

Lectio Divina September 2020

Lectio Divina September 2020	1
Lectio Divina Tuesday, September 1, 2020	2
Lectio Divina Wednesday, September 2, 2020	4
Lectio Divina Thursday, September 3, 2020	6
Lectio Divina Friday, September 4, 2020	8
Lectio Divina Saturday, September 5, 2020	10
Lectio Divina Sunday, September 6, 2020	11
Lectio Divina Monday, September 7, 2020	16
Lectio Divina Tuesday, September 8, 2020	18
Lectio Divina Wednesday, September 9, 2020	20
Lectio Divina Thursday, September 10, 2020	23
Lectio Divina Friday, September 11, 2020	25
Lectio Divina Saturday, September 12, 2020	27
Lectio Divina Sunday, September 13, 2020	29
Lectio Divina Monday, September 14, 2020	33
Lectio Divina Tuesday, September 15, 2020	36
Lectio Divina Wednesday, September 16, 2020	38
Lectio Divina Thursday, September 17, 2020	40
Lectio Divina Friday, September 18, 2020	42
Lectio Divina Saturday, September 19, 2020	44
Lectio Divina Sunday, September 20, 2020	46
Lectio Divina Monday, September 21, 2020	52
Lectio Divina Tuesday, September 22, 2020	55
Lectio Divina Wednesday, September 23, 2020	57
Lectio Divina Thursday, September 24, 2020	59
Lectio Divina Friday, September 25, 2020	61
Lectio Divina Saturday, September 26, 2020	63
Lectio Divina Sunday, September 27, 2020	65
Lectio Divina Monday, September 28, 2020	70

Lectio Divina Tuesday, September 29, 2020	72
Lectio Divina Wednesday, September 30, 2020	74

Lectio Divina Tuesday, September 1, 2020

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Almighty God,
every good thing comes from You.
Fill our hearts with love for You,
increase our faith,
and by Your constant care
protect the good You have given us.
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 4:31-37

Jesus went down to Capernaum, a town of Galilee. He taught them on the sabbath, and they were astonished at his teaching because he spoke with authority. In the synagogue there was a man with the spirit of an unclean demon, and he cried out in a loud voice, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!" Jesus rebuked him and said, "Be quiet! Come out of him!" Then the demon threw the man down in front of them and came out of him without doing him any harm. They were all amazed and said to one another, "What is there about his word? For with authority and power he commands the unclean spirits, and they come out." And news of him spread everywhere in the surrounding region.

3) Reflection

- In today's Gospel we can see the facts more closely: the admiration of the people because of the way Jesus taught and the cure of a man who was possessed by an unclean spirit. Not all the Evangelists give this account in the same way. For Luke, the first miracle is the peace with which Jesus liberates Himself from the threat of death on the part of the people of Nazareth (Lk 4:29-30) and the cure of the possessed man (Lk 4:33-35). For Matthew, the first miracle is the cure of the sick and of the possessed (Mt 4:23) or, more specifically, the cure of a leper (Mt 8:1-4). For Mark, the first miracle was the expulsion of the devil (Mk 1: 23-26). For John, the first miracle was Cana, where Jesus changed the water into wine (Jn 2:1-11). Thus, in the way of narrating things, each Evangelist indicates which was Jesus' greatest concern.
- Luke 4:31: Jesus' change in direction toward Capernaum: "Jesus went down to Capernaum, a city in Galilee, and on Saturday He taught the people." Matthew says that Jesus went to live in Capernaum (Mt 4:13). He changed His residence. Capernaum was a small city on the crossroad between two important routes: the one coming from Asia

Minor and leading to Petra on the south of Transjordan, and the other one coming from the region of the two rivers, the Tigris and the Euphrates, and leading down toward Egypt. The change toward Capernaum facilitated contact with the people and the spreading of the Good News.

- Luke 4:32: Amazement of the people at the teaching of Jesus. The first thing that people perceive is that Jesus teaches in a different way. It is not so much the content that strikes them, but rather His way of teaching: “Jesus speaks with authority.” Mark adds that because of His different way of teaching, Jesus created a critical conscience among the people in regard to the religious authority of His time. The people perceived and compared: “He teaches with authority, unlike the Scribes” (Mk 1:22,27). The Scribes taught quoting authority. Jesus does not quote any authority; rather He speaks from His experience of God and of His life.

- Luke 4:33-35: Jesus fights against the power of evil. The first miracle is the expulsion of the devil. The power of evil took possession of people, alienating them. Jesus restores the people to be themselves again, giving them back consciousness and liberty. He does this thanks to the force of His word: “Be quiet! Come out of him!” And on another occasion He says: “But if it is through the finger of God that I drive devils out, then the Kingdom of God has indeed caught you unawares” (Lk 11:20). Today, also, many people live alienated from themselves, subjugated by means of communication, by the propaganda of the government and of business. They live as slaves of consumerism, oppressed by debts and threatened by creditors. People think that they do not live well if they do not have everything which the propaganda announces. It is not easy to expel this power, which today alienates many people.

- Luke 4:36-37: The reaction of the people: He gives orders to the unclean spirits. Jesus not only has a different way of teaching the things of God, but another aspect which evokes admiration in the people is His power over unclean spirits: “What is it in His words? He gives orders to unclean spirits with authority and power and they come out.” Jesus opens a new path so that the people can place themselves before God to pray and to receive the blessings promised to Abraham. Before, they had to purify themselves. There were many laws and norms which made the life of the people difficult and marginalized many people who were considered impure. But now, purified by faith in Jesus, people could once again place themselves before God and pray to Him, without needing to have recourse to the complicated norms of purity, which were frequently expensive.

4) Personal questions

- Jesus brings about admiration and astonishment among the people. Does the way of acting of our community draw admiration from the people of the neighborhood? What type of admiration? Are my personal actions also worthy of admiration?
- Jesus drives out the power of evil and restores people to be themselves again. Today many people live alienated from everything . How can we help them to recover and be themselves again?

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 Wednesday, September 2, 2020

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Almighty God,
every good thing comes from You.
Fill our hearts with love for You,
increase our faith,
and by Your constant care
protect the good You have given us.
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 4:38-44

After Jesus left the synagogue, he entered the house of Simon. Simon's mother-in-law was afflicted with a severe fever, and they interceded with him about her. He stood over her, rebuked the fever, and it left her. She got up immediately and waited on them. At sunset, all who had people sick with various diseases brought them to him. He laid his hands on each of them and cured them. And demons also came out from many, shouting, "You are the Son of God." But he rebuked them and did not allow them to speak because they knew that he was the Christ. At daybreak, Jesus left and went to a deserted place. The crowds went looking for him, and when they came to him, they tried to prevent him from leaving them. But he said to them, "To the other towns also I must proclaim the good news of the Kingdom of God, because for this purpose I have been sent." And he was preaching in the synagogues of Judea.

3) Reflection

- The Gospel today narrates four different events: the cure of Peter's mother-in-law (Lk 4:38-39), the cure of many sick people at night, after Saturday (Lk 4:40-41), the prayer of Jesus in a deserted place (Lk 4:42) and His insistence on the mission (Lk 4: 43-44). With small differences Luke follows and adapts the information taken from the Gospel of Mark.
- Luke 4:38-39: *Jesus restores life for service.* After having participated in the celebration of Saturday in the synagogue, Jesus goes to Peter's house and cures his mother-in-law. The cure causes her to render service immediately. Having recovered her health and dignity, she places herself at the service of the people. Jesus not only cures, but He cures in such a way that the person places herself at the service of life.
- Luke 4:40-41: *Jesus accepts and cures the marginalized.* At night, when the first stars appear in the sky, after Saturday is over, Jesus accepts and cures the sick and those possessed whom the people bring to Him. The sick and the possessed were the most

marginalized people at that time. They had no one to whom to go. They were at the mercy of public charity; besides, religion considered them impure. They could not participate in the community. It was as if God rejected and excluded them. Jesus accepts and cures them, placing His hands on each one of them. Thus, it is clear in what the Good News of God consists and what He wants to do in people's lives: to accept the marginalized and the excluded and to integrate them into the community, to live with others.

“Devils came out of many people shouting: “You are the Son of God!” But He warned them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew that He was the Christ.” At that time the title Son of God did not have as yet the density and depth that it has for us today. Jesus did not allow the devils to speak. He did not want an easy propaganda based on spectacular expulsions.

- Luke 4:42a: *To remain united to the Father by means of prayer.* “When daylight came He left the house and made His way to a lonely place. The crowds went to look for Him, and when they had caught up with Him they wanted to prevent Him from leaving them.” Here we see Jesus praying. He has to make an enormous effort to have time available and a place suitable for prayer. He goes to a deserted place to be able to stay alone with God. Many times the Gospels speak about Jesus' prayer, in silence (Lk 3:21-22; 4: 1-2, 3-12; 5:15-16; 6:12; 9:18; 10:21; 11:1; 23:34; Mt 14:22-23; 26:38; Jn 11:41-42; 17:1-26; Mk1:35;). Through prayer, He maintains His consciousness of His mission.

- Luke 4:42b-44: *To maintain consciousness of one's own mission and not think about the result.* Jesus becomes known. People follow Him and they do not want Him to leave them. Jesus does not grant this petition and says, “I must proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom of God to the other towns too, because that is what I was sent to do.” Jesus was very clear about His mission. He does not stop at the result that He has already obtained, but He wishes to sustain His awareness of His mission. It is the mission received from the Father which directs Him when He has to make a decision. “I have been sent for this!” And here in this text this consciousness which is so alive springs up as the fruit of His prayer.

4) Personal questions

- Jesus spent much time in prayer and being alone with the Father, and He looked for this time. Do I dedicate time for prayer and solitude with God?
- Jesus had a clear awareness of His mission. As a Christian, am I conscious that I have a mission, or do I live without a mission?

5) Concluding Prayer

We are waiting for Yahweh;
he is our help and our shield,
for in Him our heart rejoices;
in His holy name we trust. (Ps 33:20-21)

Lectio Divina Thursday, September 3, 2020

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Almighty God,
every good thing comes from You.
Fill our hearts with love for You,
increase our faith,
and by your constant care
protect the good You have given us.
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 5:1-11

While the crowd was pressing in on Jesus and listening to the word of God, he was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret. He saw two boats there alongside the lake; the fishermen had disembarked and were washing their nets. Getting into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, he asked him to put out a short distance from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. After he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water and lower your nets for a catch." Simon said in reply, "Master, we have worked hard all night and have caught nothing, but at your command I will lower the nets." When they had done this, they caught a great number of fish and their nets were tearing. They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come to help them. They came and filled both boats so that the boats were in danger of sinking. When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at the knees of Jesus and said, "Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man." For astonishment at the catch of fish they had made seized him and all those with him, and likewise James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were partners of Simon. Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men." When they brought their boats to the shore, they left everything and followed him.

3) Reflection

- In today's Gospel we have the call of Jesus to Peter. The Gospel of Mark places the call of the first disciples after the beginning of the public ministry of Jesus (Mk 1:16-20). Luke places it after the fame of Jesus was already extended across the whole region (Lk 4:14). Jesus had cured many people (Lk 4:40) and had preached in the synagogues of all Judea (Lk 4:44). The people looked for Him and the crowds pushed Him on all sides in order to hear the Word of God (Lk 5:1). Luke makes the call easier to understand. In the first place, Peter can listen to Jesus' words to the people, and then he is a witness to the miraculous catch of fish. It is only after this double surprising experience that he understands the call of Jesus. Peter responds. He abandons everything and becomes a "fisher of men."
- Luke 5:1-3: Jesus teaches from the boat. People look for Jesus in order to listen to the Word of God. Many people get together around Jesus, making a throng around Him.

Jesus seeks help from Simon Peter and from some of his companions who had just returned from fishing. He goes into the boat with them and responds to the expectation of the people, communicating the Word of God to them. Sitting down, Jesus takes the attitude of a Teacher and speaks from a fisherman's boat. The novelty consists in the fact that He teaches, not only in the synagogue for a choice public but in any place, where there are people who wish to listen, even on the seashore.

- Luke 5:4-5: "But if you say so, I will let down the nets." When He had finished speaking, Jesus addresses Himself to Simon and encourages him to fish again. In Simon's response there is frustration, fatigue and discouragement: "Master, we worked hard all night long and caught nothing!" But trustful in Jesus' word, they throw in the nets again and continue the struggle. The word of Jesus has greater force for them than the experience of frustration of that night!
- Luke 5: 6-7: The result is surprising. The catch is so abundant that the nets are about to tear and the boat begins to sink. Simon needs the help of John and James, who are in the other boat. Nobody is complete in himself, alone. One community has to help the other. The conflict among the communities, both at the time of Luke as well as today, should be overcome in order to attain a common objective, which is the mission. The experience of the force of the transformative word of Jesus is the axis around which the differences are embraced and overcome.
- Luke 5:8-11: "Be fishers of men." The experience of the closeness of God in Jesus makes Peter understand who he is: "Leave me Lord, I am a sinful man!" Before God we are all sinners. Peter and his companions are afraid and, at the same time, they feel attracted to Jesus. Jesus drives away fear: "Do not be afraid!" He calls Peter and commits him to the mission, ordering him to be a fisher of men. Peter experiences, quite concretely, that the word of Jesus is like the word of God. It is capable of bringing about what it affirms. In Jesus those rough and tough laborers will have an experience of power, of courage, of trust. And so then, "they will abandon everything and follow Jesus!" Up until now it was only Jesus who announced the Good News of the Kingdom. Now other people will be called and involved in the mission. This way in which Jesus works, in a team, is also Good News for the people.
- The episode of the catch of fish along the lake indicates the attraction and the force of the Word of Jesus. He attracts people (Lk 5:1). He urges Peter to offer his boat to Jesus to be able to speak (Lk 5:3). The word of Jesus is so strong that it overcomes the resistance in Peter. It convinces him to cast the nets into the sea again and there is the miraculous catch (Lk 5:4-6). It overcomes in him the urge to leave Jesus and attracts him to become a "fisher of men" (Lk 5, 10). This is the way the Word of God acts in us, even now!

4) Personal questions

- Where and how does the miraculous catch of fish take place today?
- And they leaving everything followed Jesus. What do I have to leave in order to follow Jesus?
- In joining with other communities to, to overcome conflict between communities, how do we work together when both communities have the same stated mission, but have competing or conflicting ways to attain it?

5) Concluding Prayer

Who shall go up to the mountain of Yahweh?
Who shall take a stand in His holy place?
The one with clean of hands and a pure heart,
who does not swear an oath in order to deceive. (Ps 24:3-4)

Lectio Divina Friday, September 4, 2020

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Almighty God,
every good thing comes from You.
Fill our hearts with love for You,
increase our faith,
and by Your constant care
protect the good You have given us.
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 5:33-39

The scribes and Pharisees said to Jesus, "The disciples of John the Baptist fast often and offer prayers, and the disciples of the Pharisees do the same; but yours eat and drink." Jesus answered them, "Can you make the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come, and when the bridegroom is taken away from them, then they will fast in those days." And he also told them a parable. "No one tears a piece from a new cloak to patch an old one. Otherwise, he will tear the new and the piece from it will not match the old cloak. Likewise, no one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the new wine will burst the skins, and it will be spilled, and the skins will be ruined. Rather, new wine must be poured into fresh wineskins. And no one who has been drinking old wine desires new, for he says, 'The old is good.'"

