Your praise. (Ps 51:12,15)

Lectio Divina Saturday, July 11, 2020

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Father,
through the obedience of Jesus,
Your servant and Your Son,
You raised a fallen world.
Free us from sin
and bring us the joy that lasts for ever.
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 10:24-33

Jesus said to his Apostles: “No disciple is above his teacher, no slave above his master. It is enough for the disciple that he become like his teacher, for the slave that he become like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more those of his household! “Therefore do not be afraid of them. Nothing is concealed that will not be revealed, nor secret that will not be known. What I say to you in the darkness, speak in the light; what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops. And do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather, be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and body in Gehenna. Are not two sparrows sold for a small coin? Yet not one of them falls to the ground without your Father’s knowledge. Even all the hairs of your head are counted. So do not be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows. Everyone who acknowledges me before others I will acknowledge before my heavenly Father. But whoever denies me before others, I will deny before my heavenly Father.”

3) Reflection

- Today’s Gospel presents to us various instructions of Jesus on the behavior that the disciples have to adopt in the exercise of their mission. What strikes most in these instructions are two warnings: (a) the frequency with which Jesus refers to the persecutions and suffering which they will have to bear; (b) the insistence repeated three times to the disciples not to be afraid.
- Matthew 10:24-25: Persecutions and sufferings which mark the life of the disciples. These two verses constitute the final part of a warning of Jesus to the disciples concerning persecutions. The disciples should know that, because of being disciples of Jesus, they will be persecuted (Mt 10:17-23). But this should not be a reason for worry, because a disciple should imitate the life of the Master and share the trials with Him. This is part of discipleship. “A disciple is not greater than the teacher or a servant greater than his master; it is sufficient for the disciple to grow to be like his teacher and the servant like his master.” If they called Jesus Beelzebul, how much more will they

insult His disciples? In other words, the disciple of Jesus should be worried if, in his life, there are no persecutions.

- Matthew 10:26-27: Do not be afraid to tell the truth. The disciples should not be afraid to be persecuted. Those who persecute them pervert the meaning of the facts and spread calumnies which change truth into lies. But no matter how great the lie, the truth will triumph at the end and will make the lie crumble down. This is why we should not be afraid to proclaim truth, the things which Jesus has taught. Every day, the means of communication pervert the meaning of things and the people who proclaim the truth are considered as criminals; they make our system appear as just and it perverts the meaning of human life.

- Matthew 10:28: Do not be afraid of those who kill the body. The disciples should not be afraid of those who kill the body, who torture, who strike and cause suffering. Those who torture can kill the body, but they cannot kill liberty and the spirit in the body. They should be afraid, yes, that the fear of suffering may lead them to hide or to deny the truth, and that this will lead them to offend God, because anyone who draws away from God will be lost forever.

- Matthew 10:29-31: Do not be afraid, but trust in Divine Providence. The disciples should not fear anything, because they are in God's hands. Jesus tells them to look at the birds of the air. Two sparrows are sold for a penny, but not one of them will fall to the ground without the Father knowing. Every hair on your head has been counted. Luke says that not one hair falls without our Father wanting it (Lk 21:18). And so many hairs fall from our heads! Because of this "Do not be afraid. You are worth more than many sparrows." This is the lesson which Jesus draws from the contemplation of nature.

- Matthew 10:32-33: Do not be afraid to be the witnesses of Jesus. At the end Jesus summarizes everything in this sentence: "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: the one who instead will disown Me in the presence of human beings, I will disown him in the presence of My Father in heaven." Knowing that we are in God's hands and that God is with us, at every moment, we have the necessary courage and the peace to render witness and to be disciples of Jesus.

4) Personal questions

- What are you afraid of? Why?
- Have you ever been persecuted because of your commitment to announce the Good News of God which Jesus announced to us?
- Persecution is not comfortable. There can be many small persecutions throughout a day. Do you ever deny Jesus in little things to make your life more comfortable and not make trouble? How is this important?

5) Concluding Prayer

Your decrees stand firm, unshakable;
holiness is the beauty of Your house,
Yahweh, for all time to come. (Ps 93:5)

Lectio Divina Sunday, July 12, 2020

The parable of the seed

Matthew 13:1-23

1. Opening prayer

Prayer is also the willingness to listen; it is the suitable time for meeting with God. Today, the Sunday of the ‘sower’, we would like to open our hearts to listen to the word of Jesus, using the words of St. John Chrysostom that we too may become docile and willing listeners of the saving Word:

«Grant, Lord, that I may listen attentively and remember constantly Your teaching, that I may put it into practice forcefully and courageously, despising riches and avoiding the worries of a worldly life... Grant me Your strength and that I may meditate on Your words putting down deep roots and purifying me of all worldly perils» (St. John Chrysostom, A Commentary on the Gospel according to Matthew 44:3-4).

2. Reading

a) the context:

Matthew places the parable of the seed along with the events of the preceding chapters 11 and 12 where he mentions the kingdom of God that suffers violence. The theme of our parable, as also of the whole of the discourse in parables in chapter 13, is the kingdom of God.

The “house” whence Jesus leaves is the house where he lived in Capernaum and where He is once more with His disciples (v.1: *That same day, Jesus left the house*) and His leaving is connected with the going out of the sower (v.3: *a sower went out to sow*). His “leaving” has as its physical or concrete berth the shore of the lake (v.1: *He got into a boat and sat there*); this moment recalls the time when Jesus called His disciples (4:18), but, the sea is a place of passage to the pagan peoples. Thus, it represents the border between Israel and the pagan world. The background of the discourse in parables is, then, the lake of Genesareth, called a “sea” according to the people. His leaving attracts the crowds. And while Jesus is sitting by the shore of the sea, He is surprised by the crowds coming to Him, and is obliged to get into a boat. This boat becomes the chair of His teaching. Jesus turns to His listeners and “told them many things in parables,” that is, in a manner different from teaching or proclaiming.

b) The Text:

1 That same day, Jesus left the house and sat by the lakeside, 2 but such large crowds gathered round Him that he got into a boat and sat there. The people all stood on the shore, 3 and He told them many things in parables. He said, 'Listen, a sower went out to sow. 4 As he sowed, some seeds fell on the edge of the path, and the birds came and ate them up. 5 Others fell on patches of rock where they found little soil and sprang up at once, because there was no depth of earth; 6 but as soon as the sun came up they were scorched and, not having any roots, they withered away. 7 Others fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. 8 Others fell on rich soil and produced their

crop, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. 9 Anyone who has ears should listen!

10 Then the disciples went up to Him and asked, 'Why do You talk to them in parables?' 11 In answer, He said, 'Because to you is granted to understand the mysteries of the kingdom of Heaven, but to them it is not granted. 12 Anyone who has will be given more and will have more than enough; but anyone who has not will be deprived even of what he has. 13 The reason I talk to them in parables is that they look without seeing and listen without hearing or understanding. 14 So in their case what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah is being fulfilled: Listen and listen, but never understand! Look and look, but never perceive! 15 This people's heart has grown hard, their ears dulled, they have shut their eyes tight to avoid using their eyes to see, their ears to hear, their heart to understand, changing their ways and being healed by Me. 16 'But blessed are your eyes because they see, your ears because they hear! 17 In truth I tell you, many prophets and upright people longed to see what you see, and never saw it; to hear what you hear, and never heard it.'



18 So pay attention to the parable of the sower. 19 When anyone hears the word of the kingdom without understanding, the Evil One comes and carries off what was sown in his heart: this is the seed sown on the edge of the path. 20 The seed sown on patches of rock is someone who hears the word and welcomes it at once with joy. 21 But such a person has no root deep down and does not last; should some trial come, or some persecution on account of the word, at once he falls away. 22 The seed sown in thorns is someone who hears the word, but the worry of the world and the lure of riches choke the word and so it produces nothing. 23 And the seed sown in rich soil is someone who hears the word and understands it; this is the one who yields a harvest and produces now a hundredfold, now sixty, now thirty.'

3. A moment of prayerful silence

In our busy way of acting, which leads to exterior concerns, we feel the need to stop and calm down in silence... at such a time we become receptive of the fire of the Word...

4. Interpreting the text

a) The action of the sower:

The parable speaks of a sower, not of a peasant, and his activity is marked by the contrast between the loss of the seeds (13:4-7) and the abundant fruit (13:8). Furthermore, we need to note the difference between the wealth of the description of those who lose the seeds and the concise form of the abundant fruit. But the number of failed and disappointing experiences represented by the various forms of loss of seeds

(*on the edge of the path...on patches of rock... among thorns...*) is contrasted with the great harvest that makes us forget the negative experiences of the losses. Again, in the parable there is the time difference between the initial phase of the sowing and the end phase which coincides with the fruit of the harvest. If in the various attempts at sowing there is no fruit, such lack brings to mind the Kingdom of God at the time of the great harvest. Jesus, the sower, sows the word of the kingdom (13:19) which makes present the lordship of God over the world, over people and that bears the final fruit. The parable has such persuasive force as to bring the listener to trust in the works of Jesus, which, while marked by failure or disappointment, will finally succeed.

b) Apart, Jesus communicates to the disciples the reason for speaking in parables (13:10-17):

After telling the parable and before His explanation (13:18-23) the disciples go up to Jesus (the verb “to go up to” expresses the intimate relationship with Jesus) and put an explicit question to Him, they cannot see why Jesus speaks to the crowds in parables (v.10: *Why do You talk to them in parables?*). The reply to their question is in v.13: «...*The reason I talk to them in parables is that they look without seeing and listen without hearing or understanding*». It is as if to say that the crowds neither perceive nor understand. Jesus does not mean to force them to understand. Indeed until now Jesus has spoken and acted clearly, but the crowds have not understood; but, as the time has come for Him to go on revealing His message in all its radical nature – namely understanding – He has recourse to the language of parables, which although more obscure may stimulate the crowds to think more, to reflect on the obstacles that prevent their understanding of the teachings of Jesus. This seems like a repetition of the times of Isaiah, when the people were closed to the message of God (Isa 6:9-10), and as such a situation of refusal foreseen by biblical tradition repeats itself in the crowds that “see-listen” but do not understand.

Compared to the crowd, the disciples hold a privileged position (13:11). Jesus shows this in the first part of His reply when He distinguishes between those included and those excluded from knowing the kingdom. The knowledge of the mysteries of God – that is God’s plan – is possible through the intervention of God and not through one’s own human efforts. The disciples are presented as those who understand Jesus’ parable not because they are more intelligent, but because it is He himself who explains His words to them.

The lack of understanding on the part of the crowds is the cause of His speaking in parables: they do not understand Jesus, thus they show clearly their obstinate incomprehension or better their inability to discern. The disciples, on the other hand, are declared blessed because they can *see and listen*.

c) The explanation of the parable (13:18-23):

After Jesus expressed His reasons for speaking in parables, he showed the fate of the word of the Kingdom in each of His listeners. Although there are four kinds of soil listed, there are only two types of listeners compared: those who listen to the Word and do not understand it (13:19) and those who listen to the Word and understand (13: 23). It is interesting to note that Matthew, in contrast to Mark, tells the story in the singular. It is the personal commitment that is the benchmark of real listening and true

understanding. The first category of listeners shows that they listen to the Word (19), but do not understand it. Understanding the Word here is not to be understood on the intellectual level but on the wisdom level. It is necessary to enter into its deep and saving meaning. In the second (13: 20-21) the Word is heard and welcomed with joy. Such a welcome (lack of roots) becomes unstable when the initial enthusiasm wears out, perhaps because of experiences of suffering and persecution inevitable in every journey of faithful listening to God.

The third possibility evokes material preoccupations that can choke the Word (13: 22). Finally the positive result: the seed lost in the threefold soil is compensated by the fruitful result. Briefly, the parable brings out three aspects of the act of active and persevering faith: listening, understanding and bearing fruit.

5. Meditation for ecclesial practice

- What can the parable say to the Church of today? Which soil does our ecclesial community represent? On the personal level, what interior availability and understanding do we manifest in our listening to the Word?
- Is it not true that the dangers Jesus pointed out to His disciples concerning the welcoming of the Word are relevant to us, too, for instance, fickleness before difficulties, negligence, anxiety for the future, daily worries?
- The disciples were capable of asking Jesus, of questioning Him about their worries and difficulties. On your journey of faith to the Word of God, to whom do you address your questions? The replies that Jesus communicates to us in our intimate and personal relationship with Him depend on the sort of question we ask.
- The figure of the sower recalls that of the Church in its commitment to evangelization: to know how to communicate in a new way the person of Jesus and the values of the Gospel. The Church has to stand out for the authoritative character of its teaching, for its outspokenness and for the force of its actions. Today we need to be confident, eager and tireless evangelizers. Every ecclesial community is urged by the parable of the sower not to be selective of persons or social contexts for the proclamation of the Gospel; we must have a broad vision and dedicate ourselves, even in what seem to be impossible situations, to communicating the Gospel. Every pastoral action of evangelization experiences a first moment of ephemeral enthusiasm, which, however, may be followed by a cold reaction and opposition. Pastoral attempts are comparable to the threefold attempt of the sower. In the end they are rewarded by the threefold harvest. It is certain that the word of Jesus buds and bears fruit in hearts open to His action, but we must not cease from shaking our sluggishness, our indecision and the hardness of hearing of many believers.

6. Psalm 65 (64)

You visit the earth and make it fruitful,
You fill it with riches;
the river of God brims over with water,
You provide the grain.
To that end
You water its furrows abundantly,
level its ridges,

soften it with showers and bless its shoots.
You crown the year with Your generosity,
richness seeps from Your tracks,
the pastures of the desert grow moist,
the hillsides are wrapped in joy,
the meadows are covered with flocks,
the valleys clothed with wheat;
they shout and sing for joy.

7. Closing prayer

Lord, Your parable of the sower concerns each one of us, the ways of our lives, the hardness of daily life, the difficulties and the moments of softness that are part of our interior scene. We are all, from time to time, sometimes path, rocks and thorns; but also good, fertile soil. Deliver us from the temptation of negative forces that try to eliminate the force of Your Word. Strengthen our will when passing and changing emotions render the seduction of Your Word less efficacious. Help us to keep the joy that our meeting with Your Word creates in our hearts. Strengthen our hearts so that in times of tribulation we may not feel defenseless and thus exposed to discouragement. Grant us the strength to stand up to the obstacles we place to Your Word when the worries of the world come or when we are deceived by the mirage of money, seduced by pleasure or by the vanity of appearances. Make us good soil, welcoming persons, capable of rendering our service to Your Word. Amen!