3) Reflection

- In today's Gospel we witness closely a conflict between Jesus and the religious authority of the time, the scribes and the Pharisees (Lk 5:3). This time the conflict concerns the practice of fasting. Luke narrates diverse conflicts concerning the religious practice of the time: forgiveness of sins (Lk 5:21-25), to eat with sinners (Lk 5:29-32), fasting (Lk 5:33-36), and two conflicts on the observance of Saturday, the Sabbath (Lk 6:1-5 and Lk 6:6-11).
- Luke 5:33: Jesus does not insist on the practice of fasting. The conflict here is concerning the practice of fasting. Fasting is a very ancient custom, practiced by almost all religions. Jesus Himself followed it for forty days (Mt 4:2). But He does not insist with the disciples that they do the same. He leaves them free. This is why 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.

- Luke 5:34-35: When the bridegroom is with them they are not obliged to fast. Jesus responds with a comparison. When the bridegroom is with the friends of the bridegroom, that is, during the wedding feast, they should not fast. Jesus considers Himself the bridegroom. During the time when Jesus is with the disciples, it is the wedding feast. The day will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then, if they wish, they can fast. Jesus refers to His death. He knows and He is aware that if He wants to continue along this path of liberty, the authorities will want to kill Him.

Several times in the Old Testament, God presents Himself as the bridegroom of the people (Is 49:15; 54: 5,8; 62:4-5; Hos 2:16-25). In the New Testament, Jesus is considered the bridegroom of His people (Eph 5:25). The Apocalypses speaks of the celebration of the marriage of the Lamb with His spouse, the Heavenly Jerusalem (Rev 19: 7-8; 21: 2,9).

- Luke 5:36-39: New Wine in new skins! These words pronounced concerning the new piece of cloth on an old cloak and about new wine in old skins should be understood like a light which gives clarity to diverse conflicts, narrated by Luke, first and after the discussions concerning fasting. They clarify the attitude of Jesus concerning all the conflicts with the religious authorities. Nowadays these would be conflicts such as these: marriage between divorced persons, friendship with prostitutes and homosexuals, receiving communion without being married in the Church, not to go to Mass on Sunday, not to fast on Good Friday, etc.

A piece of new cloth is not sewn on an old cloak, because when it is washed the new piece of cloth shrinks and tears the old cloak more. Nobody puts new wine in old skins, because the new wine, when it is fermented, makes the old skins burst. New wine in new skins! The religion taught by the religious authorities was like an old cloak, like an old skin. It is not necessary to want to combine the novelty brought by Jesus with old customs or uses. Either one or the other! The new wine which Jesus brings bursts the old skins. It is necessary to know how to separate both of these things. Very probably, Luke provides these words of Jesus to give direction to the communities of the years 80. There was a group of Christian Jews who wanted to reduce the novelty of Jesus to the Judaism of the beginning. Jesus is not against what is “ancient.” But He does not want the ancient to be imposed on the new, preventing it from manifesting itself. It would be as if the Catholic Church reduced the message of Vatican Council II to the pre-Vatican II practices, as many people today seem to want to do.

4) Personal questions

- Which conflicts about religious practices cause suffering to people today and are the cause of much discussion and polemics? What is the underlying image of God in all these preconceptions, norms and prohibitions?
- How can we understand today Jesus’ statement: “do not put a new piece of cloth on an old cloak?” What is the message which you can draw from this for your life and for the life of the community?

5) Concluding Prayer

Commit your destiny to Yahweh,
be confident in Him, and He will act,
making your uprightness clear as daylight,
and the justice of your cause as the noon. (Ps 37:5-6)

Lectio Divina Saturday, September 5, 2020

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Almighty God,
every good thing comes from You.
Fill our hearts with love for You,
increase our faith,
and by Your constant care
protect the good You have given us.
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 6:1-5

While Jesus was going through a field of grain on a sabbath, his disciples were picking the heads of grain, rubbing them in their hands, and eating them. Some Pharisees said, “Why are you doing what is unlawful on the sabbath?” Jesus said to them in reply, “Have you not read what David did when he and those who were with him were hungry? How he went into the house of God, took the bread of offering, which only the priests could lawfully eat, ate of it, and shared it with his companions?” Then he said to them, “The Son of Man is lord of the sabbath.”

3) Reflection

- The Gospel today speaks about the conflict concerning the observance of the Sabbath – Saturday. The observance of the Sabbath was a central law, one of the Ten Commandments. This was a very ancient Law, the value of which was stressed after the Exile. During the Exile, the people had to work seven days a week from morning until evening, without any provisions to meet and meditate on the Word of God, to pray together and to share faith, their problems and their hopes. Therefore, there was an urgent need to stop at least one day a week to get together and encourage one another during the very difficult time of the exile. Otherwise they would have lost their faith. It was then that faith was reborn and the observance of Saturday was re-established.
- Luke 6:1-2: The cause of the conflict. On Saturday the disciples were walking across the cornfields and they were picking ears of corn. Matthew 12:1 says that they were hungry (Mt 12:1). The Pharisees invoke the bible to say it was a transgression of the law of the Sabbath: Why do you do what is not permitted on the Sabbath?” (cf. Ex 20:8-

11).

- Luke 6:3-4: Jesus' response. Immediately Jesus responds recalling that David himself also did things which were prohibited, because he took the sacred bread from the temple and gave it to the soldiers to eat because they were hungry (I Sam 21:2-7). Jesus knew the bible and referred to it to show that the arguments of others had no foundation. In Matthew, Jesus' response is more complete. He not only recalls the story of David, but also quotes the legislation which permits the priests to work on Saturday, and He quotes the prophet Hosea: "Mercy is what pleases me, not sacrifice". He quotes a biblical text or a historical text, a legislative text, and a prophetic text (cf. Mt 12:1-18). At that time there was no printed bible as we have today. In each community there was only one bible, hand written, which remained in the synagogue. If Jesus knew the bible so well, it means that in the 30 years of his life in Nazareth He participated intensely in the life of the community, where every Saturday the scriptures were read. We still lack the same familiarity with the bible and the same participation in community that other had then.
- Luke 6:5: The conclusion for all of us. Jesus ends with the following statement: The Son of Man is master of the Sabbath! The Lord of Saturday! Jesus, Son of Man, who lives in intimacy with God, discovers the meaning of the bible not from outside, but from inside. He discovers the meaning starting at the roots, beginning with His intimacy with the author of the bible, who is God Himself. Because of this, He calls Himself Master of the Sabbath. In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus revitalizes the law of Saturday, saying, "Saturday was instituted for man and not man for Saturday".

4) Personal questions

- How do you spend Sunday, which is our "Sabbath"? Do you go to Mass because it is an obligation in order to avoid sin, or to be with God?
- Jesus knew the bible almost by heart. What does the bible represent for me?

5) Concluding Prayer

My mouth shall always praise Yahweh,
let every creature bless His holy name
for ever and ever. (Ps 145:21)

Lectio Divina Sunday, September 6, 2020

Fraternal correction in the community
Care of those who leave the community
Matthew 18:15-20

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 division of the text to help with the reading:

Matthew 18:15-16: Correcting the brother or sister and re-establishing unity

Matthew 18:17: Those who do not listen to the community cut themselves off

Matthew 18:18: Decisions made on earth are accepted in heaven

Matthew 18:19: Prayer in common for those who leave the community

Matthew 18:20: Jesus' presence within the community

b) A key to the reading

- Matthew's Gospel organizes the words of Jesus into five great Sermons or Discourses. This shows that at the end of the first century, the time of the final edition of Matthew's Gospel, the Christian communities had already taken on concrete forms of catechesis. The five Discourses were five great markers showing the way on the journey. They offered concrete criteria to teach people and help them solve problems. The Sermon on the Community (Mt 18:1-35), for instance, gives instructions as to how the members of the community should live together so that the community may be a revelation of the Kingdom of God.

- On this 23rd Sunday of ordinary time we shall read and meditate on the second part of the Sermon on the Community and we shall see closely two aspects: fraternal correction, that is how to proceed in case of conflict among the members of the community (18:15-18), and prayer in common: how to take care of those who have left the community (18:19-20).

c) The text:

15 'If your brother does something wrong, go and have it out with him alone, between your two selves. If he listens to you, you have won back your brother. 16 If he does not listen, take one or two others along with you: whatever the misdemeanor, the evidence of two or three witnesses is required to sustain the charge. 17 But if he refuses to listen to these, report it to the community; and if he refuses to listen to the community, treat him like a gentile or a tax collector. 18 'In truth I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven; whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. 19 'In truth I tell you once again, if two of you on earth agree to ask anything at all, it will be

granted to you by My Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three meet in My name, I am there among them.'

3. A moment of prayerful silence

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

4. Some questions

to help us in our personal reflection.

- a) Which part of the text struck you most? Why?
- b) What advice does Jesus give to help people solve the problems of the community and reconcile the members among themselves?
- c) What is the basic requirement that comes out of Jesus' advice?
- d) In Mt 16:19, the power to forgive is given to Peter; in Jn 20:23, this same power is given to the apostles. Here, the power to forgive is given to the community. How does our community use this power to forgive given to us by Jesus?
- e) Jesus said, "Where two or three meet in My name, I am there among them". What does this mean for us today?



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

a) The context of our text in Matthew's Gospel:

In organizing the words of Jesus into five great sermons or discourses, Matthew's Gospel imitates the five books of the Pentateuch and presents the Good News of the Kingdom as a New Law. This Sunday's liturgy challenges us with the New Law that teaches fraternal correction within the community and our attitude towards those who exclude themselves from the community.

b) A commentary on the text:

Matthew 18:15-16: Correcting the brother and sister and rebuilding unity.

Jesus gives simple and concrete norms to tell us how to proceed in case of conflict in the community. If a brother or sister sins, that is, behaves contrary to the life of the community, you must not denounce him/her publicly before the community. First you must speak to him/her alone. Try to find out why he/she acted in that way. If you get no result, then call two or three members of the community to see whether you can get some result.

Matthew writes his Gospel around the 80's or 90's, almost at the end of the first century, for the community of converted Jews coming from Galilee and Syria. If he recalls so insistently these words of Jesus, it is because, in fact, in those communities there were great divisions concerning the acceptance of Jesus Messiah. Many families were divided and persecuted by their own parents who did not accept Jesus as Messiah (Mt 10:21, 35-36).

Matthew 18:17: Anyone who does not listen to the community cuts him/herself off. In extreme cases and after trying everything possible, the reticent brother or sister has to be brought before the community. And if that person will not listen to the advice of the community, then he or she has to be considered “as a publican or pagan”, that is, as a person not belonging to the community and who much less wishes to be part of the community. Thus you are not excluding anyone, but the person him/herself is excluding him/herself from the common life of the community.

Matthew 18:18: Decisions made on earth are accepted in heaven

In Mt 16:19, the power to forgive is given to Peter, in Jn 20:23, this same power is given to the apostles. Now, in this text, the power to forgive is given to the community: “whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven”. Here we see the importance of reconciliation and the enormous responsibility of the community in dealing with its members. The community does not excommunicate the person, but simply ratifies the exclusion that the person had already assumed publicly by leaving the community.

Matthew 18:19: Prayer in common for the brother or sister who has left the community
This exclusion does not mean that the person is abandoned to his or her fate. Rather, he or she may be separated from the community, but will not be separated from God. Thus, if talking to the community has not borne results and if the person no longer wishes to be part of the life of the community, we still have the obligation to pray together to the Father to achieve reconciliation. And Jesus guarantees that the Father will listen.

Matthew 18:20: Jesus’ presence within the community

The reason for the certainty of being heard is Jesus’ promise: “Where two or three meet in my name, I am there among them!” Jesus says that He is the centre, the axle of the community and, as such, prays to the Father together with the community that He may grant the gift of the return of the brother or sister who has left.

c) A deepening:

- The community as alternative space of solidarity and fraternity:

Today’s neo-liberal society, marked by consumerism, is hard and heartless. It does not welcome the poor, the little ones, strangers and refugees. Money has no place for mercy. The society of the Roman Empire also was hard and heartless, with no room for the little ones. They sought a refuge for their hearts but found none. The synagogues too were demanding and did not offer them a place of rest. In the Christian communities, there were those who wished to introduce the rigor of the Pharisees in the observance of the Law. They brought into the fraternity the same unjust criteria of society and the synagogue. Thus within the communities there arose the same divisions as those in society and the synagogue between Jew and non-Jew, rich and poor, rulers and ruled, word and silence, man and woman, race and religion. Instead of making the community a place of welcome, it became a place of judgement. Recalling the words of Jesus in the Discourse on the Community, Matthew wants to shed light on the journey of the Christian so that the community may be an alternative space of solidarity and fraternity. It must be Good News for the poor.

- Excommunication and exclusion from fraternal life:

Jesus does not wish to add to the exclusion. Rather, He wishes to promote inclusion. He did this all His life: He welcomed and reintegrated people who, in the name of a false idea of God, were excluded from the community. But He could not prevent a person who disagreed with the Good News of the Kingdom from refusing to belong to the community and exclude him/herself from the community. This is what some Pharisees and doctors of the law did. Even then, the community must behave like the Father in the parable of the Prodigal Son. It must hold the brother or sister in its heart and pray for him/her so that he/she may change his/her mind and come back to the community.

6. Prayer: Psalm 32

Free admission of sin

How blessed are those whose offense is forgiven,
whose sin blotted out.
How blessed are those to whom Yahweh imputes no guilt,
whose spirit harbors no deceit.

I said not a word, but my bones wasted away
from groaning all the day;
day and night Your hand lay heavy upon me;
my heart grew parched as stubble in summer drought.

I made my sin known to You,
did not conceal my guilt.
I said, 'I shall confess my offense to Yahweh.'
And You, for Your part, took away my guilt,
forgave my sin.

That is why each of Your faithful ones
prays to You in time of distress.
Even if great floods overflow,
they will never reach Your faithful.
You are a refuge for me,
You guard me in trouble,
with songs of deliverance You surround me.

I shall instruct you and teach you the way to go;
I shall not take my eyes off you.
Be not like a horse or a mule;
that does not understand bridle or bit;
if you advance to master them,
there is no means of bringing them near.

Countless troubles are in store for the wicked,
but one who trusts in Yahweh is enfolded in His faithful love.
Rejoice in Yahweh, exult all you upright,
shout for joy, you honest of heart.

7. Final Prayer

Lord Jesus, we thank You for the word that has enabled us to understand better the will of the Father. May Your Spirit enlighten our actions and grant us the strength to practice that which Your Word has revealed to us. May we, like Mary, Your mother, not only listen 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, September 7, 2020

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

God our Father,
You redeem us
and make us Your children in Christ.
Look upon us,
give us true freedom
and bring us to the inheritance You promised.
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 6:6-11

On a certain sabbath Jesus went into the synagogue and taught, and there was a man there whose right hand was withered. The scribes and the Pharisees watched him closely to see if he would cure on the sabbath so that they might discover a reason to accuse him. But he realized their intentions and said to the man with the withered hand, "Come up and stand before us." And he rose and stood there. Then Jesus said to them, "I ask you, is it lawful to do good on the sabbath rather than to do evil, to save life rather than to destroy it?" Looking around at them all, he then said to him, "Stretch out your hand." He did so and his hand was restored. But they became enraged and discussed together what they might do to Jesus.