Lectio Divina Monday, July 13, 2020

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

God our Father,
Your light of truth
guides us to the way of Christ.
May all who follow Him
reject what is contrary to the gospel.
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 10:34-11:1

Jesus said to his Apostles: "Do not think that I have come to bring peace upon the earth. I have come to bring not peace but the sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and one's enemies will be those of his household. "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever does not take up his cross and follow after me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will

find it. "Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me. Whoever receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and whoever receives a righteous man because he is righteous will receive a righteous man's reward. And whoever gives only a cup of cold water to one of these little ones to drink because he is a disciple— amen, I say to you, he will surely not lose his reward." When Jesus finished giving these commands to his Twelve disciples, he went away from that place to teach and to preach in their towns.

3) Reflection

- In May of last year, the V Conference of Latin American Bishops, which was held in Aparecida in the north of Brazil, wrote a very important document on the theme: "Disciples and Missionaries of Jesus Christ, so that our peoples may have life". The discourse of the mission of chapter 10 of the Gospel of Matthew offers much light in helping to carry out the mission as disciples and missionaries of Jesus Christ. The Gospel today presents to us the last part of this discourse of the mission.

- Matthew 10:34-36: I have not come to bring peace to the earth but the sword. Jesus always speaks of peace (Mt 5:9; Mk 9:50; Lk 1:79; 10:5; 19:38; 24:36; Jn 14:27; 16:33; 20:21, 26). How can we understand the statement in today's Gospel which seems to say the contrary: "Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth; no, I have not come to bring peace but the sword." This affirmation does not mean that Jesus was in favor of division and the sword. No! Jesus wants neither the sword (Jn 18:11) nor division. He wants the union of all in truth (cf. Jn 17:17-23). At that time, the announcement of the truth that He, Jesus of Nazareth, was the Messiah became a reason of great division among the Jews. In the same family or community, some were in favor and others were radically contrary. In this sense the Good News of Jesus was truly a source of division, a "sign of contradiction" (Lk 2:34) or, as Jesus said, He was bringing the sword. In this way the other warning is understood: "I have come to set son against father, daughter against mother, daughter-in-law against mother-in-law; a person's enemies will be the members of his own household". In fact, that was what was happening in the families and in the communities: much division, much discussion, the consequence of the announcement of the Good News among the Jews of that time, because some accepted while others rejected. Today the same thing happens. Many times, when the Church renews itself, the appeal to the Good News becomes a 'sign of contradiction' and of division. People who for years have lived comfortably in their routine of Christian life do not want to allow themselves to be bothered by the 'innovations' of Vatican Council II. Disturbed by the changes, they used all their intelligence to find arguments in defense of their opinions and to condemn the changes, considering them contrary to what they thought was the true faith.

- Matthew 10:37: No one who prefers father or mother to Me is worthy of Me. Luke gives this same statement, but much more demanding. Literally he says, "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, his sons and brothers, his sisters, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple" (Lk 14:26). How can this affirmation of Jesus be combined with the other one in which He says to observe the fourth commandment: love and honor father and mother? (Mk 7:10-12; Mt 19:19). (The Greek word used in Luke is *μισέω*, which has slightly different meaning than how *hate* is used in English. It's usage means "to love less", to denounce (comparatively) between the

two. It does not carry the animosity we commonly associate with hate.) However, two observations: (1) The fundamental criterion on which Jesus insists always is this one: the Good News of God should be the supreme value of our life. In our life there can be no greater value. (2) The economic and social situation at the time of Jesus was such that the families were obliged to close themselves up in themselves. They no longer had the conditions to respect the obligations of human community living together as, for example, sharing, hospitality, invitation to a meal, and the acceptance of the excluded. This individualistic closing up in self, caused by the national and international situation, produced distortion: (1) It made life in community impossible (2) It limited the commandment “honor father and mother” exclusively to the small family nucleus and no longer to the larger family of the community (3) It prevented the full manifestation of the Good News of God, because if God is Father/Mother we are brothers and sisters of one another. And this truth should be expressed in the life of the community. A living and fraternal community is the mirror of the face of God. Living together without community is a mirror which disfigures the face of God. In this context, the request of Jesus, “to hate father and mother” means that the disciples should overcome the individualistic closing up of the small family on itself, and extend it to the community dimension, preferring to communal love to limiting it to familial love. Jesus Himself put into practice what He taught others. His family wanted to call Him to close Himself up in self. When they told Him, “Look, Your mother and Your brothers are outside and they are looking for You”, He answered: “Who is My mother, and who are My brothers?” Looking at the people around Him He said: “Behold, My mother and My brothers. Anyone who does the will of God is My brother, My sister and My mother” (Mk 3:32-35). He extends the family! This was and continues to be, even today for the small family, the only way to be able to keep and transmit the values which He believes.

- Matthew 10:38-39: The demands of the mission of the disciples. In these two verses, Jesus gives important and demanding advice: (a) To take up the cross and follow Jesus: Anyone who does not take his cross and follow in My footsteps is not worthy of Me. In order to perceive all the significance and importance of this first advice, keep in mind the witness of Saint Paul: “But as for me, it is not of the question that I should boast at all, except of the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom the world has been crucified to me and I to the world” (Gal 6:14). To carry the cross presupposes, even now, a radical drawing away from the sinful system which reigns in the world. (b) To have the courage to give one’s life: “Anyone who finds his life will lose it; anyone who loses his life for My sake will find it”. Only the one who in life has been capable of giving himself totally to others will feel fulfilled. This second piece of advice confirms the deepest human experience; the source of life is in the gift of life. In giving one receives. “If the grain of wheat does not die ...” (Jn 12, 24).

- Matthew 10:40: The identification of the disciple with Jesus and with God Himself. This human experience of contribution and of the gift received has a clarification, a deepening: “Anyone who welcomes you welcomes Me: and anyone who welcomes Me welcomes the One who sent Me.” In the total gift of self, the disciple identifies himself with Jesus; there the encounter with God takes place, and God allows Himself to be found by the one who seeks Him.

- Matthew 10:41-42: The reward of the prophet, of the just and of the disciple. The

discourse of the Mission ends with one sentence on reward: “Anyone who welcomes a prophet because he is a prophet will have a prophet’s reward; and anyone who welcomes an upright person because he is upright will have the reward of an upright person. 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 reward”. In this statement the sequence is very meaningful: the prophet is recognized because of his mission as one sent by God. The upright person is recognized by his behavior, by his perfect way of observing the law of God. The disciple is recognized by no quality or mission, but simply by his social condition of being least among the people. The Kingdom is not made of great things. It is like a very big house which is constructed with small bricks. Anyone who despises the brick will have great difficulty in constructing the house. Even a glass of water serves as a brick for the construction of the Kingdom.

- Matthew 11:1: The end of the discourse of the mission. When Jesus had finished instructing His twelve disciples He moved from there to teach and preach in their towns. Now Jesus leaves to put into practice what He has taught. We will see this in chapters 11 and 12 of the Gospel of Matthew.

4) Personal questions

- To lose life in order to gain life. Have you had some experience of having felt rewarded for an act of donation or gratuity for others?
- He who welcomes you welcomes Me, and who welcomes Me, welcomes the One who sent Me. Stop and think about what Jesus says here: He and God Himself identify themselves with you.

5) Concluding Prayer

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

Lectio Divina Tuesday, July 14, 2020

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

God our Father,
Your light of truth
guides us to the way of Christ.
May all who follow Him
reject what is contrary to the gospel.
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 11:20-24

Jesus began to reproach the towns where most of his mighty deeds had been done, since they had not repented. “Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty deeds done in your midst had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would long ago have repented in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you. And as for you, Capernaum: Will you be exalted to heaven? You will go down to the nether world. For if the mighty deeds done in your midst had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I tell you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom on the day of judgment than for you.”

3) Reflection

- The Discourse on the Mission occupies chapter 10. Chapters 11 and 12 describe the mission which Jesus carried out and how He did it. The two chapters mention how the people either adhered to Him, doubted the evangelizing action of Jesus, or rejected it. John the Baptist, who looked at Jesus with the eyes of the past, does not succeed in understanding Him (Mt 11:1-15). The people, who looked at Jesus out of interest, were not capable of understanding Him (Mt 11:16-19). The great cities around the lake, which listened to the preaching of Jesus and saw His miracles, did not want to open themselves up to His message (this is the text of today’s Gospel) (Mt 11:20-24). The wise and the doctors, who appreciated everything according to their own science, were not able to understand the preaching of Jesus (Mt 11:25). The Pharisees, who trusted only in the observance of the law, criticized Jesus (Mt 12:1-8) and decided to kill Him (Mt 12:9-14). They said that Jesus acted in the name of Beelzebul (Mt 12:22-37). They wanted a proof in order to be able to believe in Him (Mt 12:38-45). Not even His relatives supported Him (Mt 12:46-50). Only the little ones and the simple people understood and accepted the Good News of the Kingdom (Mt 11:25-30). They followed Him (Mt 12:15-16) and saw in Him the Servant announced by Isaiah (Mt 12:17-21).
- This way of describing the missionary activity of Jesus was a clear warning for the disciples who together with Jesus and walked through Galilee. They could not expect a reward or praise for being missionaries of Jesus. This warning is also valid for us who today read and meditate on this discourse on the mission, because the Gospels were written for all times. They invite us to confront the attitude that we have with Jesus with the attitude of the people who appear in the Gospel and to ask ourselves if we are like John the Baptist (Mt 11:1-15), like the people who were interested (Mt 11:16-19), like the unbelieving cities (Mt 11:20-24), like the doctors who thought they knew everything and understood nothing (Mt 11:25), like the Pharisees who only knew how to criticize (Mt 12:1-45) or like the simple people who went seeking for Jesus (Mt 12:15) and who, with their wisdom, knew how to understand and accept the message of the Kingdom (Mt 11:25-30).
- Matthew 11:20: The word against the cities which did not receive Him. The space in which Jesus moved during those three years of His missionary life was small; only a few square kilometers along the Sea of Galilee around the cities of Capernaum,

Bethsaida and Chorazin. Only that! So it was in this very limited space where Jesus made the majority of His discourses and worked His miracles. He came to save the whole of humanity, and almost did not get out of the limited space of His land. Tragically, Jesus had to become aware that the people of those cities did not want to accept the message of the Kingdom and were not converted. The cities become more rigid in their beliefs, traditions and customs and did not accept the invitation of Jesus to change their life.

- Matthew 11:21-24: Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum are worse than Tyre and Sidon. In the past, Tyre and Sidon, inflexible enemies of Israel, ill treated the People of God. Because of this they were cursed by the prophets. (Is 23:1; Jer 25:22; 47:4; Ezek 26:3; 27:2; 28:2; Joel 4:4; Am 1:10). And now Jesus says that these cities, symbols of all evil, would have already been converted if in them had been worked all the miracles which were worked in Chorazin and Bethsaida. The city of Sodom, the symbol of the worst perversion, was destroyed by the anger of God (Gen 18:16 to 19:29). And now Jesus says that Sodom would exist today, because it would have been converted if it had seen the miracles that Jesus worked in Capernaum. Today we still live this same paradox. Many of us who are Catholics since we were children, have many solid and firm convictions, so much so that we stop reaching for perfection of charity. And in some places, Christianity, instead of being a source of change and of conversion, becomes the refuge of the most reactionary forces of the politics of the country.

4) Personal questions

- How do I place myself before the Good News of Jesus: like John the Baptist, like the interested people, like the doctors, like the Pharisees or like the simple and poor people?
- Does my city, or my country, deserve the warning of Jesus against Capernaum, Chorazin and Bethsaida?
- If someone, a Christian, already follows Jesus, how does this passage apply? What is the message for them?

5) Concluding Prayer

Great is Yahweh and most worthy of praise
in the city of our God, the holy mountain,
towering in beauty,
the joy of the whole world. (Ps 48:1-2)

Lectio Divina Wednesday, July 15, 2020

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

God our Father,
Your light of truth
guides us to the way of Christ.
May all who follow Him

reject what is contrary to the Gospel.

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 11:25-27

At that time Jesus exclaimed: “I give praise to you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned you have revealed them to the childlike. Yes, Father, such has been your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son wishes to reveal him.”

3) Reflection

- Context. The liturgical passage of Mt 11:25-27 represents a turning point in the Gospel of Matthew: Jesus is asked the first questions regarding the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven. The first one to ask the first questions on the identity of Jesus is John the Baptist, who through his disciples asks Him a concrete question: “Are You the one who is to come, or are we to expect someone else?” (11:3). Instead, the Pharisees, together with the scribes, address words of reproach and judgment to Jesus: “Look, Your disciples are doing something that is forbidden on the Sabbath” (12:2). Up until now in chapters 1 to 10, the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven in the person of Jesus did not seem to find any obstacles, but beginning with chapter 11, we find some concrete difficulties. Or rather many begin to take a stand with regard to Jesus: sometimes He is “the object of scandal,” of fall (11:6); “this generation,” in the sense of this human descent, does not have an attitude of acceptance regarding the Kingdom that is to arrive; the cities along the lake are not converted (11:20); concerning the behavior of Jesus a true and proper controversy springs up (chapter 12), and thus they begin to think how to put Him to death (12:14). This is the climate of mistrust and of protest into which Matthew inserts this passage.

Now the moment has arrived in which to question oneself about the activity of Jesus: how to interpret the “works of Christ” (11:2,19)? How can these thaumaturgic actions be explained (11:20,21,23)? Such questions concern the crucial question of Messiahship of Jesus, and judge not only “this generation” but also the cities around the lake which have not converted as the Kingdom of Heaven gets closer in the person of Jesus.

- To become small. The most efficacious way to carry out this conversion is to become “small.” Jesus communicates this strategy of “smallness” in a prayer of thanksgiving (11:27) which has a wonderful parallel in the witness rendered to the Father on the occasion of the Baptism (11:27). Experts love to call this prayer a “hymn of rejoicing, exultation.” The rhythm of the prayer of Jesus begins with a confession: “I praise You,” “I confess to You.” Such expressions of introduction render Jesus’ words quite solemn. The prayer of praise that Jesus recites presents the characteristics of an answer addressed to the reader. Jesus addresses Himself to God with the expression “Lord of Heaven and earth,” that is, to God as creator and guardian of the world. In Judaism, instead, it was the custom to address God with the invocation “Lord of the world,” but

they did not add the term “Father,” a distinctive characteristic of the prayer of Jesus. The reason for the praise and the disclosing of God: because You have hidden..., revealed. The hiding referred to the “wise and intelligent” concerns of the scribes and the Pharisees, completely closed up and hostile to the coming of the Kingdom (3:7 ff; 7:29; 9:3,11, 34). The revelation is to the little ones, the Greek term says “infants,” those who cannot speak as yet. Thus, Jesus indicates the privileged audience of the proclamation of the Kingdom of Heaven as those who are not experts of the Law and are not instructed.

What are “these things” that are hidden or revealed? The content of this revelation or hiding is Jesus, the Son of God, the one who reveals the Father. It is evident for the reader that the revelation of God is linked indissolubly to the person of Jesus, to His Word, to His Messianic actions. He is the one who allows the revelation of God and not the Law or the premonitory events of the end of time.

- The revelation of God from the Father to the Son. In the last part of the discourse Jesus makes a presentation of self as the one to whom every thing has been communicated by the Father. In the context of the coming of the Kingdom, Jesus has the role and the mission to reveal the Heavenly Father in everything. In such a role He receives the totality of power, of knowledge and of the authority to judge. In order to confirm this role, which is so committed, Jesus appeals to the witness of the Father, the only One who possesses a real knowledge of Jesus: “Nobody knows the Son but the Father,” and vice-versa “and nobody knows the Father but the Son.” The witness of the Father is irreplaceable so that the unique dignity of Jesus as Son may be understood by His disciples. Besides, the uniqueness of Jesus is affirmed in the revelation of the Father; the Gospel of John had already affirmed this: “No one has ever seen God; it is the only Son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made Him known” (1:18). To summarize, the Evangelist makes his readers understand that the revelation of the Father takes place through the Son. Even more: the Son reveals the Father to whom He wants.

4) Personal questions

- In your prayer do you feel the need to express all your gratitude to the Father for the gifts that He has given you in life? Does it happen to you to confess publicly, to exult in the Lord because of the wonderful works that He accomplishes in the world; in the Church, and in your life?
- In your search for God do you rely on your wisdom and intelligence or do you allow yourself to be guided by the wisdom of God? How attentive are you to your relationship with Jesus? Do you listen to His word? Do you assume His sentiments in order to discover His physiognomy of Son of the Heavenly Father?

5) Concluding Prayer

My lips shall proclaim Your saving justice,
Your saving power all day long.
God, You have taught me from boyhood,
and I am still proclaiming Your marvels. (Ps 71:15,17)

Lectio Divina Thursday, July 16, 2020

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

God our Father,
Your light of truth
guides us to the way of Christ.
May all who follow Him
reject what is contrary to the Gospel.
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 11:28-30

Jesus said: "Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves. For my yoke is easy, and my burden light."

3) Reflection

- The Gospel today is composed of only three verses (Mt 11:28-30) which form part of a brief literary unit, one of the most beautiful ones, in which Jesus thanks the Father for having revealed the wisdom of the Kingdom to the little children and because He has hidden it from the doctors and the wise (Mt 11:25-30). In the brief commentary which follows we will include the entire literary unit.
- Matthew 11:25-26: *Only the little children accept and understand the Good News of the Kingdom. Jesus recites a prayer: "I thank You Father, Lord of Heaven and of earth, for hiding these things from the learned and the clever and revealing them to little children."* The wise, the doctors of that time, have created a system of laws which they imposed on the people in the name of God (Mt 23:3-4). They thought that God demanded this observance from the people. But the law of love, which Jesus has revealed to us, said the contrary. What is important in order to be saved is not what we do for God, but what God, in His great love, does for us! God wants mercy and not sacrifice (Mt 9:13). The simple and poor people understood Jesus' way of speaking and rejoiced. The wise said that Jesus was in error. They could not come to understand His teaching. *"Yes, I praise you!* He praised the Father that the little children understand the message of the Kingdom despite it being hidden from the wise and the learned! If they want to understand it they have to become the pupils of the little children! This way of thinking and of teaching makes people feel uncomfortable.
- Matthew 11:27: *The origin of the new Law: the Son knows the Father.* What the Father has to tell us He has given to Jesus, and Jesus reveals it to the little children, so that they may be open to His message. Jesus, the Son, knows the Father. He knows what the Father wanted to communicate to us, when many centuries ago He gave His Law to Moses. Today, Jesus is teaching many things to the poor and to the little children and, through them, to all His Church.

• Matthew 11:28-30: *The invitation of Jesus which is still valid today.* Jesus invites all those who are tired to go to Him, and He promises them rest. In our communities today, we should be the continuation of this invitation which Jesus addresses to people who were tired and oppressed by the weight of the observance asked by the laws of purity. He says, “*Learn from Me for I am meek and humble of heart.*” Many times, this saying has been manipulated, to ask people for submission, meekness and passivity. Jesus wants to say the opposite. He asks people not to listen to “*the wise and learned,*” the professors of religion of that time, and to begin to learn from Him, from Jesus, a man who came from Galilee, without higher instruction, who says He is “*meek and humble of heart.*” Jesus does not do as the scribes, who exalt themselves because of their science, but He places Himself at the side of the people who are exploited and humiliated. Jesus, the new Master, knows by experience what takes place in the heart of the people who suffer. He has lived this well and has known it during the thirty years of His life in Nazareth.

• *How Jesus puts into practice what He taught in the Discourse on the Mission.* Jesus has a passion: to announce the Good News of the Kingdom. He had a passion for the Father and for the people of His country who are poor and abandoned. There, where Jesus found people who listened to Him, Jesus announced the Good News, in any place: In the *synagogues* during the celebration of the Word (Mt 4:23), in the *houses* of friends (Mt 13:36); walking along the way with the disciples (Mt 12:1-8); along the *shore of the sea*, sitting in the boat (Mt 13:3); on the Mount from where He proclaims the Beatitudes (Mt 5:1); in the *squares and in the cities*, where people would bring the sick to Him (Mt 14:34-36). Also in the *Temple of Jerusalem*, during the pilgrimage (Mt 26:55)! In Jesus everything is revelation of everything which He bore inside Himself! He not only announced the Good News of the Kingdom; He Himself was and continues to be a living sign of the *Kingdom*. In Him we see clearly what happens when a human being allows God to reign in his life. Today’s Gospel reveals the tenderness with which Jesus welcomes the little children. He wanted them to find rest and peace. And because of this choice of His for the little children and the excluded, He was criticized and persecuted. He suffered very much! The same thing happens today. When a community tries to open itself to be a place of welcome and consolation for the little children and the excluded of today who are the foreigners and the migrants, many people do not agree and criticize.

4) Personal questions

- Have you ever experienced the rest promised by Jesus?
- How can the words of Jesus help our community to be a place of rest for our life?
- How can one be meek and humble while at the same time striving for promotion or advancement at work or in the community?
- To follow Jesus requires radical change. How can this be an easy yoke or a light burden?

5) Concluding Prayer

In You is the source of life,
by Your light we see the light.

Continue Your faithful love to those who acknowledge You,
and Your saving justice to the honest of heart. (Ps 36:9-10)

Lectio Divina Friday, July 17, 2020

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

God our Father,
Your light of truth
guides us to the way of Christ.
May all who follow Him
reject what is contrary to the Gospel.
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 12:1-8

Jesus was going through a field of grain on the sabbath. His disciples were hungry and began to pick the heads of grain and eat them. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, "See, your disciples are doing what is unlawful to do on the sabbath." He said to the them, "Have you not read what David did when he and his companions were hungry, how he went into the house of God and ate the bread of offering, which neither he nor his companions but only the priests could lawfully eat? Or have you not read in the law that on the sabbath the priests serving in the temple violate the sabbath and are innocent? I say to you, something greater than the temple is here. If you knew what this meant, I desire mercy, not sacrifice, you would not have condemned these innocent men. For the Son of Man is Lord of the sabbath."

3) Reflection

- In today's Gospel we see that there are many conflicts between Jesus and the religious authority of that time. They are conflicts regarding the religious practices of that time: fasting, purity, observance of the Sabbath, etc. In our day, they would be conflicts regarding, for example, matrimony between divorced persons, friendship with prostitutes, acceptance of homosexuals, communion without being married by the Church, Sunday mass obligation, fasting on Good Friday. The conflicts were many: at home, in school, in work, in the community, in the Church, in personal life, in society. They were conflicts regarding growth, relationship, age, mentality. So many of them! To live life without conflicts is impossible! Conflict is part of life and starts at birth. We are born with birth pangs. Conflicts are not accidents along the way, but form part of the journey, of the process of conversion. What strikes us is the way in which Jesus faces the conflicts. In the discussion with His enemies, He was not trying to show them that He was right, but wished to make the experience which He, Jesus, had of God, Father and Mother, prevail. The image of God which others had was that of a severe

Judge who only threatened and condemned. Jesus tries to have mercy prevail, since the objective of the Law is the practice of Love.

- Matthew 12:1-2: *To pick grain on the Sabbath day and the criticism of the Pharisees.* On a Sabbath day, the disciples went through the fields and they picked grain to eat them. They were hungry. The Pharisees arrived and invoke the Bible to say that the disciples were transgressing the law of the Sabbath (cf. Ex 20:8-11). Jesus also uses the Bible and responds invoking three examples taken from Scripture: (1) that of David, (2) that of the legislation on work of the priests in the temple and (3) from the action of the Prophet Hosea, that is, He quotes a historical book, a legislative book and a prophetic book.

- Matthew 12:3-4: *The example of David.* Jesus recalls that David himself did something which was forbidden by the Law, because he took the sacred bread of the temple and gave it to the soldiers to eat, because they were hungry (1 Sam 21:2-7). No Pharisee had the courage to criticize King David!

- Matthew 12:5-6: *The example of the priests.* Accused by the religious authority, Jesus argues beginning from what they themselves, the religious authority, do on the Sabbath day. On the Sabbath day, in the Temple of Jerusalem, the priests worked very much more than the other days of the week, because they had to sacrifice the animals for the sacrifices; they had to clean, sweep, carry burdens, kill the animals, etc. Yet nobody said that this was against the Law. They thought of it as normal! The Law itself obliged them to do all this (Num 28:9-10).

- Matthew 12:7: *The example of the prophets.* Jesus quotes a verse from the prophet Hosea: *I want mercy and not sacrifice.* The word mercy means to have the heart (cor) in the misery (*miseri*) of others, that is, the merciful person has to be very close to the suffering of the people, has to identify himself/herself with them. The word sacrifice means to have (*ficio*) a thing consecrated (*sacri*), that is, that the one who offers a sacrifice separates the sacrificed object from profane use and places it at a distance from the daily life of the people. If the Pharisees had had this way of looking at the life of the prophet Hosea, they would have known that the most pleasing sacrifice for God is not that the consecrated persons lives far away from reality, but that he/she places his/her consecrated heart totally in the service of the brothers and sisters in order to relieve them from their misery. They would not have considered guilty those who in reality were innocent.

- Matthew 12:8: *The Son of Man is the master of the Sabbath.* Jesus ends with this statement: *The Son of Man is the master of the Sabbath!* Jesus Himself is the criterion for interpretation of the Law of God. Jesus knows the *Tanakh* (the Hebrew bible) by heart and invokes it to indicate that the arguments of the others had no foundation. At that time, there were no printed bibles as we have today. In every community there was only one copy written by hand, which remained in the synagogue. If Jesus knew the bible so well, it means that during the thirty years of His life in Nazareth, He had participated intensely in the life of the community, where Scripture was read every Saturday. The new experience of God the Father made Jesus discover God's intention in decreeing the laws of the Old Testament. Having lived thirty years in Nazareth and feeling as His own the oppression and exclusion of so many brothers and

sisters, in the name of the law, Jesus must have perceived that this could not be the meaning of the law. If God is Father, then He accepts all as sons and daughters. If God is Father, then we should be brothers and sisters among ourselves. Jesus lived this and prayed for this, from the beginning until the end. The law should be at the service of life and of fraternity. “The human being is not made for the Sabbath, but the Sabbath for the human being” (Mk 2:27). Because of His great fidelity to this message, Jesus was condemned to death. He disturbed the system, and the system defended itself, using its force against Jesus, because He wished that the Law be placed at the service of life, and not vice-versa. We need to know the bible in depth and to participate deeply in the community, as Jesus did.

4) Personal questions

- What type of conflicts do you find in the family, in society, in the Church? What are the conflicts which concern religious practices which cause suffering to people nowadays and which are a cause of discussion and polemics? What is the image of God behind all these preconceptions, behind all these norms and prohibitions?
- What has conflict taught you during all these years? What is the message which you draw from all this for our communities today?

For further study

To know the bible in depth can be difficult. Various passages may seem to contradict each other, unless put into a broader context where all of a particular reference can be put together in one place. This is one way people use bible quotations to distort their real meaning. The Vatican has tools online to help. The bible is online in searchable form in an approved version at http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0839/_INDEX.HTM along with a concordance which lists and links every word in the bible in an index at http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0839/_FA.HTM and allows a user to collect similar words and ideas in one place to help discern their real meaning. Look at these online and see if they can help you learn the bible to a greater depth and understanding.

5) Concluding Prayer

Lord, I muse on You in the watches of the night,
for You have always been my help;
in the shadow of Your wings I rejoice;
my heart clings to You,
Your right hand supports me. (Ps 63:6-8)

Lectio Divina Saturday, July 18, 2020

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

God our Father,
Your light of truth
guides us to the way of Christ.
May all who follow Him
reject what is contrary to the Gospel.
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 12:14-21

The Pharisees went out and took counsel against Jesus to put him to death. When Jesus realized this, he withdrew from that place. Many people followed him, and he cured them all, but he warned them not to make him known. This was to fulfill what had been spoken through Isaiah the prophet: Behold, my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved in whom I delight; I shall place my Spirit upon him, and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles. He will not contend or cry out, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, a smoldering wick he will not quench, until he brings justice to victory. And in his name the Gentiles will hope.

3) Reflection

- The Gospel today has two parts: (a) describes the various reactions of the Pharisees and of the people who listen to the preaching of Jesus; and (b) describes what Matthew sees in these reactions: the fulfillment of the prophecy of the Servant of Yahweh, announced by Isaiah.
- Matthew 12:14: The reaction of the Pharisees: they decide to kill Jesus. This verse is the conclusion of the previous episode, in which Jesus challenges the malice of the Pharisees, by curing the man who had a withered hand (Mt 12:9-14). The reaction of the Pharisees was to hold a Council meeting against Jesus. Thus, they come to the breaking of the relationship between the religious authority and Jesus. In Mark, this episode is much more explicit and provocative (Mk 3:1-6). He says that the decision to kill Jesus was not only that of the Pharisees, but also of the Herodians (Mk 3:6). Altar and throne joined together against Jesus.
- Matthew 12:15-16: The reaction of the people: to follow Jesus. When Jesus learned the decision of the Pharisees, He went away from the place where He was. People follow Him. Even knowing that the religious authority has decided to kill Jesus, the people do not go away from Jesus, but rather they follow Him. Many followed Him and He cured them all, but warned them not to make Him known. People know how to discern. Jesus asks them not to spread the news, not to say what He is doing. A great contrast! On the one side, the conflict of life and death, between Jesus and the religious authority, and on the other the movement of the people who were desirous of encountering Jesus! They

were, above all, the marginalized and the excluded who presented themselves to Jesus with their illness and their infirmities. They, who were not accepted in society or in the religious field, were accepted by Jesus.