3) Reflection

- Context: This passage presents Jesus who cures a man with a withered hand. Different from the context of chapters 3 and 4 in which Jesus is alone, now here He is surrounded by His disciples and the women who go around with Him. Therefore, here we have Jesus always moving. In the first stages of this journey the reader finds different ways of listening to the Word of Jesus on the part of those who follow Him and which, definitively, could be summarized in two experiences, which recall, in turn, two types of approaches: that of Peter (5:1-11) and that of the centurion (7:1-10). The first one encounters Jesus who invites Him after the miraculous catch to become a fisher of men; then he falls on his knees before Jesus: "Leave me, Lord, I am a sinful man" (5:8). The second one does not have any direct communication with Jesus: he has heard people

speak very well about Jesus and he sends his envoys to ask for the cure of one of his servants who is dying; he is asking for something not for himself, but for a person who was a favorite of his. The figure of Peter expresses the attitude of the one who, discovering himself a sinner, places all his acts under the influence of the Word of Jesus. The centurion, showing solicitude for the servant, learns to listen to God. Well, between these itineraries or attitudes which characterize the itinerant journey of Jesus, is placed the cure of the man who presents the withered hand. This event of the miracle takes place in a context of debate or controversy: the ears of corn picked on the Sabbath and on the act of curing on a Saturday, precisely the withered hand. Between the two discussions there is the crucial role played by the Word of Jesus: “The Son of man is master of the Sabbath” (6:5). Continuing with this passage we ask ourselves what is the meaning of this withered hand? It is a symbol of the salvation of man who is taken back to the original moment, that of creation. The right hand, then, expresses human acting. Jesus then, gives back to this day of the week, Saturday, the deepest significance: it is the day of joy, of the restoration and not of limitation. What Jesus shows is the Messianic Saturday and not the legalistic one: the cures that He does are signs of the Messianic times, of restoration, of the liberation of man.

- The dynamic of the miracle. Luke places before Jesus a man who has a withered --- hand, dry, paralyzed. Nobody is interested in asking for his cure, much less the one concerned. And just the same, the sickness was not only an individual problem but its effects had repercussion on the whole community. But in our account we do not have so much the problem of the sickness as that of the aspect that it was done on Saturday. Jesus is criticized because He cured on Saturday. The difference with the Pharisees is that they on Saturday do not act on the basis of the commandment of love, which is the essence of the Law. Jesus, after having ordered the man to get in the middle of the assembly, formulates a decisive question: “Is it permitted on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil?” The space for the answer is restricted: to cure or not to cure, or rather, to cure or to destroy (v.9). Let us imagine the difficulty of the Pharisees: it is forbidden that evil be done on Saturday or lead man to damnation, and even less to cure, because help was permitted only in case of extreme need. The Pharisees feel provoked and this causes aggressiveness in them. But it is evident that Jesus’ intention in curing on Saturday is for the good of man and in the first place, for the one who is sick. This motivation of love invites us to reflect on our behavior and to found it on that of Jesus who saves. Jesus is not only attentive to cure the sick person but is interested also in the cure of His enemies: to cure them from their distorted attitude in their observance of the Law; to observe Saturday without freeing their neighbor from their misery and sickness is not in accordance with the will of God. According to the Evangelist, the purpose of the Sabbath is to do good, to save, like Jesus has done during His earthly life.

4) Personal questions

- Do you feel involved in the words of Jesus: how do you commit yourself in your service to life? Do you know how to create the necessary conditions so that others may live better?
- Do you know how to place at the center of your attention and of your commitment every person and all their requirements?
- Reflect on times you had a choice (big or small) to help another person, to do good,

versus fulfill a requirement or rule. Did you choose rightly? Did you choose as Jesus would have?

5) Concluding Prayer

Joy for all who take refuge in You,
endless songs of gladness!
You shelter them, they rejoice in You,
those who love Your name. (Ps 5:11)

Lectio Divina Tuesday, September 8, 2020

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

God our Father,
You redeem us
and make us Your children in Christ.
Look upon us,
give us true freedom
and bring us to the inheritance You promised.
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 1:1-16, 18-23

The Book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. Abraham became the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers. Judah became the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar. Perez became the father of Hezron, Hezron the father of Ram, Ram the father of Amminadab. Amminadab became the father of Nahshon, Nahshon the father of Salmon, Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab. Boaz became the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth. Obed became the father of Jesse, Jesse the father of David the king. David became the father of Solomon, whose mother had been the wife of Uriah. Solomon became the father of Rehoboam, Rehoboam the father of Abijah, Abijah the father of Asaph. Asaph became the father of Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, Joram the father of Uzziah. Uzziah became the father of Jotham, Jotham the father of Ahaz, Ahaz the father of Hezekiah. Hezekiah became the father of Manasseh, Manasseh the father of Amos, Amos the father of Josiah. Josiah became the father of Jechoniah and his brothers at the time of the Babylonian exile. After the Babylonian exile, Jechoniah became the father of Shealtiel, Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel, Zerubbabel the father of Abiud. Abiud became the father of Eliakim, Eliakim the father of Azor, Azor the father of Zadok. Zadok became the father of Achim, Achim the father of Eliud, Eliud the father of Eleazar. Eleazar became the father of Matthan, Matthan the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary. Of her was born Jesus who is called the Christ. Now this is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about. When

his mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found with child through the Holy Spirit. Joseph her husband, since he was a righteous man, yet unwilling to expose her to shame, decided to divorce her quietly. Such was his intention when, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her. She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: Behold, the virgin shall be with child and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel, which means “God is with us.”

3) Reflection

- Today, September 8th, Feast of the Nativity of Our Lady, the Gospel gives us the genealogy, or birth certificate, of Jesus. By means of the list of His ancestors, the Evangelist tells the communities who Jesus is and how God acts in a surprising way in order to fulfill His promise. On our birth certificate there is our name and the name of our parents. Some people, to say who they are, also recall the names of the grandparents. Others are ashamed of their ancestors, of their families, and hide behind appearances which deceive. The birth certificate of Jesus has many names. On the list of names there is a great novelty. At that time, the genealogy indicated only the names of the men. This is why it is surprising that Matthew also mentions five women among the ancestors of Jesus: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, the wife of Uriah and Mary. Why does he choose precisely these five women and not others? This is the question which the Gospel of Matthew leaves for us.

- Matthew 1:1-17: The long list of names – the beginning and the end of the genealogy. At the beginning and at the end of the genealogy, Matthew clearly makes us understand Jesus’ identity: He is the Messiah, son of David and son of Abraham. As descendant of David, Jesus is the response of God to the expectations of the Jewish people (2 Sam 7, 12, and 16). As descendant of Abraham, He is source of blessings and of hope for all nations of the earth (Gen 12-13). Therefore, in this way, both the Jews and the pagans who formed part of the communities of Syria and of Palestine at the time of Matthew could see that their hope was fulfilled in Jesus. .

Drawing up the list of the ancestors of Jesus, Matthew adopts a plan of 3 X 14 generations (Mt 1:17). The number two is the number of the divinity. Number 14 is two times 7, which is the number of perfection. At that time, it was something common to interpret or calculate God’s action by using numbers and dates. By means of these symbolic calculations, Matthew reveals the presence of God throughout the generations and expresses the conviction of the communities who said that Jesus appeared at the time established by God. With His coming history reaches its fulfillment.

The message of the five women mentioned in the genealogy. Jesus is the response of God to the expectation both of the Jews and of the pagans, but it is in a completely surprising way. In the stories of the four women of the Old Testament, mentioned in the genealogy, there is something abnormal. The four of them were foreigners, and they will conceive their sons outside the normal schema of the behavior of that time and they do not keep the requirements of the laws of purity of the time of Jesus. Tamar, a Canaanite, a widow, dresses as a prostitute of Jericho to oblige Judah to be faithful to

her and to give her a son (Gen 38:1-30). Rahab, a prostitute from Jericho, makes an alliance with the Israelites. She helped them to enter the Promised Land and professed faith in a God who liberates from the Exodus. (Judg 2:1-21). Bathsheba, a Hittite, wife of Uriah, was seduced, abused and made pregnant by King David, who in addition to that, ordered her husband to be killed (2 Sam 11:1-27). Ruth, a Moabite, a poor widow, chose to remain with Naomi and adhere to the people of God (Rt 1, 16-18). Advised by her mother-in-law Naomi, Ruth imitates Tamar and spends the night together with Boaz, obliging him to observe the law and to give her a son. From their relation Obed was born, the grandfather of King David (Ruth 3:1-15; 4:13-17). These four women question the models of behavior imposed by the patriarchal society. And thus, their conventional initiative will give continuity to the descendants of Jesus and will bring salvation to all the people. Through them, God realizes His plan and sends the promised Messiah. Truly, God's way of acting surprises and makes one think! At the end the reader will ask, "And Mary? Is there something irregular in her? What is it? We get the response from the story of Saint Joseph which follows in (Mt 1:18-23).

- Mathew 1:18-23: Saint Joseph was just. What was irregular in Mary is that she became pregnant before living together with Joseph, her betrothed, who was a just man. Jesus says, "If your justice is not greater than the justice of the Pharisees and the scribes, you will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven." If Joseph had been just according to the justice of the Pharisees, he would have denounced Mary and she would have been stoned. Jesus would have died. Thanks to the true justice of Joseph, Jesus was able to be born.

4) Personal questions

- When I present myself to others, what do I say about myself and about my family?
- If the Evangelist mentions only these five women together with over forty men, no doubt, he wants to communicate a message. What is this message? What does all this tell us about the identity of Jesus? And what does this say about us?

5) Concluding Prayer

They shall speak of the glory of Your kingship
and tell of Your might,
making known Your mighty deeds to the children of Adam,
the glory and majesty of Your kingship. (Ps 145:10-11)

Lectio Divina Wednesday, September 9, 2020

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

God our Father,
You redeem us
and make us Your children in Christ.
Look upon us,
give us true freedom
and bring us to the inheritance You promised.

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 6:20-26

Raising his eyes toward his disciples Jesus said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for the Kingdom of God is yours. Blessed are you who are now hungry, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who are now weeping, for you will laugh. Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude and insult you, and denounce your name as evil on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice and leap for joy on that day! Behold, your reward will be great in heaven. For their ancestors treated the prophets in the same way. But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. But woe to you who are filled now, for you will be hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will grieve and weep. Woe to you when all speak well of you, for their ancestors treated the false prophets in this way."

3) Reflection

- The Gospel today presents four blessings and four curses in Luke's Gospel. There is a progressive revelation in the way in which Luke presents the teaching of Jesus. Up to 6:16, he says many times, that Jesus taught the people, but he did not describe the content of the teaching (Lk 4:15,31-32,44; 5:1,3,15,17; 6:6). Now, after having said that Jesus sees the crowd desirous to hear the Word of God, Luke presents the first great discourse which begins with the exclamation, "Blessed are you who are poor!" and "Alas for you, rich!" and then takes up all the rest of the chapter (Lk 6:12-49). Some call this discourse the "discourse on the plain" because, according to Luke, Jesus came down from the mountain and stopped in a place which was flat and there He pronounced His discourse. In Matthew's Gospel, this same discourse is given on the mountain (Mt 5:1) and is called "The Sermon on the Mount." In Matthew, in this discourse there are eight Beatitudes, which trace a program of life for the Christian communities of Jewish origin. In Luke, the sermon is shorter and more radical. It contains only four Beatitudes and four curses, directed to the Hellenistic communities, formed by rich and poor. This discourse of Jesus will be meditated on in the daily Gospel of the next days.

- Luke 6:20: *Blessed are you, poor!* Looking at the disciples, Jesus declares, "Blessed are you who are poor, the Kingdom of Heaven is yours!" This declaration identifies the social category of the disciples. They are poor! And Jesus promises them, "The Kingdom is yours!" It is not a promise made for the future. The verb is in the present. The Kingdom belongs to them already. They are blessed now. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus makes explicit the meaning of this and says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit!" (Mt 5:3). They are the poor who have the spirit of Jesus; because there are some poor who have the mentality of the rich. The disciples of Jesus are poor and have the mentality of the poor. Like Jesus, they do not want to accumulate, but they assume their poverty and with Him, they struggle for a more just life together, where there will be fraternity and sharing of goods, without any discrimination.

- Luke 6:21-22: *Blessed are you, who now hunger and weep.* In the second and third Beatitude, Jesus says, "Blessed are who are hungry now, because you shall have your

full! Blessed are you, who are weeping now, you shall laugh!” One part of the sentence is in the present and the other in the future. What we live and suffer now is not definitive; what is definitive is the Kingdom of God which we are constructing with the force of the spirit of Jesus. To construct the Kingdom presupposes pain, suffering and persecution, but something is certain: the Kingdom will be attained, and you will have your fill and you will laugh!

- Luke 6:23: *Blessed are you when people hate you...!* The 4th Beatitude refers to the future: “Blessed are you when people hate you, drive you out on account of the Son of Man!” Rejoice when that day comes and dance for joy, look, your reward will be great in heaven. This was the way your ancestors treated the prophets!” With these words of Jesus, Luke encourages the communities of his time, because they were persecuted. Suffering is not a death rattle, but the pain of birth pangs. It is a source of hope! Persecution was a sign that the future that had been announced by Jesus was arriving, being reached. The communities were following the right path.

- Luke 6:24-25: *Alas for you who are rich!* Alas for you who now have your fill and who laugh! After the four Beatitudes in favor of the poor and of the excluded, follow four threats or curses against the rich and those for whom everything goes well and are praised by everybody. The four threats have the same identical literary form as the four Beatitudes. The first one is expressed in the present. The second and the third one have a part in the present and another part in the future. And the fourth one refers completely to the future. These threats are found only in Luke’s Gospel, not in Matthew’s. Luke is more radical in denouncing injustices.

In front of Jesus, on the plains, there are no rich people. There are only sick and poor people, who have come from all parts (Lk 6:17-19). But Jesus says: “Alas for you the rich!” Luke, in transmitting these words of Jesus, is thinking more of the communities of his time. In those communities there were rich and poor people, and there was discrimination against the poor on the part of the rich, the same discrimination which marked the structure of the Roman Empire (cf. Jas 5:1-6; Rev 3:17-19). Jesus criticizes the rich very hard and directly: You rich have already received consolation! You are already filled, but you are still hungry! Now you are laughing, but you will be afflicted and will weep! This is a sign that for Jesus poverty is not something fatal, nor the fruit of prejudices, but it is the fruit of unjust enrichment on the part of others.

- Luke 6:26: *Alas for you when everyone speaks well of you, because this was the way their ancestors treated the false prophets!* This fourth threat refers to the sons of those who in the past praised the false prophets; because some authorities of the Jews used their prestige and power to criticize Jesus.

4) Personal questions

- Do we look at life and at people from the viewpoint of Jesus? What do you think in your heart: is a poor and hungry person truly happy? The stories which we see on television and commercial advertising, what ideal of happiness do they present?
- In saying “Blessed are the poor,” did Jesus want to say that the poor have to continue to be poor?
- Rich and poor are two terms with many interpretations. What is my interpretation?

How does this fit with the meaning Jesus intended? Do I live authentically and without compromise in my interpretation of His message and meaning?

5) Concluding Prayer

Upright in all that He does,
Yahweh acts only in faithful love.
He is close to all who call upon Him,
all who call on Him from the heart. (Ps 145:17-18)

Lectio Divina Thursday, September 10, 2020

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

God our Father,
You redeem us
and make us Your children in Christ.
Look upon us,
give us true freedom
and bring us to the inheritance You promised.
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 6:27-38

Jesus said to his disciples: "To you who hear I say, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. To the person who strikes you on one cheek, offer the other one as well, and from the person who takes your cloak, do not withhold even your tunic. Give to everyone who asks of you, and from the one who takes what is yours do not demand it back. Do to others as you would have them do to you. For if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do the same. If you lend money to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, and get back the same amount. But rather, love your enemies and do good to them, and lend expecting nothing back; then your reward will be great and you will be children of the Most High, for he himself is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, just as also your Father is merciful. "Stop judging and you will not be judged. Stop condemning and you will not be condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven. Give and gifts will be given to you; a good measure, packed together, shaken down, and overflowing, will be poured into your lap. For the measure with which you measure will in return be measured out to you."

3) Reflection

- In today's Gospel we have the second part of the "discourse on the plain." In the first part (Lk 6:20-26), Jesus addresses Himself to the disciples (Lk 6:20). In the second part (Lk 6: 27-49), He addresses Himself "to you who listen to Me," that is, the great crowds of poor and sick people, who had come from all parts (Lk 6:17-19).

- Luke 6:27-30: Love your enemies! The words that Jesus addresses to these people are demanding and difficult: to love your enemies, not to curse them, to present the other cheek to anyone who slaps you on one cheek, and do not protest or complain when somebody takes what is yours. Taken literally, these commands seem to favor the rich who rob, but not even Jesus observes them literally. When the soldier struck Him on the face, He did not offer the other cheek but rather reacted firmly: "If there is some offense in what I said, point it out, but if not why do you strike Me?" (Jn 18: 22-23). Then, how are these words to be understood? The following verses help us to understand what Jesus wants to teach us.

- Luke 6:31-36: The Golden Rule! to imitate God. Two sayings of Jesus help us to understand what He wants to teach. The first saying is the so called Golden Rule: "Treat others as you would like people to treat you!" (Lk 6:31). The second saying is "Be merciful as your Father in Heaven is merciful!" (Lk 6:36). These two directives indicate that Jesus does not want simply to change the situation, because nothing would change. He wants to change the system. The novelty which He wants to construct comes from the new experience of God the Father, full of tenderness who accepts all! The words of threat against the rich cannot be the occasion of revenge on the part of the poor! Jesus demands the contrary attitude: "Love your enemies!" Love cannot depend on what I receive from others. True love should want the good of others, independently of what he or she does for me. Love should be creative, because that is how God's love is for us: "Be merciful, as your Heavenly Father is merciful!" Matthew says the same thing with other words: "Be perfect as your Father in Heaven is perfect" (Mt 5:48). Never will anyone be able to say, "Today I have been perfect as the Father in Heaven is perfect! I have been merciful as the Father in Heaven is merciful." We will always be below the measure which Jesus has placed before us.

In Luke's Gospel, the Golden Rule says, "Treat others as you would like people to treat you!" (Lk 6:31). Matthew, in his Gospel, gives a different formulation: "Treat others as you would like others to treat you." And he adds, "That is the Law and the Prophets" (Mt 7,12). Practically, all religions in the whole world have the same Golden Rule with a diverse formulation. This is a sign that a universal intuition or desire is expressed which comes from God and is part of our being in the image of God.

- Luke 6:37-38: "Do not judge and you will not be judged; do not condemn and you will not be condemned; forgive and you will be forgiven; give and there will be gifts for you; a full measure, pressed down, shaken together, and overflowing, will be poured into your lap; because the standard you use will be the standard used for you." These are four counsels: two in a negative form, do not judge and do not condemn; and two in positive form: to forgive and to give an abundant measure. When He says, "there will be gifts for you," Jesus refers to the treatment which God wants to bestow on us. But when our way of treating others is mean, God cannot use with us the abundant and overflowing measure that He would want to use.

Celebrate the visit of God. The Discourse on the Plains or the Sermon on the Mount,

from the beginning, leads the listeners to make a choice, to opt, in favor of the poor. In the Old Testament, several times, God placed before people this same choice, blessing or curse. People were given the freedom to choose: “Today I call heaven and earth to witness against you: I am offering you life or death, blessing or curse. Choose life, then, so that you and your descendants may live” (Deut 30:19). It is not God who condemns, but the people themselves according to the choice that they make between life and death, good or evil. These moments of choosing are moments of the visit of God to His people (Gen 21:1; 50:24-25); Ex 3:16; 32:34; Jr 20:10; Ps 65:10; Ps 80:15; Ps 106: 4). Luke is the only Evangelist who uses this image of the visit of God (Lk 1:68, 78; 7:16; 19:44; Acts 15:16). For Luke it is the visit of God which places the choice between blessing or curse before people: “Blessed are you who are poor” and “Alas for you, the rich!” But people do not recognize the visit of God (Lk 19:44).

4) Personal questions

- Do we look at life and at people with the same viewpoint as Jesus?
- What does it mean today “be merciful as your Heavenly Father is merciful”?
- Am I as literal as Jesus in love and mercy, or do I rationalize it away and compartmentalize it so it doesn’t apply to situations in my life?

5) Concluding Prayer

Yahweh, You examine me and know me,
You know when I sit,
when I rise,
You understand my thoughts from afar.
You watch when I walk or lie down,
You know every detail of my conduct. (Ps 139:1-3)

Lectio Divina Friday, September 11, 2020

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

God our Father,
You redeem us
and make us Your children in Christ.
Look upon us,
give us true freedom
and bring us to the inheritance You promised.
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 6:39-42

Jesus told his disciples a parable: "Can a blind person guide a blind person? Will not both fall into a pit? No disciple is superior to the teacher; but when fully trained, every disciple will be like his teacher. Why do you notice the splinter in your brother's eye, but do not perceive the wooden beam in your own? How can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me remove that splinter in your eye,' when you do not even notice the wooden beam in your own eye? You hypocrite! Remove the wooden beam from your eye first; then you will see clearly to remove the splinter in your brother's eye."

3) Reflection

- Today's Gospel gives us some of the passages of the discourse which Jesus pronounced on the plain after having spent the night in prayer (Lk 6:12) and after He had called the twelve to be His apostles (Lk 6:13-14). Many of the sayings in this discourse had already been pronounced on other occasions, but Luke, imitating Matthew, puts them together in this Sermon on the Plain.
- Luke 6:39: The parable of the blind man who guides another blind man. Jesus tells a parable to the disciples: "Can a blind man guide another blind man? Will not both of them fall into a hole?" A parable of one line, quite similar to the warnings which, in Matthew's Gospel, are addressed to the Pharisees: "Alas for you, blind guides!" (Mt 23:16-17,19,24,26) Here in the context of the Gospel of Luke, this parable is addressed to the animators of the communities who consider themselves the masters of truth, superior to others and because of this, they are blind guides.
- Luke 6:40: Disciple – Master. "The disciple is not greater than the teacher, but the well prepared disciple will be like the teacher" Jesus is the Master, not the professor. The professor in class teaches different subjects, but does not live with the pupils. The Master or Lord does not teach lessons; he lives with the pupils. His subject matter is himself, his life witness, his way of living the things that he teaches. Living together with the Master, the Lord has three aspects: (1) the Master is the model or example to be imitated (cf. Jn 13:13-15). (2) The disciple not only contemplates and imitates, he commits himself to the same destiny of the Master, with his temptations (Lk 22:28), his persecution (Mt 10:24-25), his death (Jn 11:16); (3) He not only imitates the model, he not only assumes the commitment, but arrives at identifying himself with Him: "I live, but it is not I who live, but Christ lives in me!" (Gal 2:20). This third aspect is the mystical dimension of the following of Jesus, fruit of the action of the Spirit.
- Luke 6:41-42: The splinter in the brother's eye. "Why do you observe the splinter in your brother's eye and never notice the great log in your own? How can you say to your brother: 'Brother, let me take out that splinter in your eye, when you cannot see the great log in your own? Hypocrite! Take the log out of your own eye first, and then you will see clearly enough to take out the splinter in your brother's eye". In the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew treats the same theme and explains a bit better the parable of the splinter in the eye. Jesus asks for a creative attitude which will make us capable of going and encountering others without judging them, without preconceptions and rationalizing, but accepting the brother (Mt 7:1-5). This total openness toward others considering them as brothers/sisters will arise in us only when we are capable of relating to God with total trust as His children (Mt 7:7-11).

4) Personal questions

- Splinter and log in the eye. How do I relate with others at home and in my family, in work and with my colleagues, in community and with the brothers and sisters?
- Master and disciple. How am I a disciple of Jesus?

5) Concluding Prayer

Lord, how blessed are those who live in Your house;
they shall praise You continually.

Blessed those who find their strength in You,
whose hearts are set on pilgrimage. (Ps 84:4-5)

Lectio Divina Saturday, September 12, 2020

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

God our Father,
You redeem us
and make us Your children in Christ.
Look upon us,
give us true freedom
and bring us to the inheritance You promised.
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 6:43-49

Jesus said to His disciples, ‘There is no sound tree that produces rotten fruit, nor again a rotten tree that produces sound fruit. Every tree can be told by its own fruit: people do not pick figs from thorns nor gather grapes from brambles.

Good people draw what is good from the store of goodness in their hearts; bad people draw what is bad from the store of badness. For the words of the mouth flow out of what fills the heart. ‘Why do you call me, “Lord, Lord” and not do what I say?

‘Everyone who comes to Me and listens to My words and acts on them—I will show you what such a person is like. Such a person is like the man who, when he built a house, dug, and dug deep, and laid the foundations on rock; when the river was in flood it bore down on that house but could not shake it, it was so well built. But someone who listens and does nothing is like the man who built a house on soil, with no foundations; as soon as the river bore down on it, it collapsed; and what a ruin that house became!’

3) Reflection

- In today’s Gospel we have the last part of the Discourse on the Plain, that is, the version which Luke presents in the Sermon on the Mount of the Gospel of Matthew. And Luke puts together what follows:
- Luke 6:43-45: The parable of the tree that bears good fruit. “There is no sound tree

that produces rotten fruit, nor again a rotten tree that produces sound fruit. Every tree can be known by its own fruit: people do not pick figs from thorns, or gather grapes from brambles". The letter of James the Apostle serves as a commentary to this parable of Jesus: "Does any water supply give a flow of fresh water and salt water out of the same pipe? Can a fig tree yield olives, my brothers, or a vine yield figs? No more can sea water yield fresh water" (James 3:11-12). A person who is well formed in the tradition of living together in community develops within self a good nature which leads him/her to do good. "The good of the treasure of his/her heart is brought out", but the person who does not pay attention to his/her formation will have difficulty in producing good deeds. Rather, "from his/her evil treasure evil will come out evil, because the mouth speaks of the fullness of the heart". Concerning the "good treasure of the heart" it is worthwhile to remember what the Book of Ecclesiasticus says on the heart, the source of good counsel: "Stick to the advice your own heart gives you, no one can be truer to you than that; since a person's soul often gives a clearer warning than seven watchmen perched on a watchtower. And besides all this beg the Most High to guide your steps into the truth" (Sir 37: 13-15).

- Luke 6:46: It is not sufficient to say, Lord, Lord. What is important is not to say beautiful things about God, but rather to do the will of the Father and in this way be a revelation of His face and of His presence in the world.

- Luke 6:47-49: To construct the house on rock. To listen and to put into practice, this is the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount. Many people sought security and religious power in the extraordinary heads (gifts) or in the observance. But true security does not come from power; it does not come from any of those things. It comes from God! And God becomes the source of security, when we seek to do His will. And in this way He will be the rock which will support us, in the difficult hours and in the storms.

God is the rock of our life. In the Book of Psalms, we frequently find the expression: "God is my rock, my fortress... My God, my Rock, my refuge, my shield, the force which saves me..." (Ps 18:3). He is the defense and the force of those who believe in Him and who seek justice (Ps 18:21-24). The people who trust in this God become, in turn, a rock for others. Thus the prophet Isaiah invites the people who were in exile: "Listen to me, you who pursue saving justice, you who seek Yahweh. Consider the rock from which you were hewn, the quarry from which you were dug. Consider Abraham your father and Sarah who gave you birth" (Isa 51:1-2). The prophet asks the people not to forget the past and to remember Abraham and Sarah who, because of their faith in God, became a rock, the beginning of the People of God. Looking toward this rock, the people should draw courage to fight and get out of the exile. And thus Matthew exhorts the communities to have as an incentive or encouragement this same rock (Mt 7:24-25) and in this way be themselves rocks to strengthen their brothers in the faith. This is also the significance which Jesus gives to Peter: "You are Peter and on this Rock I will build my Church" (Mt 16:18). This is the vocation of the first communities called to unite themselves to Jesus, the living Rock, so as to become themselves living rocks, listening and putting into practice the Word (Ps 2: 4-10; 2: 5; Eph 2:19-22).

4) Personal questions

- What is the quality of my heart?
- Is my house built on rock?

5) Concluding Prayer

Lord, You created my inmost self,
knit me together in my mother's womb.
For so many marvels I thank You; a wonder am I,
and all Your works are wonders. (Ps 139:13-14)

Lectio Divina Sunday, September 13, 2020

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 division of the text to help with the reading:

Matthew 18:21: Peter's question

Matthew 18:22: Jesus' reply

Matthew 18:23-26: 1st part of the parable

Matthew 18:27-30: 2nd part of the parable

Matthew 18:31-35: 3rd part of the parable

b) A key to the reading:

In the Gospel of the 24th Sunday of Ordinary Time, Jesus tells us of the need to forgive our brothers and sisters. It is not easy to forgive. There are some offences and insults that go on hurting us. Some say, "I forgive, but I do not forget." I cannot forget! Resentment, tensions, different opinions, provocations make it difficult to forgive and be reconciled. Why is forgiving so difficult? Do I create a space in my family, my community, my work and my relationships for reconciliation and forgiveness? How? Let us meditate on the third part of the "Sermon on the Community" (Mt 18:21-35), where Matthew puts together the sayings and parables of Jesus on limitless forgiveness. As you read, think of yourself and try to look back on your life.

c) The text:

21 Then Peter went up to Him and said, 'Lord, how often must I forgive my brother if he wrongs me? As often as seven times?' 22 Jesus answered, 'Not seven, I tell you, but seventy-seven times. 23 'And so the kingdom of Heaven may be compared to a king

who decided to settle his accounts with his servants. 24 When the reckoning began, they brought him a man who owed ten thousand talents; 25 he had no means of paying, so his master gave orders that he should be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, to meet the debt. 26 At this, the servant threw himself down at his master's feet, with the words, "Be patient with me and I will pay the whole sum."