- Matthew 12:17: The concern of Matthew: Jesus is our Messiah. This reaction, different from that of the Pharisees and of the people, moved Matthew to see here the realization of the prophecy of the Suffering Servant. On the one hand, the Servant was persecuted by the authority which insulted Him and spat on His face, but He does not turn back. He presents His face hard as a rock, knowing that He will not be disappointed (Is 50:5-7). On the other hand, the Servant is sought and expected by the people. The crowd coming from far is waiting for His teaching (Is 42:4). This is exactly what is happening to Jesus.

- Matthew 12:18-21: Jesus fulfills the prophecy of the Servant. Matthew presents the entire first Cantic of the Servant. Read the text slowly, thinking of Jesus and the poor who today are excluded:

“Look! My Servant whom I have chosen;
My beloved in whom My soul delights,
I will send My Spirit upon Him, and He will proclaim justice to the nations;
He will not brawl or cry out; His voice is not heard in the streets,
He will not break a bruised reed, or snuff the faltering wick.
Until he has made justice victorious; in him the nations will put their hope.”

4) Personal questions

- Do you know of any case in which the religious authority, in the name of religion, decided to persecute and kill people who, like Jesus, did good to people?
- In our community are we servants of God for the people? What do we lack?

5) Concluding Prayer

How precious, God, is Your faithful love.
So the children of Adam take refuge in the shadow of Your wings.
They feast on the bounty of Your house,
You let them drink from Your delicious streams. (Ps 36:7-8)

Lectio Divina Sunday, July 19, 2020

*The mysterious growth of the Reign
God's patience
Matthew 13: 24-43*

1. Opening prayer

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

God speaks to us in life and in Scripture, so that we may observe the Word and produce good fruit through our perseverance.

2. Reading

a) Division of the text:

The text is made up of three parables, a break, and the explanation of the first parable. The three parables of the darnel and the wheat (13: 24-30), the mustard seed (13: 31-32) and the leaven (13:33), have the same purpose. They wish to correct the expectations of Jesus' contemporaries who thought that the Reign of God would come with vehemence and immediately eliminate whatever was contrary to it. Through these parables, Jesus wishes to explain to His listeners that He did not come to restore the Reign by force, but to inaugurate a new era gradually, in the day-to-day history, in a way often unobserved. And yet His work has an inherent strength, dynamism and a transforming power that gradually changes history from inside according to God's plan...if one has eyes to see!

In 13:10-17, between the parable of the sower and its explanation, the evangelist inserts a dialogue between Jesus and His disciples where the Master explains to them why it is that He speaks to the crowds only in parables. Here too, between the parables and the explanation, the evangelist inserts a brief comment on the reason why Jesus speaks in parables (13: 34-35).

Then follows the explanation of the parable of the darnel and the wheat (13: 36-43). What is striking in this explanation is that, while many of the details of the parable are interpreted, not a single reference is made to the core of the parable, that is, the dialogue between the owner and his servants concerning the darnel that grew together with the wheat. Many scholars deduce that the explanation of the parable is not from Jesus, but from the evangelist who changes the original sense of the parable. While Jesus meant to correct the messianic impatience of his contemporaries, Matthew addresses lukewarm Christians and exhorts them, almost threatens them, with God's judgement. However, the parable and the explanation are part of the canonical text and, therefore, both should be considered because both contain the Word of God addressed to us today.

b) The text:

24-30: He put another parable before them, "The kingdom of Heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. While everybody was asleep his enemy came, sowed darnel all among the wheat, and made off. When the new wheat sprouted and ripened, then the darnel appeared as well. The owner's laborers went to him and said, "Sir, was it not good seed that you sowed in your field? If so, where does the darnel come from?" He said to them, "Some enemy has done this." And the laborers said, "Do you want us to go and weed it out?" But he said, "No, because when you weed out the darnel you might pull up the wheat with it. Let them both grow till the harvest; and at harvest time I shall say to the reapers: First collect the darnel and tie it in bundles to be burnt, then gather the wheat into my barn." '

31-32: He put another parable before them, "The kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed which a man took and sowed in his field. It is the smallest of all the seeds, but

when it has grown it is the biggest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air can come and shelter in its branches.'

33: He told them another parable, 'The kingdom of Heaven is like the yeast a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour till it was leavened all through.'

34-35: In all this Jesus spoke to the crowds in parables; indeed, He would never speak to them except in parables. This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet: I will speak to you in parables, unfold what has been hidden since the foundation of the world.

36-43: Then, leaving the crowds, He went to the house; and His disciples came to Him and said, 'Explain to us the parable about the darnel in the field.' He said in reply, 'The sower of the good seed is the Son of man. The field is the world; the good seed is the subjects of the kingdom; the darnel, the subjects of the Evil One; the enemy who sowed it, the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; the reapers are the angels. Well then, just as the darnel is gathered up and burnt in the fire, so it will be at the end of time. The Son of man will send his angels and they will gather out of His kingdom all causes of falling and all who do evil, and throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth. Then the upright will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Anyone who has ears should listen!

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 is your reaction towards the evil that you see in the world and in yourself? Is it the reaction of the servants or that of the owner?
- b) What are the signs of the presence of the Reign that you can see in the world and in your life?
- c) What image of God appears from these three parables? Is this your image of God?

5. A key to the reading

for those who wish to go deeper into the text.

a) The Reign of God:

In the two compendia that Matthew offers us on the ministry of Jesus, he presents Him preaching the Gospel or the good news of the Reign and healing (4:23; 9:35). The expression "Reign of Heaven" appears 32 times in Matthew. It is the same as the "Reign of God", found only once in Matthew, whereas it is the more usual expression found in the rest of the New Testament. As a matter of respect, the Jews avoid not only the use of the Name of God as revealed to Moses (see Ex 3:13-15), but also the word "God" which is substituted by various expressions such as "Heaven" or "The heavens". Matthew, the most Jewish of the Gospels, conforms to this practice.

The expression is not found in the Old Testament, where, however, we often find the idea of the royalty of God over Israel and over the universe and the verbal equivalent of the New Testament's "God reigns". In fact, the Reign of God, as presented also in the New Testament, is above all the action of God who rules and the new situation as a

consequence of His ruling. God has always been ruler, but because of sin, Israel and the whole of humanity avoid His royalty and create a situation opposed to His original plan. The Reign of God will be established when everything will be once more subjected to His dominion, that is, when humanity will accept His sovereignty and thus realize His plan.

Jesus proclaimed the coming of this new era (see for example Mt 3: 2). Somehow the reality of God's Reign is made present and anticipated in Him and in the community He founded. But the Church is not yet the Reign. The Reign grows mysteriously and gradually until it reaches its fulfillment at the end of time.

b) God's logic:

The reality of the Reign and its growth, as described by Jesus, place us before the mystery of God whose thoughts are not our thoughts. We confuse royalty and force, and impositions, and triumphalism. We like things done on a grand scale. We see success as an undertaking praised and involving many people. However, these are temptations which seduce even the community, and instead of serving the Reign, the community finds itself opposing it. God, on His part, prefers to advance His plan through small, poor and insignificant things and while we are always in a hurry to complete our plans, God waits with great patience and forbearance.

6. Psalm 145

Hymn to the Lord Ruler

I will extol Thee, my God and King,
and bless Thy name for ever and ever.
Every day I will bless Thee,
and praise Thy name for ever and ever.

Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised,
and His greatness is unsearchable.
One generation shall laud Thy works to another,
and shall declare Thy mighty acts.
On the glorious splendor of Thy majesty,
and on Thy wondrous works, I will meditate.
Men shall proclaim the might of Thy terrible acts,
and I will declare Thy greatness.
They shall pour forth the fame of Thy abundant goodness,
and shall sing aloud of Thy righteousness.
The Lord is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
The Lord is good to all,
and His compassion is over all that He has made.

All Thy works shall give thanks to Thee,
O Lord, and all Thy saints shall bless Thee!
They shall speak of the glory of Thy kingdom,
and tell of Thy power,

to make known to the sons of men Thy mighty deeds,
and the glorious splendor of Thy kingdom.
Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom,
and Thy dominion endures throughout all generations.

The Lord is faithful in all His words, and gracious in all His deeds.
The Lord upholds all who are falling,
and raises up all who are bowed down.
The eyes of all look to Thee,
and Thou givest them their food in due season.
Thou openest Thy hand,
Thou satisfiest the desire of every living thing.

The Lord is just in all His ways,
and kind in all His doings.
The Lord is near to all who call upon Him,
to all who call upon Him in truth.
He fulfills the desire of all who fear Him,
He also hears their cry, and saves them.
The Lord preserves all who love Him;
but all the wicked He will destroy.

My mouth will speak the praise of the Lord,
and let all flesh bless His holy name for ever and ever.

7. Closing prayer

For Thou lovest all things that exist,
and hast loathing for none of the things which Thou hast made,
for Thou wouldst not have made anything if Thou hadst hated it.
How would anything have endured if Thou hadst not willed it?
Or how would anything not called forth by Thee have been preserved?
Thou sparest all things, for they are Thine,
O Lord who lovest the living.
Therefore Thou dost correct little by little those who trespass,
and dost remind and warn them of the things wherein they sin,
that they may be freed from wickedness
and put their trust in Thee, O Lord.

Thou art righteous and rulest all things righteously,
deeming it alien to Thy power to condemn him
who does not deserve to be punished.
For Thy strength is the source of righteousness,
and Thy sovereignty over all causes Thee to spare all.
For Thou dost show Thy strength
when men doubt the completeness of Thy power,
and dost rebuke any insolence among those who know it.
Thou who art sovereign in strength dost judge with mildness,

and with great forbearance Thou dost govern us;
for Thou hast power to act whenever Thou dost choose.

Wisdom 11: 24-12: 2, 15-18

Lectio Divina Monday, July 20, 2020

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Lord,
be merciful to Your people.
Fill us with Your gifts
and make us always eager to serve You
in faith, hope and love.
You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

2) Gospel Reading - Matthew 12:38-42

Some of the scribes and Pharisees said to Jesus, “Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you.” He said to them in reply, “An evil and unfaithful generation seeks a sign, but no sign will be given it except the sign of Jonah the prophet. Just as Jonah was in the belly of the whale three days and three nights, so will the Son of Man be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights. At the judgment, the men of Nineveh will arise with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and there is something greater than Jonah here. At the judgment the queen of the south will arise with this generation and condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and there is something greater than Solomon here.”

3) Reflection

- Today’s Gospel presents to us a discussion between Jesus and the religious authority of the time. This time, the doctors of the law and the Pharisees are those who ask Jesus for a sign. Jesus had given many signs: He had cured the leper (Mt 8:1-4), the servant of the centurion (Mt 8:5-13), Peter’s mother-in-law (Mt 8:14-15), the sick and the possessed of the city (Mt 8:16), He had calmed down the storm (Mt 8:23-27), had cast out devils (Mt 8:28-34) and had worked many other miracles. The people seeing all these signs recognize in Jesus the Servant of Yahweh (Mt 8:17; 12:17-21). But the doctors and the Pharisees are not able to perceive the significance of so many signs which Jesus had given. They wanted something different.
- Matthew 12:38: The request for a sign made by the Pharisees and the doctors. The Pharisees arrived and said to Jesus, “Master, we should like to see a sign from You.” They want Jesus to make a sign for them, a miracle, and thus they will be able to verify and examine if Jesus is or is not the one who is sent by God according to what they imagined and expected. They wanted to be sure. They wanted to submit Jesus to their own criteria in such a way as to be able to place Him into their own Messianic frame.

There is no openness in them for a possible conversation. They had understood nothing of all that Jesus had done.

- Mathew 12:39: Jesus' response: the sign of Jonah. Jesus does not submit Himself to the request of the religious authority, because it is not sincere: "An evil and unfaithful generation that asks for a sign! The only sign that will be given them is the sign of the prophet Jonah." These words constitute a very strong judgment regarding the doctors and the Pharisees. They evoke the oracle of Hosea who denounced the people, accusing them of being an unfaithful and adulterous spouse (Hos 2:4). The Gospel of Mark says that Jesus, upon hearing the request of the Pharisees, sighed profoundly (Mk 8:12), probably out of indignation and of sadness before such a great blindness: because it is not worthwhile to place a beautiful picture before people who do not want to open their eyes. Anyone who closes his eyes cannot see! The only sign which will be given to them is the sign of Jonah.

- Matthew 12:41: There is something greater than Jonah here. Jesus looks toward the future: "For as Jonah remained in the belly of the sea monster for three days and three nights, so will the Son of Man be in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights." Therefore, the only sign will be Jesus' resurrection, which will be prolonged in the resurrection of His followers. This is the sign which will be given to the doctors and the Pharisees in the future. They will be placed before the fact that Jesus, condemned to death by them and to death on the cross, will be raised from the dead, and He will continue, in many ways, to raise those who believe in Him. For example, He will raise them in the witness of the apostles, "persons without instruction" who will have had the courage to face authority announcing the resurrection of Jesus (Acts 4:13). What converts is witness, not miracles: "On Judgment day the men of Nineveh will appear against this generation and they will be its condemnation, because when Jonah preached they repented." The people of Nineveh converted because of the witness of the preaching of Jonah, and they denounced the unbelief of the doctors and the Pharisees, because "Look, there is something greater than Jonah here."

- Matthew 12:42: There is something greater than Solomon here. The reference to the conversion of the people of Nineveh is associated and makes one recall the episode of the Queen of the South. "On Judgment Day the Queen of the South will appear against this generation and be its condemnation, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon and look, there is something greater than Solomon here!" This reminder of the episode of the Queen of the South, who recognizes the wisdom of Solomon, indicates how the Bible was used at that time. By association, the principal rule of interpretation was the following: "The Bible is explained through the Bible." Even now, this is one of the more important norms for the interpretation of the Bible, especially for the prayerful reading of the Word of God.

4) Personal questions

- To be converted means to be completely changed morally, but also to change one's ideas and way of thinking. A moralist is one who changes behavior but keeps his way of thinking unaltered. Which one am I?
- In the on-going renewal of the Church today, am I a Pharisee who asks for a sign or

am I like the people who recognize that this is the way wanted by God?

- Certain religions today see God in a different light and use it to justify killing and other injustices. Still others re-envision God and His Church as anything they want. In what ways can we discern the truth in terms of on-going renewal?
- Today, we use several types of analysis to interpret the bible, such as literary analysis, historical-criticism, contextual analysis, etc. How familiar are you with these methods and how do you feel they add to understanding the bible?

For further study

The encyclical of Pope Pius XII, *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, talks about methods of biblical interpretation in modern times and promotes biblical studies. Take time to read this to begin an exploration of the diverse ways we can learn from the bible. Papal documents are available at www.vatican.va

5) Concluding Prayer

Better Your faithful love than life itself;
my lips will praise You.
Thus I will bless You all my life,
in Your name lift up my hands. (Ps 63:3-4)

Lectio Divina Tuesday, July 21, 2020

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Lord,
be merciful to Your people.
Fill us with Your gifts
and make us always eager to serve You
in faith, hope and love.
You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

2) Gospel Reading - Matthew 12:46-50

While Jesus was speaking to the crowds, his mother and his brothers appeared outside, wishing to speak with him. Someone told him, "Your mother and your brothers are standing outside, asking to speak with you." But he said in reply to the one who told him, "Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?" And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my heavenly Father is my brother, and sister, and mother."

3) Reflection

- The family of Jesus. The relatives reached the house where Jesus was. They have probably come from Nazareth. From there up to Capernaum there is a distance of forty

kilometers. His mother also comes with them. They do not enter, but they send a messenger: "Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside, asking to speak with You." Jesus' reaction is clear: "Who is My mother? Who are My brothers?" And stretching out His hand toward His disciples, He said, "Here are My mother and My brothers. For whoever does the will of My heavenly Father is My brother, and sister, and mother." To understand the meaning of this response it is helpful to look at the situation of the family in the time of Jesus.

- In the old Israel, the clan, that is, the large family (the community), was the basis for social living together. It was the protection of families and of the people, the guarantee of possession of the land, the principal vehicle of the tradition, and the defense of identity. It was the concrete way on the part of the people of that time to incarnate the love of God and love toward neighbor. To defend the clan was the same as to defend the Covenant.

- In Galilee at the time of Jesus, because of the system established during the long periods of government of Herod the Great (37 BC to 4 BC) and of his son Herod Antipas (4 BC to 39 AD), the clan (the community) was becoming weaker. The taxes to be paid, both to the government and to the Temple, the debts which were increasing, the individualistic mentality of the Hellenistic ideology, the frequent threats of violent repression on the part of the Romans and the obligation to accept the soldiers and give them hospitality, the ever growing problem of survival, all this impelled the families to block things out and to think only of their own needs. This closing up was strengthened by the religion of the time. For example: one who gave his inheritance to the Temple could leave his parents without any help. This weakened the fourth commandment which was the backbone of the clan (Mk 7:8-13). Besides this, the observance of the norms of purity was a factor of marginalization for many people: women, children, Samaritans, foreigners, lepers, possessed people, tax collectors or publicans, the sick, the mutilated and paraplegics.

- Thus, concern with the problems of one's own family prevented the people from meeting in community. Now, in order that the Kingdom of God manifest itself in community living, the people had to overcome the narrow limits of the small family and open themselves again to the large family, to the community. Jesus gave the example. When His own family tried to take possession of Him, He reacted and extended the family: "Who is My mother? Who are My brothers?" And stretching out His hand toward His disciples, He said, "Here are My mother and My brothers. For whoever does the will of My heavenly Father is My brother, and sister, and mother." He created a community.

- Jesus asked the same thing of those who wanted to follow Him. Families could not close themselves off from the larger community. The excluded and the marginalized had to be accepted in life with others, and in this way feel accepted by God (Lk 14:12-14). This was the way to attain the objective of the Law, which said "There must, then, be no poor among you" (Dt 15:4). Like the great Prophets of the past, Jesus tried to consolidate community life in the villages of Galilee. He restored the profound meaning of the clan, of the family, of the community, as an expression of the incarnation of the love toward God and toward neighbor.

4) Personal questions

- To live faith in the community. What place and what influence does family and community have in my way of living my faith?
- Today, in large cities, overcrowding promotes individualism which is contrary to life in community. What am I doing to counteract this evil?
- There are many forms of community today, and some of these are dysfunctional. We have online communities, gangs (which are a form of community), lobbies, clubs, social and business societies, and so on. How do I bring the attitude of Jesus to these other communities I might be a member of?
- How broadly do I define what is my community? Why?

5) Concluding prayer

I waited, I waited for Yahweh,
then He stooped to me
and heard my cry for help.
He put a fresh song in my mouth,
praise of our God. (Ps 40:1.3)

Lectio Divina Wednesday, July 22, 2020

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Lord,
be merciful to Your people.
Fill us with Your gifts
and make us always eager to serve You
in faith, hope and love.
You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

2) Gospel Reading - John 20:1-2,11-18

On the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early in the morning, while it was still dark, and saw the stone removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and told them, "They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we don't know where they put him." Mary stayed outside the tomb weeping. And as she wept, she bent over into the tomb and saw two angels in white sitting there, one at the head and one at the feet where the Body of Jesus had been. And they said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken my Lord, and I don't know where they laid him." When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus there, but did not know it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" She thought it was the gardener and said to him, "Sir, if you carried him away, tell me where you laid him, and I will take him." Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew,

"Rabbouni," which means Teacher. Jesus said to her, "Stop holding on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and tell them, 'I am going to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord," and then reported what he told her.

3) Reflection

- The Gospel today presents the appearance of Jesus to Mary Magdalene, whose feast we celebrate today. The death of Jesus, her great friend, makes her lose the sense of life, but she does not cease to look for Him. She goes to the tomb to encounter anew the One whom death had stolen. There are moments in life in which everything crumbles down. It seems that everything has come to an end. Death, disasters, pain, disillusionments, betrayals! There are so many things that can make us lose the earth under our feet and produce in us a profound crisis, but something different can also take place. Unexpectedly, the encounter with a friend can give us back the sense of life and make us discover that love is stronger than death and defeat. In the way in which the appearance of Jesus to Mary Magdalene is described we distinguish the stages followed, from the painful seeking for the dead friend to the encounter of the risen Lord. These are also the stages that we all follow, along our life, seeking God and in living out the Gospel. It is the process of death and of resurrection.

- John 20:1: Mary Magdalene goes to the tomb. There was a profound love between Jesus and Mary Magdalene. She was one of the few people who had the courage to remain with Jesus until the hour of His death on the Cross. After the obligatory rest of the Sabbath, she returned to the tomb, to be in the place where she had met the Beloved for the last time, but to her great surprise, the tomb was empty!

- John 20:11-13: Mary Magdalene weeps, but seeks. As she wept, she stooped to look inside, and saw two angels in white sitting where the body of Jesus had been, one at the head, the other at the feet. The angels asked, "Why are you weeping?" Her response: "They have taken my Lord away, and I do not know where they have put Him!" Mary Magdalene looks for the Jesus she had known, the same one with whom she had lived for three years.

- John 20:14-15: Mary Magdalene speaks with Jesus without recognizing Him; the disciples on the way to Emmaus saw Jesus, but they did not recognize Him (Lk 24:15-16). The same thing happens to Mary Magdalene. She sees Jesus, but does not recognize Him. She thinks that He is the gardener. Jesus also asks, as the angels had done, "Why are you weeping?" And He adds, "Whom are you looking for?" Response: "If you have taken Him away, tell me where you have put Him, and I will go and remove Him!" She is still looking for the Jesus of the past, the same one of three days before. The image of the past prevents her from recognizing the living Jesus, who is standing in front of her.

- John 20:16: Mary Magdalene recognizes Jesus. Jesus pronounces the name "Mary!" (Miriam). This is the sign of recognition: the same voice, the same way of pronouncing the name. She answers "Master!" (Rabbouni). Jesus turns. The first impression is that death has been only a painful accident on the way, but that now everything has turned back as it was in the beginning. Mary embraces Jesus intensely. He was the same Jesus who had died on the cross, the same one whom she had known and loved. Here takes place what Jesus had said in the parable of the Good Shepherd: "He calls His by name

and they know His voice". "I know My sheep and My sheep know Me!" (Jn 10:2,4,14).

- John 20:17: Mary Magdalene receives the mission to announce the resurrection to the Apostles. In fact, it is the same Jesus, but the way of being with her is not the same. Jesus tells her, "Do not cling to Me because I have not yet ascended to the Father!" Jesus is going to be together with the Father. Mary Magdalene should not cling to Him, but rather, she has to assume her mission: "But go and find My brothers and tell them: I am ascending to My Father and your Father". He calls the disciples "My brothers". Ascending to the Father Jesus opens the way for us so that we can be close to God. "I want them to be with Me where I am" (Jn 17:24; 14:3).

- John 20:18: The dignity and the mission of Magdalene and of the women. Mary Magdalene is called the disciple of Jesus (Lk 8:1-2); witness of His crucifixion (Mk 15:40-41; Mt 27:55-56; Jn 19:25), of His burial (Mk 15:47; Lk 23:55; Mt 27:61), and of His resurrection (Mk 16:1-8; Mt 28:1-10; Jn 20:1,11-18). Now she receives the order, she is ordered to go to the Twelve and to announce to them that Jesus is alive. Without this Good News of the Resurrection, the seven lamps of the Sacraments would extinguish (Mt 28:10; Jn 20:17-18).

4) Personal questions

- Have you ever had an experience that has produced in you an impression of loss and of death? What has given you new life and the hope and joy of living?
- Mary Magdalene looked for Jesus in a certain way and found Him again in another way. How does this take place in our life today?

5) Concluding Prayer

God, You are my God, I pine for You;
My heart thirsts for You,
My body longs for You,
As a land parched, dreary and waterless. (Ps 63:1)

Lectio Divina Thursday, July 23, 2020

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Lord,
be merciful to Your people.
Fill us with Your gifts
and make us always eager to serve You
in faith, hope and love.
You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

2) Gospel Reading - Matthew 13:10-17

The disciples approached Jesus and said, "Why do you speak to the crowd in parables?" He said to them in reply, "Because knowledge of the mysteries of the Kingdom of

heaven has been granted to you, but to them it has not been granted. To anyone who has, more will be given and he will grow rich; from anyone who has not, even what he has will be taken away. This is why I speak to them in parables, because they look but do not see and hear but do not listen or understand. Isaiah's prophecy is fulfilled in them, which says: You shall indeed hear but not understand, you shall indeed look but never see. Gross is the heart of this people, they will hardly hear with their ears, they have closed their eyes, lest they see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their hearts and be converted and I heal them. "But blessed are your eyes, because they see, and your ears, because they hear. Amen, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it."

3) Reflection

- Chapter 13 speaks to us about the discourse on the parables. Following the text of Mark (Mk 4:1-34), Matthew omits the parable of the seed which germinates alone (Mk 4:26-29), and he stops at the discussion of the reason for the parable (Mt 13:10-17), adding the parable of the wheat and the darnel (Mt 13:24-30), of the yeast (Mt 13:33), of the treasure (Mt 13:44), of the pearl (Mt 13:45-46) and of the dragnet (Mt 13:47-50). Together with the parable of the sower (Mt 13:4-11) and of the mustard seed (Mt 13:31-32), there are seven parables in the Discourse on the Parables (Mt 13:1-50).
- Matthew 13:10: The question. In the Gospel of Mark, the disciples ask for an explanation of the parables (Mk 4:10). Here in Matthew, the perspective is different. They want to know why Jesus, when He speaks to the people, speaks only in parables: "Why do You talk to them in parables?" What is the reason for this difference?
- Matthew 13:11-13: "Because to you is granted to understand the mysteries of the kingdom of Heaven, but to them it is not granted. Anyone who has will be given more and will have more than enough; but anyone who has not will be deprived even of what he has. The reason I speak to them in parables is that they look without seeing and listen without hearing or understanding. Jesus answers: "Because to you is granted to understand the mysteries of the kingdom of Heaven. Anyone who has will be given more and will have more than enough; but anyone who has not will be deprived even of what he has." Why is it granted to the Apostles to know and not to others? Here is a comparison to help us understand. Two people listen to the mother who teaches: A person must not cut and sew." One of them is the daughter and the other is not. The daughter understands and the other one understands nothing. Why? Because in the mother's house the expression "cut and sew" means to slander. Thus, the mother's teaching helps the daughter to understand how to put love into practice, helping her so that what she already knows may grow, develop. Anyone who has will be given more. The other person understands nothing and loses even the little that she knew regarding love and slander. She remains confused and does not understand what love has to do with cutting and sewing! Anyone who has not will be deprived even of what he has. A parable reveals and hides at the same time! It reveals for "those who are inside," who accept Jesus as the Messiah Servant. It hides from those who insist on saying that the Messiah will be and should be a glorious King. These understand the image presented by the parable, but they do not understand the significance. The

disciples, instead, grow in what they already know concerning the Messiah. The others do not understand anything and lose even the little that they thought they knew about the Kingdom and the Messiah.

- Matthew 13:14-15: The fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah. Just as at another time (Mt 12:18-21), in this different reaction of the people and the Pharisees to the teaching of the parables, Matthew again sees here the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. He even quotes at length the text of Isaiah which says, "Listen and listen, but never understand! Look and look, but never perceive! This people's heart has grown coarse, their ears dulled, they have shut their eyes tight to avoid using their eyes to see, their ears to hear, their heart to understand, changing their ways and being healed by Me."
- Matthew 13:16-17: "But blessed are your eyes because they see, your ears because they hear." All this explains the last sentence: "But blessed are your eyes because they see, your ears because they hear. In truth I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see and never saw it, to hear what you hear and never heard it!"
- The Parables: a new way of speaking to the people about God. People remained impressed by the way in which Jesus taught. "A new way of teaching! Given with authority! Different from that of the scribes!" (Mk 7:28). Jesus had a great capacity for finding very simple images to compare the things of God with the things of life which people knew and experienced in the daily struggle to survive. This presupposes two things: to be in touch with the things of the life of the people, and to be in touch with the things of God, of the Kingdom of God. In some parables there are things that happen and that seldom take place in life. For example, when has it ever happened that a shepherd, who has one hundred sheep, abandons the flock with 99 to go and look for the lost sheep? (Lk 15:4). Where have we ever seen a father who accepts with joy and a feast his son who had squandered all his goods, without saying a word of reproach to him? (Lk 15:20-24). When has it been seen that a Samaritan man is better than a Levite, than a priest? (Lk 10:29-37). The parable makes one think. It leads the person to enter into the story beginning from the experience of life. And through our experience it urges us to discover that God is present in our daily life. The parable is a participative form of teaching and educating. It does not change everything in one minute. It does not make one know; it makes one discover. The parable changes our perspective; it makes the person who listens a contemplative; it helps her to observe reality. This is the novelty of the teaching of the parables of Jesus, different from that of the doctors who taught that God manifests Himself only in the observance of the law. "The Kingdom is present in your midst" (Lk 17:21). But those who listened did not always understand.