27 And the servant's master felt so sorry for him that he let him go and cancelled the debt. 28 Now as this servant went out, he happened to meet a fellow-servant who owed him one hundred denarii; and he seized him by the throat and began to throttle him, saying, "Pay what you owe me." 29 His fellow-servant fell at his feet and appealed to him, saying, "Be patient with me and I will pay you." 30 But the other would not agree; on the contrary, he had him thrown into prison till he should pay the debt. 31 His fellow-servants were deeply distressed when they saw what had happened, and they went to their master and reported the whole affair to him. 32 Then the master sent for the man and said to him, "You wicked servant, I cancelled all that debt of yours when you appealed to me. 33 Were you not bound, then, to have pity on your fellow-servant just as I had pity on you?" 34 And in his anger the master handed him over to the torturers till he should pay all his debt. 35 And that is how My heavenly Father will deal with you unless you each forgive your brother from your heart.'



3. A moment of prayerful silence

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

4. Some questions

to help us in our personal reflection.

- a) Which part of the parable struck you most? Why?
- b) What counsels does Jesus give us to help us reconcile and forgive?
- c) Looking in the mirror of the parable, with which character do I identify myself most: the king who wants to audit his servants or with the forgiven servant who does not want to forgive his companion?
- d) Looking at the present situation of our family, our community, our church, our society and our world, is there among us a space for forgiveness and reconciliation so that reconciliation spreads among us? Where do we need to begin so that reconciliation may spread among us?

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

a) The context within which our text is placed in Matthew's Gospel:

- The comparison that Jesus uses to show the obligation to forgive and be reconciled brings together parable and allegory. When Jesus speaks of the King who wants to settle his accounts with his servants, He is thinking of God who forgives all. When He speaks

of the debt of the servant forgiven by the King, He is thinking of our huge debt with God who always forgives us. When He speaks of the attitude of the forgiven servant who will not forgive, he is thinking of us, forgiven by God, but who will not forgive our brothers and sisters.

- At the end of the first century, the Judeo-Christians of the communities of Syria and Palestine had serious and grave problems of reconciliation with the brothers and sisters of the same race. At the time of the great disaster of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in the 70's, both the *Synagogue* and the *Ecclesia* were trying to reorganize themselves in the regions of Syria and Palestine. That is why there was a great and growing tension between them that was the source of much suffering within families. This tension is the background to Matthew's Gospel.

b) A commentary on the text:

Matthew 18:21: Peter's question: how many times forgive?

On hearing Jesus' words on reconciliation, Peter asks: "How often must I forgive? Seven times?" Seven is a number indicating perfection and, in the case of Peter's proposal, seven is synonymous with *always*.

Matthew 18:22: Jesus' reply: seventy times seven!

Jesus sees further. He eliminates any possible limitation to forgiveness: "Not seven, but seventy times seven!" There is no proportion between the forgiveness we receive from God and our forgiving our brother and sister. So as to make His reply to Peter clear, Jesus tells a parable. It is the parable of limitless forgiveness!

Matthew 18:23-26: The first part of the parable: the situation of the debtor

When He speaks of the King, Jesus is thinking of God. A servant owes the king ten thousand talents, that is, 164 tons of gold. The servant says he will pay. But even if he worked the whole of his life, he, his wife, his children and all his family, he would not be able to acquire 164 tons of gold to pay back the king. In other words, we shall never be in a position to pay back our debt with God. Impossible! (cf. Psalm 49:8-9).

Matthew 18:27-30: The second part of the parable: The great contrast

At the servant's insistence, the king forgives him his debt of 164 tons of gold. A fellow servant owes him a hundred denarii, that is, 30 grams of gold. There is no comparison between the two debts! A grain of sand and a mountain! Before God's love that freely forgives our debt of 164 tons of gold, it is only just that we should forgive a debt of 30 grams of gold. But the forgiven servant would not forgive, not even at the insistence of the debtor. He behaves towards his fellow servant the way the king should have behaved towards him but did not: he ordered that he be thrown in jail until the debt of 30 grams of gold was paid! The contrast speaks for itself and needs no commentary!

Matthew 18:31-35: The third part of the parable: the moral of the story

The shameful attitude of the forgiven servant who will not forgive strikes even his mates. They report him to the king and the king acts accordingly: he puts into motion the procedure of justice and the forgiven servant who in turn would not forgive, is thrown into jail, where he will stay until his debt is paid! He should still be there today! He will never be able to pay 164 tons of gold! The moral of the parable: "This is how My Father will deal with you unless you each forgive your brother from your heart!"

The only limit to the free mercy of God who always forgives us is our refusal to forgive the brother and sister! (Mt 18:34; 6:12:15; Lk 23:34).

c) A deepening: Forgiving after 11 September 2001!

On 11 September 2001, a group of terrorists flew two planes into the two towers of New York and killed more than three thousand persons while shouting “Holy War!” The immediate cry in reply was: “Crusade”. Both sides used the name of God to legitimize violence. No one recalled the saying: “Seventy times seven!” And one of the sides calls itself Christian!

On the occasion of the war in Iraq, Pope John Paul II shouted at a public audience, “War is Satanic!”, and invited all to fight for peace. At an ecumenical meeting of representatives of Jews and Muslims in Jerusalem in 2000, the Pope said, “We cannot call on the name of God to legitimize violence!”

The last sentence of the Old Testament through which the people of God entered the New Testament and that expresses the nucleus of its messianic hope for reconciliation, is the oracle of the prophet Malachi: “Lo, I will send Elijah, the prophet, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and terrible day, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with doom” (Mal 3:23). To turn the hearts of fathers to their children, and the hearts of children to their fathers, means to rebuild relationships between persons. There will be no future of peace unless we make a great effort at rebuilding human relationships in the small nucleus, that is, in the family and in the community. The community is where families meet to preserve and pass on the values that they hold.

Indifference came into the world with the first-born of the first union: Cain who kills Abel (Gen 4:8). This indifference has grown with double vengeance. Cain will be avenged sevenfold, but Lamech seventy times sevenfold (Gen 4:24). Peter wants to undo the error and proposes a reconciliation of seven times (Mt 18:21). But his proposal is weak. It does not go to the root of violence. Jesus goes much further and demands seventy times seven (Mt 18:22). To this day, and especially today, reconciliation is the most urgent task for us, followers of Jesus. It is worthwhile remembering Jesus’ warning: “*That is how My Father will deal with you unless you each forgive the brother from your heart!*” **Seventy times seven!**

6. Prayer: Psalm 62

God our only hope

In God alone there is rest for my soul,
from Him comes my safety;
He alone is my rock, my safety,
my stronghold so that I stand unshaken.
How much longer will you set on a victim,
all together, intent on murder,
like a rampart already leaning over,
a wall already damaged?
Trickery is their only plan,

deception their only pleasure,
with lies on their lips they pronounce a blessing,
with a curse in their hearts.

Rest in God alone, my soul!
He is the source of my hope.
He alone is my rock, my safety, my stronghold,
so that I stand unwavering.
In God is my safety and my glory,
the rock of my strength.
In God is my refuge;
trust in Him, you people, at all times.
Pour out your hearts to Him,
God is a refuge for us.

Ordinary people are a mere puff of wind,
important people a delusion;
set both on the scales together,
and they are lighter than a puff of wind.
Put no trust in extortion,
no empty hopes in robbery;
however much wealth may multiply,
do not set your heart on it.
Once God has spoken,
twice have I heard this:
Strength belongs to God,
to You, Lord, faithful love;
and You repay everyone as their deeds deserve.

7. Final Prayer

Lord Jesus, we thank You for the word that has enabled us to understand better the will of the Father. May Your Spirit enlighten our actions and grant us the strength to practice that which Your Word has revealed to us. May we, like Mary, Your mother, not only listen 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, September 14, 2020

Anyone who believes in Jesus has eternal life.

Opening prayer

Oh Father who wanted to save man
by the Cross of Christ, Your Son,
grant to us who have known on earth
His mystery of love,

to enjoy in Heaven the fruits of His redemption.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.

1. LECTIO

Reading:

Jesus said to Nicodemus:

"No one has gone up to heaven
except the one who has come down from heaven, the
Son of Man.

And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert,
so must the Son of Man be lifted up,
so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal
life."

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son,
so that everyone who believes in him might not perish
but might have eternal life.

For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn
the world,
but that the world might be saved through him.



2. MEDITATIO

a) Key for the reading:

The text for today's Liturgy has been taken from the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. It should not surprise us that the passage chosen for this celebration forms part of the fourth Gospel, because, it is precisely this Gospel which presents the mystery of the cross of the Lord as the exaltation. This is clear from the beginning of the Gospel: "as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so must the Son of man be lifted up" (Jn 3:14; Dan 7:13). John explains the mystery of the Incarnate Word in the paradoxical movement of the descent-ascent (Jn 1:14,18; 3:13). In fact, it is this mystery which offers the key for the reading in order to understand the evolution of the identity and of the mission of the *passus et gloriosus* (suffering and glorious) of Jesus Christ, and that we may well say that this is not only valid for the text of John. The Letter to the Ephesians, for example, uses this paradoxical movement to explain the mystery of Christ: "Now, when it says, 'He went up', it must mean that He had gone down to the deepest levels of the earth" (Eph 4:9).

Jesus is the Son of God who becoming Son of man (Jn 3:13) makes known to us the mysteries of God (Jn 1:18). He alone can do this, in so far as He alone has seen the Father (Jn 6:46). We can say that the mystery of the Word who descends from Heaven responds to the yearning of the prophets: who will go up to heaven to reveal this mystery to us? (cf. Deut 30:12; Prov 30:4). The fourth Gospel is full of references to the mystery of He who "is from Heaven" (1 Cor 15:47). The following are some quotations or references: Jn 6:33, 38,51, 62; 8:42; 16:28-30; 17:5.

The exaltation of Jesus is precisely in His descent to come to us, unto death, and death on the Cross, on which He was lifted up like the serpent in the desert, which,

“anybody... who looked at it would survive” (Num 21:7-9; Zech 12:10). John reminds us in the scene of the death of Jesus Christ being lifted up: “They will look to the one whom they have pierced” (Jn 19:37). In the context of the fourth Gospel, “to turn and look” means “to know,” “to understand,” “to see.”

Frequently, in John’s Gospel, Jesus speaks about His being lifted up: “When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He” (Jn 8:28); “when I am lifted up from the earth, I shall draw all peoples to Myself. By these words He indicated the kind of death He would die” (Jn 12: 32-33). In the synoptics also Jesus announces to His disciples the mystery of His condemnation to death on the cross (see Mt 20:27-29; Mk 10:32-34; Lk 18:31-33). In fact, Christ had “to suffer all that to enter into His glory” (Lk 24:26).

This mystery reveals the great love which God has for us. He is the Son given to us, “so that anyone who believes in Him will not be lost, but will have eternal life,” this Son whom we have rejected and crucified. But precisely in this rejection on our part, God has manifested Himself to us His fidelity and His love which does not stop before the hardness of our heart. And even in spite of our rejection and our contempt He gives us salvation (cf. Acts 4:27-28), remaining firm in fulfilling His plan of mercy: God, in fact, has not sent His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world may be saved through Him.”

b) A few questions:

- i) What struck you in the Gospel?
- ii) What does the exaltation of Christ and of His cross mean for you?
- iii) What consequences does this paradoxical movement of descent-ascent imply in the living out of faith?

3. ORATIO

Psalm 77 (1-2, 34-38)

My people, listen to My teaching,
pay attention to what I say.
I will speak to you in a parable,
unfold the mysteries of the past.

Whenever He slaughtered them,
they began to seek Him;
they turned back and looked eagerly for Him,
recalling that God was their rock,
God the Most High, their redeemer.

They tried to flatter Him with their mouths;
their tongues were deceitful towards Him.
Their hearts were not loyal to Him;
they were not faithful to His covenant.

But in His compassion He forgave their guilt
instead of killing them,

time and again repressing His anger instead of rousing His full wrath.

4. CONTEMPLATIO

"Jesus Christ as Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (Phil 2:11)

Lectio Divina Tuesday, September 15, 2020

Ordinary Time
John 19:25-27

1) Opening prayer

Almighty God,
our creator and guide,
may we serve You with all our hearts
and know Your forgiveness in our lives.

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 19:25-27

Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple there whom he loved he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son." Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his home.

3) Reflection

- Today, feast of Our Sorrowful Mother, the Gospel of the day presents the passage in which Mary, the Mother of Jesus and the Beloved Disciple, meet at Calvary before the Cross. The Mother of Jesus appears two times in the Gospel of John: at the beginning at the wedding feast in Cana (Jn 2:1-5), and at the end, at the foot of the Cross (Jn 19:25-27). These two episodes, only present in John's Gospel, have a very profound value. The Gospel of John, compared to the synoptics, is like an x-ray of the other three, while the other three are only a photograph of what has taken place. The x-rays of faith help us to discover in the events dimensions which the human eye does not perceive. The Gospel of John, besides describing the facts, reveals the symbolical dimension which exists in them. Thus, in both cases, at Cana and at the foot of the Cross, the Mother of Jesus represents symbolically the Old Testament waiting for the New Testament to arrive, and in the two cases, she contributes to the arrival of the New Testament. Mary appears like the step between what existed before and what will arrive afterwards. At Cana she symbolizes the Old Testament; she perceives the limits of the Old Testament and takes the initiative so that the New one may arrive. She tells her Son, "They have no wine!" (Jn 2:3). And on Calvary? Let us see:

- John 19:25: The women and the Beloved Disciple, together at the foot of the Cross. This is what the Gospel says: “Near the cross of Jesus stood His mother and His mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala.” The “photograph” shows the mother together with the Son, standing up, a strong woman, who does not allow herself to be discouraged. “Stabat mater dolorosa!” Hers is a silent presence which supports the Son in His gift of self unto death, death on a cross (Phil 2:8). But the “x-ray” of faith shows how the passage from the Old Testament to the New Testament takes place. As happened in Cana, the Mother of Jesus represents the Old Testament, the new humanity which is formed beginning from the lived experience of the Gospel of the Kingdom. At the end of the first century, some Christians thought that the Old Testament was no longer necessary. In fact, at the beginning of the second century, Marcionites rejected the Old Testament and remained with only a part of the New Testament. This is why many wanted to know what was Jesus’ will regarding this.
- John 19:26-28: The Testament or the Will of Jesus. The words of Jesus are significant. Seeing His Mother, and at her side the beloved disciple, Jesus says, “Woman, this is your son.” Then He says to the disciple, “This is your mother.” The Old and the New Testament must walk together. At the request of Jesus, the beloved disciple, the son, the New Testament, receives the mother in his house. In the house of the Beloved Disciple, in the Christian community, the full sense of the Old Testament is discovered. The New Testament cannot be understood without the Old one, nor is the Old one complete without the New one. Saint Augustine said, “Novum in vetere latet, Vetus in Novo patet.” (The New one is hidden in the Old one. The Old one blooms in the New one). The New one without the Old one would be a building without a foundation. And the Old one without the New one would be like a fruit tree which could not bear fruit.
- Mary in the New Testament. The New Testament speaks very little about Mary, and she says even less. Mary is the mother of silence. The bible only contains seven utterances of Mary. Each one of those is like a window which allows one to see inside Mary’s house and to discover how her relationship with God was. The key to understanding all this is given by Luke: “Blessed are those who receive the word of God and put it into practice” (Lk 11: 27-28).
 - 1st: “How can this come about, since I have no knowledge of man?” (Lk 1:34).
 - 2nd: “You see before you the Lord’s servant; let it happen to me as you have said.” (Lk 1:38).
 - 3rd: “My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my Savior (Lk 1: 46-55).”
 - 4th: “My child, why have You done this to us? Your father and I were worried looking for you” (Lk 2: 48).
 - 5th: “They have no wine!” (Jn 2: 3.)
 - 6th: “Do whatever He tells you!” (Jn 2:5).
 - 7th: The silence at the foot of the Cross, more eloquent than a thousand words! (Jn 19: 25-27).