4) Personal questions

- Jesus says, "To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the Kingdom." When I read the Gospels, am I like those who understand nothing or like those to whom it has been granted to know the Kingdom?
- What role does the Father's gratuitous grace have in understanding these parables?
- Which is the parable of Jesus with which I most identify ? Why?

5) Concluding Prayer

Yahweh, Your faithful love is in the heavens;
Your constancy reaches to the clouds;
Your saving justice is like towering mountains,
Your judgments like the mighty deep. (Ps 36:5-6)

Lectio Divina Friday, July 24, 2020

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Lord,
be merciful to Your people.
Fill us with Your gifts
and make us always eager to serve You
in faith, hope and love.
You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

2) Gospel Reading - Matthew 13:18-23

Jesus said to his disciples: "Hear the parable of the sower. The seed sown on the path is the one who hears the word of the Kingdom without understanding it, and the Evil One comes and steals away what was sown in his heart. The seed sown on rocky ground is the one who hears the word and receives it at once with joy. But he has no root and lasts only for a time. When some tribulation or persecution comes because of the word, he immediately falls away. The seed sown among thorns is the one who hears the word, but then worldly anxiety and the lure of riches choke the word and it bears no fruit. But the seed sown on rich soil is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields a hundred or sixty or thirty fold."

3) Reflection

- Context. Beginning with chapter 12, on the one side we see there is opposition among the religious leaders of Israel, the scribes and the Pharisees; on the other side, within the crowds who listen to Jesus and are amazed because of His marvelous actions, gradually, little by little, a group of disciples is being formed, with uncertain features, but who follow Jesus with perseverance. To twelve of these disciples Jesus has given the gift of His authority and His power. He has sent them as messengers of the Kingdom, giving them demanding and radical instructions (10:5-39). Now at the moment when controversy breaks out with His opponents, Jesus recognizes His true kinship, not in the lines of the flesh (mother, brothers), but in those who follow Him, listen to Him, and fulfill the will of the Father (12:46-50). This last account offers us the possibility to imagine that the audience to whom Jesus addressed His words is two-fold: on the one side, the disciples to whom He has given to know the mysteries of the Kingdom (13:11) and who have the ability to understand them (13:50) and, on the other side, the crowds

who seem to be deprived of this deep understanding (13:11, 34-36). To the large crowds who gather to listen to Jesus is presented, above all, the parable of the sower. Jesus speaks about a seed that falls (or not!) on the earth. Its growth depends on the place where it falls; it is possible for it to be hindered so that it cannot bear fruit. This is what happens in the first three types of earth “along the road side” (the ground hardened by the passing of men and animals), “the rocky earth” (formed by rocks), “on the thorns” (it is the earth covered with thorns). Instead, the seed that falls on “good ground” bears excellent fruit, even if at different levels. The reader is directed to be more attentive to the yield of the grain than to the action of the sower. Besides, Matthew focuses the attention of the listener on the good earth and the fruit that this earth is capable of producing in an exceptional manner.

The first part of the parable ends with an admonition: “Anyone who has ears should listen” (v. 9); it is an appeal to the freedom of the listener. The word of Jesus may remain a “parable” for a crowd incapable of understanding, or it can reveal “the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven” for those who allow themselves to be upset or affected by its force. It is the acceptance of the Word of Jesus that distinguishes the disciples from the indeterminate crowds; the faith of the first ones reveals the blindness of the others and obliges them to look “beyond” the parable.

- To listen and to understand. It is always Jesus who leads the disciples on the right path for the understanding of the parable. In the future through the disciples, it is the Church to be guided in the understanding of the Word of Jesus. In the explanation of the parable the pair of verbs “to listen” and “to understand” appears in 13:33: That which has been sown in the good ground is the one who listens to the Word and understands it...” It is in the understanding that the true disciple is distinguished from the crowds, who listen to Jesus’ words only occasionally.

- Hindrances to understanding. Jesus recalls, above all, the negative response to His preaching on the Kingdom of Heaven given by His contemporaries. Such a negative response is connected to the various impediments among them. The earth on the edge of the road is that transformed by pedestrians into a trodden road; it is totally negative: “Throw the seeds on the pavement of the street, everybody knows that it serves nothing: the necessary conditions for growth do not exist. And, then people go by, step over it, and ruin the seed. The seed should not be thrown just any place” (Carlos Mesters). Above all, there is the personal responsibility of the individual: to accept God’s Word in one’s own heart. If it falls on a “trodden” heart, which is obstinate because of its own convictions and indifferent, he sides with the evil one. Then the rocky earth: If the first impediment was constituted by an insensitive, indifferent heart, now the image of the seed that falls on the rocks, on stones, and among bushes indicates a heart immersed in a superficial and worldly life. Such life styles are energies that prevent the Word of God from bearing fruit. They begin to listen, but immediately it is blocked, not only by tribulations and trials that are unavoidable, but also because of the involvement of the heart in concerns and riches. It is a life that is not deep but superficial, worldly. It is similar to instability. The good earth is the heart that listens and understands the Word; this one bears fruit. Such fruit is the work of the Word in the heart that accepts it. It is a question of an active understanding that allows one to get involved by God’s action present in the Word of Jesus. The understanding of His Word will continue to be

inaccessible if we neglect the encounter with Him and, therefore, we do not allow it to overflow in us.

4) Personal questions

- Does listening lead to the deep understanding of God's Word or does it remain only an intellectual exercise?
- Are you a heart that accepts, that is available, docile to attain a full understanding of the Word?
- The crowds traveled far to hear Jesus. They invested time and effort, yet they are identified as having hard or rocky hearts. At some level, they came to say yes, but don't. Do we also come to say yes but don't really?

5) Concluding Prayer

The Law of Yahweh is perfect, refreshment to the soul;
The precepts of Yahweh are honest,
light for the eyes. (Ps 19:7-8)

Lectio Divina Saturday, July 25, 2020

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Lord,
be merciful to Your people.
Fill us with Your gifts
and make us always eager to serve You
in faith, hope and love.
You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

2) Gospel Reading - Matthew 20:20-28

The mother of the sons of Zebedee approached Jesus with her sons and did him homage, wishing to ask him for something. He said to her, "What do you wish?" She answered him, "Command that these two sons of mine sit, one at your right and the other at your left, in your Kingdom." Jesus said in reply, "You do not know what you are asking. Can you drink the chalice that I am going to drink?" They said to him, "We can." He replied, "My chalice you will indeed drink, but to sit at my right and at my left, this is not mine to give but is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father." When the ten heard this, they became indignant at the two brothers. But Jesus summoned them and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and the great ones make their authority over them felt. But it shall not be so among you. Rather, whoever wishes to be great among you shall be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave. Just so, the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many."

3) Reflection

- Jesus and the disciples are on the way to Jerusalem (Mt 20:17). Jesus knows that He will be killed (Mt 20:8). The Prophet Isaiah had already announced it (Is 50:4-6; 53:1-10). His death will not be the fruit of blind destiny or of a pre-established plan, but it will be the consequence of the commitment freely made of being faithful to the mission which He received from the Father together with the poor of the earth. Jesus had already said that the disciple has to follow the Master and carry his cross behind him (Mt 16:21,24). But the disciples did not understand what was happening (Mt 16:22-23; 17:23). Suffering and the cross did not correspond to the idea that they had of the Messiah.

- Matthew 20:20-21: The petition of the mother of the sons of Zebedee. The disciples do not only not understand, but they continue to think about their personal ambitions. The mother of the sons of Zebedee, the spokesperson for her sons John and James, gets close to Jesus to ask for a favor: “Promise that these two sons of mine may sit one at Your right hand and the other at Your left in Your Kingdom.”

They had not understood Jesus’ proposal. They were concerned only about their own interests. This shows clearly the tensions in the communities, both at the time of Jesus and of Matthew, as we also see in our own communities.

- Matthew 20:22-23: Jesus’ response. Jesus reacts firmly. He responds to the sons and not to the mother: “You do not know what you are asking. Can you drink the cup that I am going to drink?” It is a question of the chalice of suffering. Jesus wants to know if they, instead of taking places of honor, are willing to give their own life up to death. Both reply, “We can!” This was a sincere response and Jesus confirms it: “You shall drink My cup.” At the same time, it seems to be a hasty response, because a few days later, they abandon Jesus and leave Him alone in His hour of suffering (Mt 26:51). They do not have a strong critical conscience, and they are not even aware of their own personal reality. Jesus then completes the statement, saying, “But it is not Mine to grant that you sit at My right hand and My left, these seats belong to those to whom they have been allotted by My Father.” What Jesus can offer is the chalice of the suffering of the cross.

- Matthew 20:24-27: “Among you this is not to happen.” “When the other ten heard this, they were indignant with the two brothers.” The request made by the mother in the name of her sons causes a heated discussion in the group. Jesus calls the disciples and speaks to them about the exercise of power: “The rulers of nations, you know, dominate over them and the great exercise their power over them. Among you this is not to happen: anyone who wants to become great among you must be your servant and anyone who wants to be first among you must be your slave.” At that time, those who held power had no concern for the people. They acted according to their own interests (cf. Mk 14:3-12). The Roman Empire controlled the world, subduing it with the force of arms and, in this way, through taxes, customs, etc. succeeded in accumulating riches through repression and the abuse of power. Jesus had another response. He teaches against privileges and against rivalry. He overthrows the system and insists on the attitude of service, which is the remedy for personal ambition. The community has to

prepare an alternative. When the Roman Empire disintegrates, victim of its own internal contradictions, the communities should be prepared to offer to the people an alternative model of living together.

- Matthew 20:28: The summary of the life of Jesus. Jesus defines His life and His mission: “The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.” In this definition of self given by Jesus are implied three titles which define Him and which were for the first Christians the beginning of Christology: Son of Man, Servant of Yahweh and older brother (close relative). Jesus is the Messiah, Servant, announced by the prophet Isaiah (cf. Isa 42:1-9; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; 52:13-53). He learned from His mother, who said, “Behold the servant of the Lord!” (Lk 1:38). This was a totally new proposal for the society of that time.

4) Personal questions

- James and John ask for favors. Jesus promises suffering. What do I seek in my relationship with God and what do I ask for in prayer? How do I accept the suffering that comes in my life and which is the opposite of what we ask in prayer?
- Jesus says, “May it not be like that among you!” Is our way of living in the Church and in the community in accord with Jesus’ advice?
- “Whoever wishes to be great among you shall be your servant.” In this world, as a boss, supervisor, department head, CEO, manager, or customer, how does “being great” differ from this? Is it possible to be great as Jesus asks and be great as the world understands it?

5) Concluding Prayer

Then the nations kept saying,
“What great deeds Yahweh has done for them!”
Yes, Yahweh did great deeds for us,
and we were overjoyed. (Ps 126:2-3)

Lectio Divina Sunday, July 26, 2020

Three parables of the Kingdom of God
Discovering the signs of God in daily life
Matthew 13:44-52

1. Opening prayer

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

Create silence in us so that we may listen to Your voice in Creation and in the Scriptures, in events and in people, above all in the poor and suffering. May Your word guide us so that we too, like the two disciples on the way to Emmaus, may experience the force

of Your resurrection and witness to others that You are alive in our midst as source of fraternity, justice and peace. We ask this of You, Jesus, Son of Mary, who revealed the Father to us and sent us Your Spirit. Amen.

2. Reading

a) A division of the text as an aid to the reading:

Matthew 13:44: The parable of the hidden treasure

Matthew 13:45-46: The parable of the merchant looking for precious pearls

Matthew 13:47-50: The parable of the dragnet cast into the sea

Matthew 13:51-52: A parable to conclude the discourse of the parables

b) A key to the reading:

On this 17th Sunday of Ordinary Time we meditate on the three parables that make up the final section of the Discourse of the Parables: the hidden treasure, the merchant of precious pearls and the dragnet cast into the sea. Jesus' parables help us adjust our sight to better see the presence of the Kingdom of God in the most ordinary things of life. As we read, it would be good to keep in mind the following: "What is for me a hidden treasure, a merchant of precious pearls or a dragnet cast into the sea? How does my experience help me understand the parables of the treasure, of the pearl and of the dragnet?"

c) The Text:

44 'The kingdom of Heaven is like treasure hidden in a field which someone has found; he hides it again, goes off in his joy, sells everything he owns and buys the field. 45 'Again, the kingdom of Heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls; 46 when he finds one of great value he goes and sells everything he owns and buys it.

47 'Again, the kingdom of Heaven is like a dragnet that is cast in the sea and brings in a haul of all kinds of fish. 48 When it is full, the fishermen bring it ashore; then, sitting down, they collect the good ones in baskets and throw away those that are of no use. 49 This is how it will be at the end of time: the angels will appear and separate the wicked from the upright, 50 to throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth.

51 'Have you understood all these?' They said, 'Yes.' 52 And He said to them, 'Well then, every scribe who becomes a disciple of the kingdom of Heaven is like a householder who brings out from his storeroom new things as well as old.'

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 struck me most? Why?

b) In my experience of life, what do I understand by a hidden treasure, a merchant of precious pearls, or a dragnet cast into the sea?

c) How does this experience of mine help me understand the parables of the treasure,

the pearl and the dragnet?

d) What difference is there between the parable of the treasure and that of the pearl?

e) What does the text say about the mission to be carried out as disciples of Christ?

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

a) The context of the parables told by Jesus:

The Gospels contain many parables of Jesus. Matthew even says, “All these things Jesus said to the crowd in parables and did not speak to them unless in parables” (Mt 13:34). This was a common method of teaching used in those days. It was in this way that Jesus made Himself understood by the people. In the parables, He starts from very ordinary things of life and uses them as terms of comparison to help people better understand the less known things of the Kingdom of God. In this Sunday’s Gospel, Jesus starts with three well-known things in the lives of people: the treasure hidden in the field, the merchant who seeks pearls, and the dragnet that fishermen cast into the sea.

b) A commentary on the text:

Matthew 13:44: The parable of the hidden treasure

Here the term of comparison used to shed light on the things of the Kingdom of God is the treasure hidden in the field. No one knows that there is a treasure in that field. By chance, a man finds it. He did not know he was going to find it. He finds it and rejoices and gratefully welcomes the unexpected. The discovered treasure does not belong to him yet, it will be his if he succeeds in buying the field. Such were the laws in those days. So he goes, sells all he owns and buys that field. By buying the field he also acquires the treasure.