4) Personal questions

- Mary at the foot of the Cross. A strong and silent woman. What is my devotion to Mary, the Mother of Jesus, like?
- In the Pieta of Michelangelo, Mary seems to be very young, younger than the crucified

Son, yet she must have been about fifty years old. Asked why he had sculptured the face of Mary as a young girl, Michelangelo replied, “People who are passionate for God never age!” Passionate for God! Is that passion for God in me?

5) Concluding Prayer

Yahweh, how abundant is the goodness You have in store
for those who fear You,
and bestow on those who make You their refuge,
for all humanity to see!
Safe in Your presence You hide them,
far from human plotting. (Ps 31:19-20)

Lectio Divina Wednesday, September 16, 2020

1) Opening prayer

Almighty God,
our creator and guide,
may we serve You with all our hearts
and know Your forgiveness in our lives.
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 7:31-35

Jesus said to the crowds: “To what shall I compare the people of this generation? What are they like? They are like children who sit in the marketplace and call to one another, ‘We played the flute for you, but you did not dance. We sang a dirge, but you did not weep.’ For John the Baptist came neither eating food nor drinking wine, and you said, ‘He is possessed by a demon.’ The Son of Man came eating and drinking and you said, ‘Look, he is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.’ But wisdom is vindicated by all her children.”

3) Reflection

- In today’s Gospel we see the originality of the Good News which opens the way for people who are attached to ancient forms of faith who feel lost and do not understand anything more of God’s action. In order to hide their lack of openness and of understanding they defend and seek childish pretexts to justify their attitude of lack of acceptance. Jesus reacts with a parable to denounce the confusion of His enemies: “You are similar to children who do not know what they want”.
- Luke 7:31: *To whom, then, shall I compare you?* Jesus is struck by the reaction of the people and say: “What comparison, then, can I find for the people of this generation? What are they like?” When something is evident and the persons, out of ignorance or because of bad will, do not perceive things and do not want to perceive them, it is good to find an evident comparison which will reveal their incoherence and the ill will. And

Jesus is a Master in finding comparisons which speak for themselves.

- Luke 7:32: *Like children without judgment.* The comparison which Jesus finds is this one. You are like “those children, shouting to one another while they sit in the market place: we played the pipes for you, and you would not dance; we sang dirges and you would not cry!” Spoiled children, all over the world, have the same reaction. They complain when others do not do and act as they say. The reason for Jesus’ complaint is the arbitrary way with which people in the past reacted before John the Baptist and how they react now before Jesus.

- Luke 7:33-34: *Their opinion on John and on Jesus.* “For John the Baptist has come, not eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say: he is possessed. The Son of man has come eating and drinking, and you say: look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners”. Jesus was a disciple of John the Baptist; He believed in him and was baptized by him. On the occasion of this Baptism in the Jordan, He had the revelation of the Father regarding His mission as Messiah-Servant (Mk 1:10). At the same time, Jesus stressed the difference between Him and John. John was more severe, more ascetical, did not eat nor drink. He remained in the desert and threatened the people with the punishment of the Last Judgment (Lk 3:7-9). Because of this, people said that he was possessed. Jesus was more welcoming; He ate and drank like everybody else. He went through the towns and entered the houses of the people; He accepted the tax collectors and the prostitutes. This is why they said that He was a glutton and a drunkard. Even considering His words regarding “the men of this generation” (Lk 7:31), in a general way, probably, Jesus had in mind the opinion of the religious authority who did not believe in Jesus (Mk 11:29-33).

- Luke 7:35: *The obvious conclusion to which Jesus arrives.* And Jesus ends drawing this conclusion: “Yet, wisdom is justified by all her children”. The lack of seriousness and of coherence is clearly seen in the opinion given on Jesus and on John. The bad will is so evident that it needs no proof. That recalls the response of Job to his friends who believe that they are wise: “Will no one teach you to be quiet! - the only wisdom that becomes you!” (Job 13:5).

4) Personal questions

- When I express my opinion on others, am I like the Pharisees and the scribes who gave their opinion on Jesus and John? They expressed only their preconceptions and said nothing on the persons whom they judged.
- Do you know any groups in the Church who would merit the parable of Jesus?

5) Concluding Prayer

How blessed the nation whose God is Yahweh,
the people He has chosen as His heritage.
From heaven Yahweh looks down,
He sees all the children of Adam. (Ps 33,12-13)

Lectio Divina Thursday, September 17, 2020

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Almighty God,
our creator and guide,
may we serve You with all our hearts
and know Your forgiveness in our lives.
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 7:36-50

A certain Pharisee invited Jesus to dine with him, and he entered the Pharisee's house and reclined at table. Now there was a sinful woman in the city who learned that he was at table in the house of the Pharisee. Bringing an alabaster flask of ointment, she stood behind him at his feet weeping and began to bathe his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them, and anointed them with the ointment. When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, that she is a sinner." Jesus said to him in reply, "Simon, I have something to say to you." "Tell me, teacher," he said. "Two people were in debt to a certain creditor; one owed five hundred days' wages and the other owed fifty. Since they were unable to repay the debt, he forgave it for both. Which of them will love him more?" Simon said in reply, "The one, I suppose, whose larger debt was forgiven." He said to him, "You have judged rightly." Then he turned to the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? When I entered your house, you did not give me water for my feet, but she has bathed them with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but she has not ceased kissing my feet since the time I entered. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she anointed my feet with ointment. So I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven; hence, she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little." He said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." The others at table said to themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" But he said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

3) Reflection

- Today's Gospel presents the episode of the woman with the perfume who was accepted by Jesus during a feast in house of Simon the Pharisee. One of the aspects of the novelty of the Good News of Jesus is the surprising attitude of Jesus toward women. At the time of the New Testament women lived marginalized. In the Synagogue they could not participate in the public life and they could not be witnesses. Many women, though, resisted this exclusion. From the time of Ezra, the marginalization of women had been increasing on the part of the religious authority (Ezr 9:1 to 10:44), and the resistance of women against their exclusion, also increased, as we can see in the stories of Judith, Esther, Ruth, Noemi, Suzanne, and the Sulamite and others. This resistance

found echo and acceptance in Jesus. In the episode of the woman with the perfume there is inconformity which springs up and the resistance of the women in the life of every day and the acceptance of Jesus.

- Luke 7:36-38: The situation which breaks out the debate. Three completely different persons meet with one another: Jesus, Simon, the Pharisee, a practicing Jew, and the woman, whom they said that she was a sinner. Jesus is in the house of Simon who has invited Him to dinner with him. The woman enters, and she places herself at the feet of Jesus, and begins to cry, bathing Jesus' feet with her tears, and dries them with her loose hair. She kisses His feet and anoints them with perfume. To get the hair loose in public was a gesture of independence. Jesus does not draw back, nor does He send the woman away, rather He accepts her gesture.

- Luke 7:39-40: The reaction of the Pharisee and the response of Jesus. Jesus was accepting a person, who, according to the custom of the time, could not be accepted, because she was a sinner. The Pharisee, observing everything, criticizes Jesus and condemns the woman: "If this man were a prophet, He would know who this woman is and what sort of person it is who is touching Him and what a bad name she has". Jesus uses a parable to respond to the provocation of the Pharisee.

- Luke 7:41-43: The parable of the two debtors. One owed 500 denarii, the other 50. Neither one was able to pay, both of them were forgiven. Which of them will love their master more? Response of the Pharisee: "The one who was let off more, I suppose!" The parable presupposes that both, the Pharisee and the woman, had received some favor from Jesus. By the attitude that both take before Jesus they indicate how much they appreciate the favor received. The Pharisee shows his love, his gratitude, by inviting Jesus to eat with him. The woman shows her love, her gratitude, by her tears, the kisses and the perfume.

- Luke 7:44-47: The message of Jesus for the Pharisee. After having received the response of the Pharisee, Jesus applies the parable. Even if He was in the house of the Pharisee, invited by him, Jesus does not lose the freedom to speak and to act. He defends the woman against the criticism of the practicing Jew. The message of Jesus for the Pharisees of all times is this one: "The one who is forgiven little, loves little!" A Pharisee thinks that he is not a sinner because he observes the law in everything. The personal assurance that I, a Pharisee, create for myself many times, in the observance of the Law of God and of the Church, prevents me from experiencing the gratuity of the love of God. What is important is not the observance of the law in itself, but the love with which I observe the law. And using the symbols of the love of the woman, Jesus responds to the Pharisee who considered himself to be in peace with God: "you poured no water over My feet; you gave Me no kiss, you did not anoint My head with perfumed oil! Simon, in spite of the banquet that you have offered Me, you have loved very little!"

- Luke 7:48-50: The word of Jesus to the woman. Jesus declares that the woman is forgiven and then adds: "Your faith has saved you, go in peace!" Here we have the novelty of the attitude of Jesus. He does not condemn but He accepts. It is faith which helps the woman to encounter herself and to encounter God. In the relationship with Jesus, a new force springs up in her and makes her be born again.

4) Personal questions

- Where, when, and how are women despised or rejected by the Pharisee of today?
- The woman certainly would not have done what she did if she was not absolutely certain that Jesus would accept her. Do the marginalized and migrant persons have the same certainty today?

5) Concluding Prayer

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

Lectio Divina Friday, September 18, 2020

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Almighty God,
our creator and guide,
may we serve You with all our hearts
and know Your forgiveness in our lives.
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 8:1-3

Jesus journeyed from one town and village to another, preaching and proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom of God. Accompanying him were the Twelve and some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward Chuza, Susanna, and many others who provided for them out of their resources.

3) Reflection

- In today's Gospel we have the continuation of yesterday's episode which spoke of the surprising attitude of Jesus with regard to women, when He defends the woman who was known in the town as a sinner, against the criticism of the Pharisee. Now at the beginning of chapter 8, Luke describes Jesus who goes through the villages and towns of Galilee, and the novelty is that He was not only accompanied by the disciples, but also by the women disciples.
- Luke 8:1: The Twelve who follow Jesus. In one phrase alone, Luke describes the situation: Jesus goes through towns and villages preaching and proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom of God and the Twelve are with Him. The expression "to follow Jesus" (cf. Mk 1:18; 15:41) indicates the condition of the disciple who follows the Master, twenty-four hours a day, trying to imitate His example and to participate in His destiny.

- Luke 8:2-3: The women follow Jesus. What surprises is that along with the men there are also women “together with Jesus”. Luke places both the men and the women disciples at the same level because all of them follow Jesus. Luke has also kept some of the names of some of these women disciples: Mary Magdalene, born in the town of Magdala. She had been cured and delivered from seven demons; Joanna, the wife of Chuza, steward of Herod Antipas, who was Governor of Galilee; Suzanne and several others. It is said that they “served Jesus with their own goods” Jesus allows a group of women “to follow” Him (Lk 8:2-3; 23:49; Mk 15:41). The Gospel of Mark when speaking about the women at the moment of Jesus’ death says, “There were some women who were observing at a distance and among them Mary of Magdala, Mary, the mother of James the younger and Joses, and Salome, who followed Him and served Him when he was still in Galilee, and many others who had gone up with Him to Jerusalem (Mk 15:40-41). Mark defines their attitude with three words: to follow, to serve, to go up to Jerusalem. The first Christians did not draw up a list of these women disciples who followed Jesus as they had done with the twelve disciples. But, in the pages of the Gospel of Luke the name of seven of these women disciples are mentioned: Mary Magdalene, Joanna, wife of Chuza, Suzanne (Lk 8:3), Martha and Mary (Lk 10:38), Mary, the mother of James (Lk 24:10) and Anna, the prophetess (Lk 2:36), who was eighty-four years old. Number eighty-four is seven times twelve: the perfect age! The later Ecclesiastical tradition does not value this fact about the discipleship of women with the same importance with which it values the following of Jesus on the part of men. It is also important to remember that women held a particular discipleship apart from the men chosen by Jesus for the Twelve.

The Gospel of Luke has always been considered as the Gospel of women. In fact, Luke is the Evangelist who presents the largest number of episodes in which he underlines the relationship of Jesus with the women, and the novelty is not only in the presence of the women around Jesus, but also and, above all, in the attitude of Jesus in relation to them. Jesus touches them and allows them to touch Him without fear of being contaminated (Lk 7:39; 8:44-45,54). This was different from the teachers of that time, Jesus accepts women who follow Him and who are His disciples (Lk 8:2-3; 10: 39). The liberating force of God, which acts in Jesus, allows women to rise and to assume their dignity (Lk 13:13). Jesus is sensitive to the suffering of the widow and is in solidarity with her sorrow (Lk 7:13). The work of the woman who prepares the meal is considered by Jesus like a sign of the Kingdom (Lk 13:20-21). The insistent widow who struggles for her rights is considered the model of prayer (Lk 18:1-8), and the poor widow who shares the little that she has with others is the model of dedication and donation (Lk 21:1-4). At a time when the witness of women is not accepted as something valid, Jesus accepts women and considers them witnesses of His death (Lk 23:49), of His burial (Lk 22:55-56) and of His resurrection (Lk 24:1-11, 22-24).

4) Personal questions

- How are women considered in your community, in your country, in your Church?
- Does this consider the unique gifts each gender is given, or does it treat each as just a "plug-in-replacement" for the other?
- Compare the attitude of our Church with the attitude of Jesus, but not in a superficial or politically motivated way.

5) Concluding Prayer

God, examine me and know my heart,
test me and know my concerns.
Make sure that I am not on my way to ruin,
and guide me on the road of eternity. (Ps 139:23-24)

Lectio Divina Saturday, September 19, 2020

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Almighty God,
our creator and guide,
may we serve You with all our hearts
and know Your forgiveness in our lives.
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 8:4-15

When a large crowd gathered, with people from one town after another journeying to Jesus, he spoke in a parable. "A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path and was trampled, and the birds of the sky ate it up. Some seed fell on rocky ground, and when it grew, it withered for lack of moisture. Some seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew with it and choked it. And some seed fell on good soil, and when it grew, it produced fruit a hundredfold." After saying this, he called out, "Whoever has ears to hear ought to hear." Then his disciples asked him what the meaning of this parable might be. He answered, "Knowledge of the mysteries of the Kingdom of God has been granted to you; but to the rest, they are made known through parables so that they may look but not see, and hear but not understand. "This is the meaning of the parable. The seed is the word of God. Those on the path are the ones who have heard, but the Devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts that they may not believe and be saved. Those on rocky ground are the ones who, when they hear, receive the word with joy, but they have no root; they believe only for a time and fall away in time of temptation. As for the seed that fell among thorns, they are the ones who have heard, but as they go along, they are choked by the anxieties and riches and pleasures of life, and they fail to produce mature fruit. But as for the seed that fell on rich soil, they are the ones who, when they have heard the word, embrace it with a generous and good heart, and bear fruit through perseverance."

3) Reflection

- In today's Gospel, we will meditate on the parable of the seed. Jesus had a very popular word to teach by means of parables. A parable is a comparison which uses the visible things of life that are known to explain the invisible and unknown things of the Kingdom

of God. Jesus had an enormous capacity to find very simple images to compare the things of God with the things of life which people knew and experienced in their daily struggle to survive. This presupposes two things: to be within the things of life, and to be within the things of God, of the Kingdom of God. For example, the people of Galilee understood all about seeds, of land, of rain, of the sun, of salt of flowers, of the harvest, of fishing, etc. Now, there are exactly these known things that Jesus uses in the parables to explain the mystery of the Kingdom. The farmer who listens says: “The seed in the ground, I know what this means. Jesus says that this has something to do with the Kingdom of God. What could this ever be?” It is possible to imagine the long conversations with the people! The parable enters into the heart of the people and urges them to listen to nature and to think about life.

- When He finishes telling the parable, Jesus does not explain it, but He usually says: “Who has ears to hear, let him hear” This means: “This is: you have heard and so now try to understand!” From time to time He would explain to the disciples: People like this way of teaching, because Jesus believed in the personal capacity to discover the sense of the parables. The experience which people had of life was for Him a means to discover the presence of the mystery of God in their life and to have courage not to be discouraged along the way.

- Luke 8:4: The crowds follow Jesus. Luke says: a large crowd got around Him and people from all the towns ran to Him from all the towns. So then He tells them this parable. Mark describes how Jesus told the parable. There were so many people that He, in order not to fall, went into a boat and sitting down He taught the people who were on the seashore (Mk 4:1).

- Luke 8:5-8: The parable of the seed is a mirror of the life of the farmers. At that time, it was not easy to live from agriculture. The ground was full of rocks; there was little rain, and much sun. Besides, many times, people, to shorten the way, passed through the fields and stepped on the plants (Mk 2:23). But in spite of that, every year the farmer sowed and planted, trusting in the force of the seed, in the generosity of nature.

- Luke 8:8b: Anyone who has ears to hear let him hear! At the end, Jesus says: “Anyone who has ears to hear, let him hear!” The way to be able to understand the parable is to search: “Try to understand!” The parable does not say everything immediately, but moves the person to think. It does it in such a way that the person discovers the message beginning from the experience which the person has of the seed. It urges the person to be creative and to participate. It is not a doctrine which is presented ready to be taught and decorated. The parable is not water in a bottle, it is the source.

- Luke 8:9-10: Jesus explains the parable to the disciples. At home, alone with Jesus, the disciples want to know the meaning of the parable. Jesus responds by means of a difficult and mysterious phrase. He says to the Disciples: “To you is granted to understand the secrets of the Kingdom of God, for the rest it remains in parables so that “they may look but not perceive, listen but not understand”. This phrase gives rise to a question in the heart of the people: What is the purpose of a parable? Is it to clarify or to hide things? Did Jesus uses the parables in order that people continue in their ignorance and would not convert themselves? Certainly not! In another place it is said that Jesus used the parables “according to what they could understand” (Mk 4:33). The parable reveals and hides at the same time” It reveals for those who are “inside, within” who accept Jesus Messiah Servant. It hides for those who insist in seeing in Him the

Messiah the glorious King. These understand the images of the parable, but do not understand its meaning.

- Luke 8:11-15: The explanation of the parable, in its diverse parts. One by one, Jesus explains the parts of the parable, the seed, and the earth up to the harvest time. Some scholars think that this explanation was added afterwards; that it would not be from Jesus, but from one of the communities. This is possible! It does not matter! Because in the bud of the parable there is the flower of the explanation. Buds and flowers, both of them have the same origin, that is, Jesus. This is why we also can continue to reflect and to discover other beautiful things in the parable. Once, a person in a community asked: “Jesus says that we have to be salt. For what does salt serve?” The people gave their opinion starting from the experience which each one had regarding salt! And they applied all this to the life of the community and discovered that to be salt is difficult and demanding. The parable functioned well! The same thing can be applied to the seeds. All have a certain experience.

4) Personal questions

- The seed falls in four different places: on the road side, among the rocks, among the thorns and in the good earth. What does each one of these four places mean? What type of earth am I? Sometimes, people are rock; other times thistles; other roadside, other times good ground. Normally, what are we in our community?
- What are the fruits which the Word of God is producing in our life and in our community?

5) Concluding Prayer

Your kingship is a kingship for ever,
Your reign lasts from age to age.
Yahweh is trustworthy in all His words,
and upright in all His deeds. (Ps 145:12-13)

Lectio Divina Sunday, September 20, 2020

Parable of the laborers sent to the vineyard
The absolute gratuitousness of the love of God
Matthew 20: 1-16

1. Opening prayer

Oh Father, Your Son Jesus, whom You have given to us, is our kingdom, our richness, our Heaven; He is the Master of the house and of the earth in which we live and He goes out continuously to search for us, because He desires to call us, to pronounce our name, to offer us His infinite love. We will never be able to pay Him back, never repay the superabundance of His compassion and mercy for us; we can only tell Him our Yes, ours: “Here I am, I come”, or repeat with Isaiah: “Here I am Lord, send me!”. Lord, allow this word to enter into my heart, in my eyes, into my ears and that it changes me, transforms me, according to this surprising incomprehensible love that Jesus is offering

me today also, even at this moment. Lead me to the last place, to mine, that which He has prepared for me, there where I can truly and fully be myself. Amen.

2. Reading

a) To insert the passage in its context:

This passage places us within the section of the Gospel of Matthew, which directly precedes the account of the Passion, death and Resurrection of Jesus. This section begins in 19:1, where it is said that Jesus definitively leaves the territory of Galilee to go to Judea, beginning in this way the path to get close to Jerusalem and this is concluded in 25:46, with the account on the coming and the judgment of the Son of God. In particular, chapter 20 places us also along the road of Jesus towards the holy city and its temple, in a context of teaching and of polemics with the wise and the powerful of the time, which He carries out through parables and encounters.

b) To help in the reading of the passage:

20, 1a: with the first words of the parable, which are a formula of introduction, Jesus wants to accompany us into the most profound theme about which He intends to speak. He wants to open before us the doors of the kingdom, which is He himself, and He presents Himself as the Master of the vineyard, which needs to be cultivated.

20, 1b-7: These verses constitute the first part of the parable; in it Jesus tells about the initiative of the Master of the vineyard to employ the laborers, describing the four times he went out to look for laborers, in which he establishes a contract and the last time he goes out is at the end of the day.

29, 8-15: This second part includes, instead, the description of the payment to the workers, with the protest of the first one and the Master's answer.

20, 16: At the end is given the conclusive sentence, which is included with 19: 30 and which reveals the key of the passage and the its application: those who in the community are considered the last ones, in the perspective of the Kingdom and of God's judgment, will be the first ones.

c) Text:

20, 1°: 1 'Now the kingdom of Heaven is like a landowner

20, 1b-7: going out at daybreak to hire workers for his vineyard. 2 He made an agreement with the workers for one denarius a day and sent them to his vineyard. 3 Going out at about the third hour he saw others standing idle in the market place 4 and said to them, "You go to my vineyard too and I will give you a fair wage." 5 So they went. At about the sixth hour and again at about the ninth hour, he went out and did the same. 6 Then at about the eleventh hour he went out and found more men standing around, and he said to them, "Why have you been standing here idle all day?" 7 "Because no one has hired us," they answered. He said to them,



"You go into my vineyard too."

20, 8-15: 8 In the evening, the owner of the vineyard said to his bailiff, "Call the workers and pay them their wages, starting with the last arrivals and ending with the first." 9 So those who were hired at about the eleventh hour came forward and received one denarius each. 10 When the first came, they expected to get more, but they too received one denarius each. 11 They took it, but grumbled at the landowner saying, 12 "The men who came last have done only one hour, and you have treated them the same as us, though we have done a heavy day's work in all the heat." 13 He answered one of them and said, "My friend, I am not being unjust to you; did we not agree on one denarius? 14 Take your earnings and go. I choose to pay the latecomer as much as I pay you. 15 Have I no right to do what I like with my own? Why should you be envious because I am generous?"

20: 16: 16 Thus the last will be first, and the first, last.'

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) The passage opens with a connecting particle, "*in fact*", which is very important, because it sends us to the preceding verse (Mt 19:30), where Jesus affirms that "the first will be the last and the last the first", with the same words that He will repeat at the end of this parable. Therefore, these are words of utmost importance, fundamental, which indicate to me the direction which I should take. Jesus is the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of Heaven; He is the new world, into which I am invited to enter. But His is an overturned world, where our logic of power, gain, reward, ability, effort, is defeated and replaced by another logic, that of absolute gratuitousness, of merciful and superabundant love. If I think that I am first, that I am strong and capable; if I have already placed myself in the first place at the table of the Lord, it is better that now I rise and go and take the last place. There the Lord will come to look for me and, calling me, He will raise me and take me towards Him.

b). Here, Jesus compares Himself to a *landowner, the Master of the house*, using a particular figure, which He repeats several times in the Gospel. I try to follow it, being attentive to the characteristics which it presents and trying to verify which is my relationship with Him. The Master of the house is the owner of the vineyard, who takes care of it, surrounding it by a wall, digging a press there, cultivating it with love and labor (Mt 21: 33 ff.), so that it can bear a better fruit. It is the Master of the house who offers a great supper, and invites many, calling to his table the most forlorn or forsaken, the cripple and the lame, the blind (Lk 14: 21ff). And the one who returns from the wedding and for whom we have to wait keeping watch, because we do not know the hour (Lk 12:36); is the Master of the house who left on a trip, who has ordered us to keep watch, so as to be ready to open the door for him, as soon as he returns and knocks, in the evening, or at midnight, or at the rooster's crow, or in the morning (Mk 13:35). I understand then, that the Lord expects the good fruit from me; that He has chosen me as a guest to His table; that He will return and look for me and will knock at my door...

Am I ready to respond to Him, to open the door for Him? To offer to Him the fruit of the love which He expects from me? Or rather, am I sleeping, weighed down by a thousand other interests, enslaved by other masters of the house, diverse and far away from Him?

c) The Lord Jesus, the Master of the house and of the vineyard, repeatedly goes out to call and to send; at dawn, at nine o'clock, at noon, at three o'clock in the afternoon, at five, when the day is almost ended. He does not get tired. He comes to look for me, to offer me His love, His presence, to seal a pact with me. He desires to offer me His vineyard, its beauty. When we do meet, when He, looking at me fixedly, will love me (Mk 10:21), What will I answer? Will I be sad because I have many other goods belonging to me (Lk 18:23)? Will I ask Him to consider me justified, because I have already taken on other commitments? (Lk 14:18?). Will I flee, naked, losing also that small cloth of happiness that has remained in order to cover myself (Mk 14:52)? Or, rather, will I say, "Yes, yes", and then I will not go (Mt 21: 29)? I feel that this word causes me to be in crisis, it peers into the depth of myself, it reveals to me who I am ... I remain dismayed, fearful for my freedom, but I decide, before the Lord who is speaking to me, to do as Mary did and also say, "Lord, may it be done to me according to Your word", with humble availability and abandonment.

d) Now the Gospel places me before my relationship with others, the brothers and sisters who share with me the journey of following Jesus. We are all convoked to Him, in the evening, after the work of the day: He opens His treasure of love and begins to distribute it, to give grace, mercy, compassion, friendship, himself totally. He does not stop. The Lord continues only to overflow, to pour out, to give Himself to us, to each one. Matthew points out, at this point, that someone murmurs against the Master of the vineyard, against the Lord. Indignation springs up because He treats everyone equally, with the same intensity of love, with the same superabundance. Perhaps what is written in these lines also applies to me: the Gospel knows how to bring out and make evident my heart as it is, the most hidden part of myself. Perhaps the Lord is, precisely, addressing these words filled with sadness: "*Perhaps you are jealous?*" I should allow myself to be questioned. I have to allow Him to enter within me and to look at me with His penetrating eyes, because only if He looks at me, I will be able to be healed. Now I pray as follows: "Lord, I ask You, come to me, put Your word in my heart and let new life germinate, let love germinate".

5. A key for the reading

The Vineyard

In the image of the vineyard, apparently very simple and ordinary, Scripture condenses a very rich and profound reality, always more dense in significance, gradually as the texts get closer to the full revelation of Jesus. In the first book of Kings, chapter 21, we read of the violent attack against Naboth, a simple subject of the corrupt King Ahab, who possessed a vineyard, planted, unfortunately, precisely next the to palace of the King. This account makes us understand how important the vineyard was, an inviolable property: Naboth would not have given it up for anything in the world, as he says, "Yahweh forbid that I should give you my ancestral heritage!" (I Kings 21:3). Out of

love for it, he lost his life. Therefore, the vineyard represents the most precious good, the family heritage, in a certain part, the identity itself of the person; he cannot sell it, cede it to others, barter or trade it for other goods, which would never equal it. It hides a vital, spiritual force.

Isaiah 5 tells us clearly that the vineyard signifies the people of Israel, as it is written: “Now, the vineyard of Yahweh Sabaoth is the House of Israel; and the people of Judah the plant He cherished” (Isa 5: 7). The Lord has loved these people with an infinite and eternal love, sealed by an inviolable covenant; He takes care of it, just as a vine-dresser would do with his vineyard, doing everything possible so that it can bear more beautiful fruit. Each one of us is Israel, the whole Church: the Father has found us as dry, arid land, devastated, filled with rocks, and He has cultivated it, He has dug around it, fertilized it, watered it always; He has planted us as a chosen vineyard, all with genuine vines (Jer 2:21). What more could He have done for us, which He has not done? (Isa 5:4). In His infinite lowering, the Lord has become vineyard Himself; He has become the true Vine (Jn 15:1ff), of which we are the branches; He united Himself to us, just as the vine is united to its branches. The Father, who is the vine-dresser, continues His work of love in us, so that we may bear fruit and He waits patiently. He prunes, He cultivates, but then He sends us to work, to collect the fruits to offer to Him. We are sent to His people, to His sons, as sons that we are ourselves, as His disciples; we cannot draw back, refuse, because we have been created for this: that we may go and bear fruit and that our fruit may remain (Jn 15:16). Lord, turn to us; look down from Heaven and visit Your vineyard (Psalm 79:15).

The promise: one denarius

The Master of the vineyard establishes as the payment for the work of the day a denarius; a good sum, which allowed one to live with dignity. More or less it corresponds to the drachma agreed upon by the old Tobit with the one who accompanied his son Tobias towards the Media (Tob 5:15).