Jesus does not explain the parable. The same applies here as was said on previous occasions: “He who has ears to hear let him hear” (Mt 13:9, 43). Or: “The Kingdom of God is this. You have heard. Now try to understand!” If Jesus does not explain the parable, nor will I. This is the task for each one of us. But I would like to offer a suggestion beginning from what I have understood. The field is our life. In our lives there is no hidden treasure, no precious treasure, more precious than all else. Will anyone who comes across such a treasure give away everything that he or she owns in order to buy this treasure? Have you found it?

Matthew 13:45-46: The parable of the merchant of precious pearls

In the first parable, the term of comparison is “the treasure hidden in the field”. In this parable, the accent is different. The term of comparison is not the precious pearl, but the activity, the effort of the merchant who seeks precious pearls. We all know that such pearls exist. What is important is not to know that they exist, but to seek them ceaselessly until we come across them.

Both parables have some common and some different elements. In both cases, it is about something precious: a treasure and a pearl. In both cases there is a finding of the object desired, and in both cases the person goes and sells all he owns so as to be able to buy the precious thing found. In the first parable, the finding is by chance. In the second, the finding is the result of the effort of seeking. Here we see two basic aspects of the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom exists, it is hidden in life, waiting for those who will find it. The Kingdom is the result of a seeking (obtaining). These are the two basic

dimensions of human life: gratitude of love that welcomes us and comes to meet us, and the faithful observance that brings us to meet the Other.

Matthew 13:47-50: The parable of the dragnet cast into the sea

Here the Kingdom is likened to a dragnet, not any kind of net, but a net cast into the sea and gathers fish of all kinds. It is something typical of the life of those who were listening, most of whom were fishermen who lived by fishing. This is an experience they are familiar with, the casting of the net that gathers all, some good and some less good. The fisherman cannot prevent the less good fish from entering the net, because he cannot control what happens in the deep waters of the sea where he drags his net. He will only know when he pulls up the net and sits with his mates to sort the fish out. Then they will separate what is worthwhile from what is worthless. Again, Jesus does not explain the parable. He just gives a hint: "This is how it will be at the end of time". Then the good will be separated from the evil.

Matthew 13:51-52: Conclusion of the discourse of parables

In Matthew's Gospel, the discourse of parables ends with a brief dialogue between Jesus and His listeners and that acts as a key to the reading of all the parables. Jesus asks, "Have you understood all these?" The people reply, "Yes!" Then Jesus concludes with these very beautiful words, "Well then, every scribe who becomes a disciple of the kingdom of Heaven is like a householder who brings out from his storeroom new things as well as old". These closing words are another parable. "The things new as well as old that the householder brings out from his storeroom" are the things of the life that Jesus has just suggested in the parables: seeds cast in the field (Mt 13:4-8), the mustard seed (Mt 13:31-32), the leaven (Mt 13:33), the treasure hidden in the field (Mt 13:44), the merchant of precious pearls (Mt 13: 45-46), the dragnet cast into the sea (Mt 13:47-48). Each person's experience of these things is his or her treasure. It is in such experiences that each person finds the term of comparison that will permit him or her to understand the things of the Kingdom of God! Sometimes when the parables do not mean much to us and do not yield their message, the cause may not be a lack of study, but a lack of experience in life or a lack of depth in one's life. Those who live superficially without any depth of the experience of life, have no storeroom from which to bring out things new as well as old.

c) A deepening: The teaching of the parables

The parables of Jesus are a pedagogical device that uses daily life to show us how the things of daily life speak to us of God. The parables make reality transparent and reveal the presence and action of God. They transform one's sight into a contemplative gaze. A parable is about the things of life and thus is an open teaching that involves us. We all have experience of the things of life. The teaching in parables begins with a person's experience of common things so as to be able to understand the Kingdom: seed, salt, light, sheep, flowers, woman, children, father, net, fish, treasure, pearl, etc.

Jesus did not usually explain His parables. Generally He ended with this exhortation: "He who has ears to hear let him hear!" (Mt 11:15; 13:9, 43), or, "That's it. You've heard! Now try to understand!" Jesus left His parables open ended; He did not finish them. This is a sign that Jesus believed in the ability of people to discover the meaning of the parable starting from their own experience of life. Occasionally, at the request of

His disciples, He would explain the meaning. (Mt 13:10, 36). For instance, verses 36-43 explain the parable of the wheat and the weeds. It is also possible that these explanations are the reflection of the catechesis given to the communities of first Christians. The communities met and discussed the parables of Jesus, seeking to understand what Jesus meant to say. Thus, gradually, the teaching of Jesus started to be assimilated into the catechesis of the community and this then becomes an explanation of the parable.

6. Palm 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, July 27, 2020

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

God our Father and protector,
without You nothing is holy,
nothing has value.

Guide us to everlasting life
by helping us to use wisely
the blessings You have given to the world.

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

2) Gospel Reading - Matthew 13:31-35

Jesus proposed a parable to the crowds. "The Kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that a person took and sowed in a field. It is the smallest of all the seeds, yet when full-grown it is the largest of plants. It becomes a large bush, and the 'birds of the sky come and dwell in its branches.'" He spoke to them another parable. "The Kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed with three measures of wheat flour until the whole batch was leavened." All these things Jesus spoke to the crowds in parables. He spoke to them only in parables, to fulfill what had been said through the prophet: I will open my mouth in parables, I will announce what has lain hidden from the foundation of the world.

3) Reflection

- We are meditating on the discourse on the Parables, which reveals, by means of comparisons, the mystery of the Kingdom of God present in the life of the people. Today's Gospel presents to us two brief parables: the mustard seed and the yeast. In these, Jesus tells two stories taken from daily life which will serve as terms of comparison to help the people discover the mystery of the Kingdom. When meditating on these two stories it is not necessary to try to discover what each element of the stories try to tell us about the Kingdom. First of all, one must look at the story itself as a whole and try to discover the central point around which the story was constructed. This central point will serve as a means of comparison for revealing the Kingdom of God. Let us try to discover the central point of the two parables.
- Matthew 13:31-32: The parable of the mustard seed. Jesus says, "The Kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed" and then He immediately tells the story: a mustard seed which is very small is cast into the ground. Despite being very small, it grows and becomes larger than other plants and attracts the birds which come and build their nests in it. Jesus does not explain the story. Here applies what He said on another occasion: "Anyone who has ears to hear, let him hear!" That is, "It is this. You have heard, so now try to understand!" It is up to us to discover what the story reveals to us about the Kingdom of God present in our life. Thus, by means of this story of the mustard seed,

Jesus urges us to think because each one of us understands something about the seed. Jesus expects that people, all of us, begin to share what each one has discovered. Now, I share three points that I have discovered on the Kingdom, beginning with this parable: (a) Jesus says, "The Kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed." The Kingdom is not something abstract, it is not an idea. It is a presence in our midst (Lk 17:21). What is this presence like? It is like the mustard seed: a very small presence, humble, which can hardly be seen. It is about Jesus, a poor carpenter, who goes through Galilee, speaking about the Kingdom to the people of the towns. The Kingdom of God does not follow the opinions of the great of the world. It has a different way of thinking and proceeding. (b) The prophecy evokes a prophecy of Ezekiel, in which it is said that God will take a small twig of the cedar and will plant it on the mountain of Israel. This small twig of cedar "will bring forth branches and will bear fruit and will become a magnificent cedar. Under it all the birds will live, every kind of birds will rest under it. All the trees of the forest will know that I am the Lord, who humiliated the tall tree and exalted the low one; I dry the green tree and make the dry tree come to life. I the Lord have spoken and I will do it" (Ezek 17:22-23). (c) The mustard seed, even if very small, grows and gives hope. Like the mustard seed, the Kingdom has an interior force and it grows. How does it grow? It grows through the preaching of Jesus and of the disciples in the towns of Galilee. It grows even today, through the witness of the community and becomes good news of God which radiates light and attracts people. The person who gets close to the community feels welcomed, accepted, at home, and builds in it her nest, her dwelling. Finally, the parable leaves a question in the air: who are the birds? The question will receive an answer later in the Gospel. The text suggests that it is a question of the pagans who will be able to enter the Kingdom (Mt 15:21-28).

- Matthew 13:33: The parable of the yeast. The story of the second parable is the following: A woman took a bit of yeast and mixed it with three measures of flour, until it is leavened all through. Once again, Jesus does not explain. He only says, "The Kingdom of Heaven is like the yeast..." As in the first parable, it is up to us to discover the significance which this has for us today. The following are some points which I have discovered and which have made me think: (a) What grows is not the yeast, but the dough. (b) It is a matter of something in a house, well known to a woman in her house. (c) The yeast is mixed up with the pure dough of flour and contains something living. (d) The objective is to have all the dough rise and grow through the beneficial action of the yeast, and not only one part. (e) The yeast is not an end in itself but serves to make the dough grow.

- Matthew 13:34-35: Why Jesus speaks in parables. Here, at the end of the discourse on the Parables, Matthew clarifies the reason which prompted Jesus to teach the people using the form of parables. He says that it was in order that the prophecy would be fulfilled which said, "I will open the mouth to use parables; I will proclaim things hidden since the creation of the world." In reality, the text that has been quoted is not of a prophet, but rather it is a Psalm (Ps 78:2). For the first Christians the whole of the Old Testament was a great prophecy which announced in a veiled way the coming of the Messiah and the fulfillment of the promises of God. In Mark 4:33-34, the reason which prompted Jesus to teach the people by means of parables was to adapt the message to the capacity of the people. With these examples taken from the life of the

people, Jesus helped the people to discover the things of God in everyday life. Life then became transparent. He made them perceive that what was extraordinary in God is hidden in the ordinary and common things of daily life. People understood the things of life. In the parables they received the key to open them and to find in them the signs of God. At the end of the discourse on the Parables, in Matthew 13:52, as we shall see later, another reason will be explained why Jesus chose to teach with parables.

4) Personal questions

- Which point of these two parables did you like best or which struck you more? Why?
- What is the seed that without your awareness has grown in you and in your community?
- What other symbolisms can you find for the seed, the bush, the birds, the bush's relationship with other plants, and the meanings for "dwell"? What insights does this lead you to?
- What other symbolisms can you find for yeast and flour? Is there significance to using "3 measures of flour" in the parable? What insights does this lead you to?

5) Concluding Prayer

I will sing of Your strength,
in the morning acclaim Your faithful love;
You have been a stronghold for me,
a refuge when I was in trouble. (Ps 59:16)

Lectio Divina Tuesday, July 28, 2020

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

God our Father and protector,
without You nothing is holy,
nothing has value.
Guide us to everlasting life
by helping us to use wisely
the blessings You have given to the world.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, Your Son,
who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

2) Gospel Reading - Matthew 13:36-43

Jesus dismissed the crowds and went into the house. His disciples approached him and said, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field." He said in reply, "He who sows good seed is the Son of Man, the field is the world, the good seed the children of the Kingdom. The weeds are the children of the Evil One, and the enemy who sows them is the Devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels. Just

as weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his Kingdom all who cause others to sin and all evildoers. They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the Kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears ought to hear."

3) Reflection

- The Gospel today presents Jesus' explanation, at the petition of the disciples, of the parable of the wheat grain and the darnel. Some experts think that this explanation, which Jesus gives to His disciples, is not Jesus' but the community's. This is possible and probable, because a parable, by its nature, requires the involvement and the participation of people in the discovery of its significance. Just as the plant is already contained within the seed, in the same way, certainly, the explanation of the community is in the parable. And it is precisely this objective that Jesus wanted and wants to attain with the parable. The meaning which we are discovering today in the parable which Jesus told two thousand years ago was already enclosed, or contained, in the story that Jesus told, just as the flower is already contained in its seed.
- Matthew 13:36: The request of the disciples to Jesus: the explanation of the parable of the wheat grain and the darnel. The disciples, in the house, speak and ask for an explanation of the parable of the wheat grain and the darnel. (Mt 13:24-30). It has been said many times that Jesus, in the house, continued to teach His disciples (Mk 7:17; 9:28,33; 10:10). At that time, there was no television, and people spent the long winter evenings together, speaking about the facts and events of life. On these occasions Jesus completed the teaching and the formation of His disciples.
- Matthew 13:38-39: The meaning of each one of the elements of the parable. Jesus responds taking again each one of these elements of the parable and giving them significance: the field is the world; the good seed are the members of the Kingdom; the darnel is the members of the adversary (the evil one); the enemy is the devil; the harvest is the end of time; the reapers are the angels. And now reread the parable (Mt 13:24-30) giving to each one of these six elements: field, good seed, darnel, enemy, harvest and reapers, the right significance. In this way the story assumes a completely new sense and it is possible to attain the objective that Jesus had in mind when He told the parable of the darnel and the good seed. Some think that this parable should be understood as an allegory and not as a parable properly so-called.
- Matthew 13:40-43: The application of the parable or of the allegory. With the information given by Jesus, you will better understand its application: Just as the darnel is gathered up and burnt in the fire, so it will be at the end of time. The Son of Man will send His angels and they will gather from His kingdom all causes of failing and all who do evil, and throw them into the blazing furnace where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the Kingdom of their Father."

The destiny of the darnel is the furnace. The destiny of the grain is to shine like the sun in the Kingdom of the Father. Behind these two images there is the experience of the people. After they have listened to Jesus and have accepted Him in their life, everything

has changed for them. This means that in Jesus what they expected has taken place: the fulfillment of the promises. Now life is divided into before and after having accepted Jesus in their lives. The new life has begun with the splendor of the sun. If they continued to live as before, they would be like the dandelion in the furnace: life without meaning, which is good for nothing.

- Parable and Allegory. There is the parable. There is the allegory. There is the mixture of both which is the more common form. Generally, everything in the parable is a call. In the Gospel of today, we have the example of an allegory. An allegory is a story which a person tells, but when she is telling it, she does not think about the elements of the story, but about the theme which has to be clarified. In reading an allegory it is not necessary to look at the story as a whole, because in an allegory the story is not constructed around a central point which later serves as a comparison. Rather, each element has its own independent function, starting from the sense which it receives. It is a matter of discovering what each element of the two stories tries to tell us about the Kingdom, as the explanation which Jesus gave of the parable: field, good seed, dandelion, enemy, harvest, reapers. Generally the parables are also allegories, and a mixture of both.

4) Personal questions

- In the field everything is mixed up: dandelion and grain. In the field of my life, what prevails: dandelion or grain?
- Notice that this parable includes “all who cause others to sin” as well as “all evildoers”. We often just focus on our own sins. Do I focus on what effect I have on others and whether I cause others to sin by what I say or do? Will I think about that, now and during my self-examinations now?
- Have you tried to talk with other people to discover the meaning of some parable?

5) Concluding Prayer

How blessed is he who has Jacob's God to help him.
His hope is in Yahweh his God,
who made heaven and earth,
the sea and all that is in them. (Ps 146:5-6)

Lectio Divina Wednesday, July 29, 2020

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

God our Father and protector,
without You nothing is holy,
nothing has value.
Guide us to everlasting life
by helping us to use wisely

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

2) Gospel Reading - Luke 10:38-42

Jesus entered a village where a woman whose name was Martha welcomed him. She had a sister named Mary who sat beside the Lord at his feet listening to him speak. Martha, burdened with much serving, came to him and said, “Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me by myself to do the serving? Tell her to help me.” The Lord said to her in reply, “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and worried about many things. There is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part and it will not be taken from her.”

3) Reflection

- The dynamics of the account. The condition of Jesus as an itinerant teacher offers Martha the possibility to receive Him in her house. This account presents the attitude of both sisters: Mary sitting down at Jesus’ feet is all taken up listening to His Word; Martha, instead, is taken up completely by many services and she gets close to Jesus to protest about her sister’s behavior. The dialogue between Jesus and Martha occupies a long space in the account (vv.40b-42): Martha begins with a rhetorical question, “Lord, do You not care that my sister is leaving me to do the serving all by myself?”; then she asks for the intervention of Jesus so that He can call the sister back to the domestic work which she has abandoned: “Tell her to help me”. Jesus answers in an affectionate tone; this is the sense of the repetition of the name, “Martha, Martha”: He reminds her that she is concerned about “many things”, and in reality she needs “only one” and He concludes by recalling that the sister has chosen the best part, and it will not be taken away from her. Luke has built up this account on a contrast: the two different personalities of Martha and Mary; the first one is all taken up by “many things”, the second one does not do even one, she is all taken up with listening to the Master. The purpose of this contrast is to underline the attitude of Mary who dedicates herself to listen fully and totally to the Master, thus becoming the model for every believer.

- The person of Martha. She is the one who takes the initiative to receive Jesus in her house. In dedicating herself to receive the Master she is full of anxiety for the multiplicity of things to be prepared and by the tension of seeing herself alone to do it all. She is taken up by so much work, she is anxious, and experiences a great tension. Therefore, Martha “goes to Jesus” and addresses to Him a legitimate question for help: why should she be left alone by the sister? Jesus answers seeing that she is only worried, she is divided in the heart between the desire of serving Jesus with a meal worthy of His person and the desire to dedicate herself to listen to Him. Jesus, therefore, does not disapprove of Martha’s service, but only the anxiety with which she does it. Before, Jesus had explained in the parable of the sower that the seed that fell among the thorns recalls the situation of those who listen to the Word, but allow themselves to be taken up by other concerns (Lk 8:14). Therefore, Jesus does not disapprove of Martha’s work, the value of acceptance and welcoming concerning His person, but He warns the woman

about the dangers into which she may fall: anxiety and agitation. Jesus had already said something about these risks: “Seek first the Kingdom of Heaven, and everything else will be given to you as well” (Lk 12:31).

- The person of Mary. She is the one who accepts the Word: she is described with the imperfect form: “she was listening”, a continuing action in listening to the Word of Jesus. Mary’s attitude is in contrast with her sister’s anxiety and tension. Jesus says that Mary has preferred “the best part” that corresponds to listening to His Word. From the Word of Jesus the reader learns that there are not two parts of which one is qualitatively better than the other, but there is only the good one: to accept His Word. This attitude does not endorse avoiding one’s own tasks or daily responsibilities, but only the knowledge that listening to the Word precedes every service, every activity.

- Balance between action and contemplation. Luke is particularly attentive to link listening to the Word to relationship with the Lord. It is not a question of dividing the day in times dedicated to prayer and others to service, but attention to the Word precedes and accompanies the service. The desire to listen to God cannot be replaced by other activity: it is necessary to dedicate a certain time and place to seek the Lord. The commitment to cultivate listening to the Word comes from the attention to God: everything can contribute: the environment of the place, the time. However, the desire to encounter God should come from within one’s own heart. There is no technical element which automatically leads one to encounter God. It is a problem of love: it is necessary to listen to Jesus, to be with Him, and then the gift is communicated, and falling in love begins. The balance between listening and service involves all believers, in family life as well as in professional and social life: What can we do so that baptized persons persevere and attain maturity of faith? We should train ourselves to listen to the Word of God. This is the most difficult but surest way to attain maturity of faith.

4) Personal questions

- Do I know how to create in my life situations the paths of listening? Do I limit myself only to listen to the Word of God in church, or rather, do I dedicate myself to personal and profound listening, looking for suitable times and places?
- Do you limit yourself to a private use of the Word or do you proclaim it in order to become light for others and not only a lamp which lights one’s own private life?
- The Church has a long history in the Fathers and Doctors of the Church to help understand how to listen to the Word of God. Have you read and learned from this treasure of the Church to enable more profound listening?

5) Concluding Prayer

Yahweh, who can find a home in Your tent,
who can dwell on Your holy mountain?
Whoever lives blamelessly, who acts uprightly,
who speaks the truth from the heart. (Ps 15:1-2)

Lectio Divina Thursday, July 30, 2020

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

God our Father and protector,
without You nothing is holy,
nothing has value.

Guide us to everlasting life
by helping us to use wisely
the blessings You have given to the world.

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

2) Gospel Reading - Matthew 13:47-53

Jesus said to the disciples: "The Kingdom of heaven is like a net thrown into the sea, which collects fish of every kind. When it is full they haul it ashore and sit down to put what is good into buckets. What is bad they throw away. Thus it will be at the end of the age. The angels will go out and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth." "Do you understand all these things?" They answered, "Yes." And he replied, "Then every scribe who has been instructed in the Kingdom of heaven is like the head of a household who brings from his storeroom both the new and the old." When Jesus finished these parables, he went away from there.

3) Reflection

- Today's Gospel presents the last parable of the discourse on the parables, the story of the net thrown into the sea. This parable is found only in the Gospel of Matthew without any parallel in the other three Gospels.
- Matthew 13:47-48: *The parable of the dragnet cast into the sea. The Kingdom of Heaven is like a net that is cast into the sea and brings in all kinds of fish. When it is full, the fishermen haul it ashore; then sitting down; they collect the good ones in baskets and throw away those that are of no use.* This story is well known by the people of Galilee who live around the lake. This is their work. The story clearly shows the end of a day of work. The fishermen go fishing with only one purpose: to cast the net and to catch a great number of fish, to haul the net ashore and to choose the good fish to take home and to throw away those that are no good. Describe the satisfaction of the fishermen, at the end of a day, being very tired after having worked hard. This story must have brought a smile of satisfaction to the faces of the fishermen who listened to Jesus. The worst thing is to arrive at the shore at the end of the day without having caught anything (Jn 21:3).
- Matthew 13:49-50: *The application of the parable.* Jesus applies the parable, or better still, gives a suggestion in order that people can discuss and apply the parable to their life: "This is how it will be at the end of time, the angels will appear and separate the

wicked from the righteous, to throw them into the blazing furnace where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth.” How are we to understand this blazing furnace? These are very strong images to describe the destiny of those who separate themselves from God or who do not want to know anything about God. In every city there is a place to throw away the garbage every day. There is a permanent furnace nourished every day by the daily garbage. The garbage place in Jerusalem was located in a valley called *Gehenna*, where, at the time of the kings, there was a furnace even to sacrifice to the false gods of Molok. For this reason, the furnace of *Gehenna* becomes the symbol of exclusion and of condemnation. God is not the one who excludes. God does not want the exclusion and the condemnation of anyone; He wants that all may have life and life in abundance. Each one of us excludes himself/herself.

• Matthew 13:51-53: *The end of the discourse on the Parables. At the end of the discourse on the parables, Jesus concludes with the following question: "Have you understood these things?" They answered: "Yes."* And Jesus finishes the explanation with another comparison which describes the result He wants to achieve through the parables: *"Well, then every Scribe who becomes a disciple of the Kingdom of Heaven is like a householder who brings out from his storeroom new things as well as old."*

Two points to clarify:

(a) Jesus compares the doctor of the law to the father in the family. What does the father of the family do? *"He brings out from his treasure new things and old things."* Education at home takes place through the transmission to the sons and daughters of what the parents have received and learned over time. It is the treasure of the family wisdom where the richness of faith is enclosed, the customs of life, and many other things that the children learn with time. Now Jesus wants that in the community, that the people who are responsible for the transmission of faith be as a father within the family. Just like the parents are responsible for the life of the family, in the same way, these people who are responsible for the teaching should understand the things of the Kingdom and transmit it to the brothers and sisters in the community.

(b) *Here there is the question of a doctor of the law who becomes a disciple of the Kingdom.* Therefore, there were doctors of the law who accepted Jesus, and saw in Him the one who revealed the Kingdom. Is this what happened to a doctor when he discovers the Messiah in Jesus, the Son of God? Everything he has studied to be able to be a doctor of the law continues to be valid, but it receives a deeper dimension and a broader purpose. A comparison can clarify what has just been said. In a group of friends one shows a photo, where one sees a man with an angry face, with his finger up, almost attacking the public. Everybody thinks that it is a question of an inflexible person, demanding, who does not allow for any intimacy. At that moment a young boy arrives, he sees the photo and exclaims, "He is my father!" The others look at him and comment, "A severe father, right?" He answers, "No! He is very affectionate. My father is a lawyer. That photo was taken in the tribunal, while he was denouncing the crime of a great landowner who wanted a poor family to abandon their home where they had lived for many years! My father won the case, and the poor family remained in the house!" All looked at him again and said, "What a pleasant person!" Almost like a miracle the photo lit up from within and assumed a different aspect. That very severe face acquired the features of great tenderness! The words of the son, the result of his experience of

being the son, changed everything, without changing anything! The words and the gestures of Jesus, result of His experience as a Son, without changing a letter or a comma, illuminated from within the wisdom accumulated by the doctor of the law. And thus, God, who seemed to be so far away and so severe, acquired the features of a good Father and of enormous tenderness!

4) Personal questions

- Has the experience of Son entered in you and changed your perspective, making you discover the things of God in a different way?
- What has the discourse on the parables revealed to you about the Kingdom?

5) Concluding Prayer

Praise Yahweh, my soul!
I will praise Yahweh all my life,
I will make music to my God as long as I live. (Ps 146:1-2)

Lectio Divina Friday, July 31, 2020

1) Opening prayer

God our Father and protector,
without You nothing is holy,
nothing has value.
Guide us to everlasting life
by helping us to use wisely
the blessings You have given to the world.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, Your Son,
who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

2) Gospel Reading - Matthew 13:54-58

Jesus came to his native place and taught the people in their synagogue. They were astonished and said, “Where did this man get such wisdom and mighty deeds? Is he not the carpenter’s son? Is not his mother named Mary and his brothers James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas? Are not his sisters all with us? Where did this man get all this?” And they took offense at him. But Jesus said to them, “A prophet is not without honor except in his native place and in his own house.” And he did not work many mighty deeds there because of their lack of faith.

3) Reflection

- The Gospel today tells us of Jesus’ visit to Nazareth, His native community. Passing through Nazareth was painful for Jesus. What was His community at the beginning, now is no longer so. Something has changed. Where there is no faith, Jesus can work no miracles.
- Matthew 13: 53-57^a: The reaction of the people of Nazareth before Jesus. It is always

good for people to go back to their land. After a long absence, Jesus also returns, as usual, on a Saturday, and He goes to the meeting of the community. Jesus was not the head of the group, but just the same, He speaks. This is a sign that people could participate and express their own opinion. People were astonished. They did not understand Jesus' attitude: "Where did the man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?" Jesus, son of that place, whom they knew since He was a child, how is it that now He is so different? The people of Nazareth are scandalized and do not accept Him: "This is the carpenter's son, surely?" The people do not accept the mystery of God present in a common man, as they are, and as they had known Jesus. In order to speak about God He should be different. As one can see, not everything was positive. The people, who should have been the first ones to accept the Good News, are the first ones to refuse it. The conflict is not only with foreigners, but also with His relatives and with the people of Nazareth. They do not accept because they cannot understand the mystery which envelops Jesus: "Is not His mother, the woman called Mary, and His brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Jude, and His sisters too, are they not all here with us? So where did the man get it all?" They are not able to believe.

- Matthew 13:57b-58: Jesus' reaction before the attitude of the people of Nazareth. Jesus knows very well that "no one is a prophet in his own country." He says, "A prophet is despised only in his own country and in his own house." In fact, where there is neither acceptance nor faith, people can do nothing. Prejudice prevents it. Jesus Himself, even wanting, can do nothing. He was astonished at their lack of faith.

- The brothers and sisters of Jesus. The expression "brothers of Jesus" causes much division between Catholics and Protestants. Based on this and other texts, the Protestants say that Jesus had many brothers and sisters and that Mary had more children! Catholics say that Mary did not have any other children. What are we to think of this? Both positions, that of Catholics as well as that of Protestants, contain arguments taken from the Bible and from the tradition of their respective Churches. We should consider that in our communities today we also call each other "brother" and "sister", yet we don't share immediate parents. In that day, children didn't move far from their parents like they might do today, so many extended family relationships existed within the same community. For this reason, it is not helpful to discuss this question with arguments which are only intellectual, because it is a question of profound convictions, which have something to do with faith and with the sentiments of each one. An argument which is merely intellectual cannot change a conviction of the heart! It only irritates and repels! Even if I do not agree with the opinion of others, I have to respect it. In the second place, instead of talking about texts, all of us, Catholics and Protestants, should unite in order to fight for the defense of life, created by God, a life disfigured by poverty, injustice, lack of faith. We should recall some other sayings of Jesus: "I have come so that they may have life and life to the full" (Jn 10:10); "That all may be one, so that the world may believe that You, Father, have sent Me" (Jn 17:21); "Do not prevent them! Anyone who is not against us is for us" (Mk 10:39,40).

4) Personal questions

- In Jesus something changed in His relationship with the community of Nazareth. Since you began to participate in community, has anything changed in your relationship with your family? Why?

- Has participation in the community helped you to accept and to trust people, especially the more simple and the poorest?
- When two join to form a new community in marriage, their relationship with their families also changes. Reconsider the previous questions in light of this as well.

5) Concluding Prayer

For myself, wounded wretch that I am,
by Your saving power raise me up!
I will praise God's name in song,
I will extol Him by thanksgiving. (Ps 69: 29-30)