But in the evangelical account this denarius is immediately called by another name. The Master, in fact, says, “that which is just I will give you” (v4). Our inheritance, our salary is what is just, what is good: the Lord Jesus. He, in fact, does not give, does not promise other than Himself. Our reward is in Heaven (Mt 5:12), with our Father (Mt 6:1). It is not the money, the denarius which was used to pay the tax per-capita to the Romans, on which was the image and the inscription of King Tiberius Caesar (Mt 22: 20), but which is the face of Jesus, His name, His presence. He tells us, “I am with you not only today, but all days, until the end of the world. I myself will be your reward”.

The sending out

The text offers to our life a very strong energy, which springs from the verbs “*to send, to order to go*”, repeated twice. Both concern us; they touch us deeply; they call us and put us in movement. It is the Lord Jesus who sends us, making of us His disciples: “Behold, I send you” (Mt 10:16). He calls us every day for his mission and repeats to us, “Go!” and our happiness is hidden precisely here, in the realization of this Word of His. Also where He sends us, in the way in which He indicates it, towards the reality and the persons whom He places before us.

The murmuring, the grumbling

These are words of utmost importance, true and very much present in our experience of daily life. We cannot deny this: they dwell in our heart, in our thoughts, sometimes they torment us, disfigure us, get us terribly tired, drive us away from ourselves, from others, from the Lord. Yes, we are also among those workers who complain and grumble, murmuring against the Master. The rumor of the murmuring comes from very far away, but it joins us and enters our heart. Israel in the desert murmured heavily against its Lord and we have received as inheritance those thoughts, those words: “The Lord hates us, that is why he brought us out of the land of Egypt to hand us over to the Amorites and to destroy us” (Deut 1:27) and we doubt His capacity to nourish us, to lead us ahead, to protect us: “Can God make a banquet in the desert?” (Ps 78:19). To murmur means not to listen to the voice of the Lord, not to believe anymore in His love for us: Therefore, we become scandalized, upset, strongly against the merciful Lord and we get angry against His way of acting and we wish to change it, to make it smaller according to our own schema: He went to the house of a sinner! He eats and drinks with tax collectors, with sinners!” (Lk 5:30; 15:2; 19:7). If we listen well this is the secret murmuring of our heart. How to heal it? Saint Peter suggests this way: “Practice hospitality with one another, without murmuring” (I Pet 4: 9); only hospitality, that is, acceptance can, little by little, change our heart and open it to be receptive, capable of bearing within it persons, situations, the reality which we find in life. “Accept one another” says Scripture. And it is precisely like that: we have to learn to accept, above all, the Lord Jesus, as He is, with His way of loving and of remaining, of speaking with us and of changing us, of waiting for us and of attracting us. To accept Him is to accept the one who is at our side, who comes to meet us; it is only this movement which can overcome the harshness of murmuring.

Murmuring is born from jealousy, from envy, from our evil eye, as the Master of the vineyard says, Jesus Himself. He knows how to keep us inside. He knows how to penetrate our look and reach our heart, in the spirit. He knows how we are, He knows us, loves us; And it is out of love that He brings out of us the evil within, takes off the veil from our evil eye. He helps us to become aware or conscious of how we are, of what is within us. At the moment when He says, “Perhaps your eye is evil?” as He is doing today in this Gospel, He heals us, He takes the balm and spreads it, takes the clay made with his saliva and puts it on our eyes, to the very depth.

6. A moment of prayer: Psalm 135

Refrain: Your love for us is infinite!

Alleluia! Give thanks to Yahweh for He is good,
for His faithful love endures for ever.
Give thanks to the God of gods,
for His faithful love endures for ever.
Give thanks to the Lord of lords,
for His faithful love endures for ever.
He alone works wonders,
for His faithful love endures for ever.

He struck down the first-born of Egypt,
for His faithful love endures for ever.
He brought Israel out from among them,
for His faithful love endures for ever.
With mighty hand and outstretched arm,
for His faithful love endures for ever.
He split the Sea of Reeds in two,
for His faithful love endures for ever.
Let Israel pass through the middle,
for His faithful love endures for ever.
And drowned Pharaoh and all his army,
for His faithful love endures for ever.
He led His people through the desert,
for His faithful love endures for ever.

He kept us in mind when we were humbled,
for His faithful love endures for ever.
And rescued us from our enemies,
for His faithful love endures for ever.
He provides food for all living creatures,
for His faithful love endures for ever.
Give thanks to the God of heaven,
for His faithful love endures for ever.

7. Final Prayer

Thank you, O Father, for having revealed Your Son to me and for having made me enter into His inheritance, in His vineyard. You have rendered me a branch, have rendered me a grape: now I only need to remain in Him, in You and allow myself to be taken as good fruit, ripe, to be placed in the press. Yes, Lord, I know it: this is the way, I am not afraid, because You are with me. I know that the only way to happiness is the gift of self to You, the gift to the brothers. That I may be a branch, that I may be good grapes, to be squeezed, as You wish! Amen.

Lectio Divina Monday, September 21, 2020

St. Matthew, the Evangelist
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 9:9-13

As Jesus passed by, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the customs post. He said to him, "Follow me." And he got up and followed him. While he was at table in his house, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat with Jesus and his disciples. The Pharisees saw this and said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" He heard this and said, "Those who are well do not need a physician, but the sick do. Go and learn the meaning of the words, I desire mercy, not sacrifice. I did not come to call the righteous but sinners."

3) Reflection

- The Sermon on the Mountain takes chapters 5, 6 and 7 of the Gospel of Matthew. The purpose of the narrative part of chapters 8 and 9 is to show how Jesus put into practice what He had just taught. In the Sermon on the Mountain, He teaches acceptance (Mt 5:23-25. 38-42.43). Now He puts it into practice accepting the lepers (Mt 8:1-4), the foreigners (Mt 8:5-13), the women (Mt 8:14-15), the sick (Mt 8:16-17), the possessed (Mt 8:28-34), the paralytics (Mt 9:1-8), the tax collectors (Mt 9:9-13), the unclean persons (Mt 9:20-22), etc. Jesus breaks the norms and the customs which excluded and divided persons, that is with the fear and the lack of faith (Mt 8:23-27) the laws on purity (9:14-17), and He clearly says which are the requirements for those who want to follow Him. They should have the courage to abandon many things (Mt 8:18-22). In the same way in the attitudes and in the practice of Jesus we see in what the Kingdom and the perfect observance of the Law of God consists.
- Matthew 9:9: The call to follow Jesus. The first people called to follow Jesus are four fishermen, all Jewish (Mt 4:18-22). Now Jesus calls a tax collector, considered a sinner and treated as an unclean person by the community of the most observant of the Pharisees. In the other Gospels, this tax collector is called Levi. Here, his name is Matthew, which means gift of God or given by God. The communities, instead of excluding the tax collector and of considering him unclean, should consider him a Gift of God for the community, because his presence makes the community become a sign of salvation for all! Like the first four who were called, in the same way also Matthew, the tax collector, leaves everything that he has and follows Jesus. The following of Jesus requires breaking away from many things. Matthew leaves the tax office, his source of revenue and follows Jesus!
- Matthew 9:10: Jesus sits at table with sinners and tax collectors. At that time the Jews lived separated from the tax collectors and sinners and they did not eat with them at the same table. The Christian Jews should break away from this isolation and sit at table with the tax collectors and with the unclean, according to the teaching given by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mountain, the expression of the universal love of God the Father (Mt 5:44-48). The mission of the communities was that of offering a place to those who did not have it. But this new law was not accepted by all. In some communities, persons coming from paganism, even if they were Christians, were not accepted around the same table (cf. Ac 10:28; 11:3; Ga 2:12). The text of today's Gospel shows us Jesus who sits at table with tax collectors and sinners in the same house, around the same table.

- Matthew 9:11: The question of the Pharisees. Jews were forbidden to sit at table with the tax collectors and with sinners, but Jesus does not follow this prohibition. Rather He becomes a friend to them. The Pharisees seeing the attitude of Jesus, ask the disciples: “Why does your master eat with tax collectors and sinners?” This question may be interpreted as an expression of their desire to know why Jesus acts in that way. Others interpret the question like a criticism of Jesus’ behavior, because for over five hundred years, from the time of the slavery in Babylon until the time of Jesus, the Jews had observed the laws of purity. This secular observance became a strong sign of identity. At the same time it was a factor of their separation in the midst of other peoples. Thus, because of the laws on purity, they could not nor did they succeed to sit around the same table to eat with tax collectors. To eat with tax collectors meant to get contaminated, to become unclean. The precepts of legal purity were rigorously observed, in Palestine as well as in the Jewish communities of the Diaspora. At the time of Jesus, there were more than five hundred precepts to keep purity. In the years 70’s, at the time when Matthew wrote, this conflict was very actual.
- Matthew 9:12-13: “Mercy is what pleases me, not sacrifice. Jesus hears the question of the Pharisees to the disciples and He answers with two clarifications: the first one is taken from common sense: “It is not the healthy who need the doctor, but the sick”. The second one is taken from the Bible: “Go and learn the meaning of the words: Mercy is what pleases Me, not sacrifice”. Through these clarifications, Jesus makes explicit and clarifies His mission among the people: “I have not come to call the upright but sinners”. Jesus denies the criticism of the Pharisees; He does not accept their arguments, because they came from a false idea of the Law of God. He Himself invokes the Bible: “Mercy is what pleases Me, not sacrifice”. For Jesus, mercy is more important than legal purity. He refers to the prophetic tradition to say that mercy has greater value for God than all sacrifices (Ho 6:6; Is 1:10-17). God has profound mercy, and is moved before the failures of His people (Ho 11:8-9).

4) Personal questions

- Today, in our society, who is marginalized and excluded? Why? In our community, do we have preconceptions or prejudices? Which? Which is the challenge which the words of Jesus present to our community?
- Jesus asks the people to read and to understand the Old Testament which says: “Mercy is what pleases Me and not sacrifice”. What does Jesus want to tell us with this today?

5) Concluding Prayer

Blessed are those who observe His instructions,
 Blessed are those who observe His instructions,
 who seek Him with all their hearts,
 and, doing no evil, who walk in His ways. (Ps 119:2-3)

Lectio Divina Tuesday, September 22, 2020

1) Opening prayer

Father,
guide us, as You guide creation
according to Your law of love.
May we love one another
and come to perfection
in the eternal life prepared for us.
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 8:19-21

The mother of Jesus and his brothers came to him but were unable to join him because of the crowd. He was told, "Your mother and your brothers are standing outside and they wish to see you." He said to them in reply, "My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and act on it."

3) Reflection

- The Gospel today presents the episode in which the relatives of Jesus and His mother want to speak with Him, but Jesus does not pay attention to them. Jesus had problems with His family. Sometimes the family helps one to live the Gospel and to participate in the community. Other times, the family prevents this. This is what happened to Jesus and this is what happens to us.
- Luke 8:19-20: The family looks for Jesus. The relatives reach the house where Jesus was staying. They had probably come from Nazareth. From there to Capernaum the distance is about 40 kilometers. His mother was with them. They probably did not enter because there were many people, but they sent somebody to tell Him: "Your mother and Your brothers are outside and want to see You". According to the Gospel of Mark, the relatives do not want to see Jesus, they want to take Him back home (Mk 3:32). They thought that Jesus had lost His head (Mk 3:21). They were afraid, because according to what history says, the Romans watched very closely all that He did, in one way or other, with the people (cf. Ac 5:36-39). In Nazareth, up on the mountains He would have been safer than in Capernaum.
- Luke 8:21: The response of Jesus. The reaction of Jesus is clear: "My mother and My brothers are those who listen to the Word of God and put it into practice". In Mark the reaction of Jesus is more concrete. Mark says: Looking around at those who were sitting there He said: "Look, My mother and My brothers! Anyone who does the will of God, he is My brother, sister and mother (Mk 3:34-35). Jesus extends His family! He does not permit the family to draw Him away from the mission: neither the family (Jn 7:3-6), nor Peter (Mk 8:33), nor the disciples (Mk 1:36-38), nor Herod (Lk 13:32), nor anybody else (Jn 10:18).

- It is the Word of God which creates a new family around Jesus: “My mother and My brothers are those who listen to the Word of God, and put it into practice.” A good commentary on this episode is what the Gospel of John says in the Prologue: “He was in the world that had come into being through Him and the world did not recognize Him. He came to His own and His own people did not accept Him”. But to those who did accept Him He gave them power to become children of God: to those who believed in His name, who were born not from human stock or human desire, or human will, but from God Himself. And the Word became flesh, He lived among us; and we saw His glory, the glory that He has from the Father as only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth. (Jn 1:10-14). The family, the relatives, do not understand Jesus (Jn 7:3-5; Mk 3:21), they do not form part of the new family. Only those who receive the Word, that is, who believe in Jesus, form part of the new family. These are born of God and form part of God’s Family.

- The situation of the family at the time of Jesus. In the time of Jesus, the political social and economic moment or the religious ideology, everything conspired in favor of weakening the central values of the clan, of the community. The concern for the problems of the family prevented persons from being united in the community. Rather, in order that the Kingdom of God could manifest itself anew, in the community life of the people, persons had to go beyond, to pass the narrow limits of the small family and open themselves to the large family, toward the community. Jesus gives the example. When His own family tried to take hold of Him, Jesus reacted and extended the family (Mk 3:33-35). He created the community.

- The brothers and the sisters of Jesus. The expression “brothers and sisters of Jesus” causes much polemics among Catholics and Protestants. Basing themselves on this and on other texts, the Protestants say that Jesus had more brothers and sisters and that Mary had more sons! The Catholics say that Mary did not have other sons. What should we think about this? In the first place, both positions: that of the Catholics as well as that of the Protestants, start from the arguments drawn from the bible and from the traditions of their respective Churches. Because of this, it is not convenient to discuss on this question with only intellectual arguments. Because here it is a question of the convictions that they have and which have to do with faith and sentiments. The intellectual argument alone does not succeed in changing a conviction of the heart! Rather, it irritates and draws away! And even if I do not agree with the opinion of the other person, I must respect it. In the second place, instead of discussing texts, both we Catholics, and the Protestants, should unite together to fight in defense of life, created by God, a life totally disfigured by poverty, injustice, by the lack of faith. We should recall some phrase of Jesus: “I have come so that they may have life and life in abundance” (Jn 10:10). “So that all may be one so that the world will believe that it was You who sent Me” (Jn 17:21). “Do not prevent them! Anyone who is not against us is for us” (Mk 9:39.40).

4) Personal questions

- Does your family help or make it difficult for you to participate in the Christian community?

- How do you assume your commitment in the Christian community without prejudice for the family or for the community?

5) Concluding Prayer

Teach me, Yahweh, the way of Your will,
and I will observe it.
Give me understanding and I will observe Your Law,
and keep it wholeheartedly. (Ps 119:33-34)

Lectio Divina Wednesday, September 23, 2020

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Father,
guide us, as You guide creation
according to Your law of love.
May we love one another
and come to perfection
in the eternal life prepared for us.
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 9:1-6

Jesus summoned the Twelve and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them to proclaim the Kingdom of God and to heal the sick. He said to them, "Take nothing for the journey, neither walking stick, nor sack, nor food, nor money, and let no one take a second tunic. Whatever house you enter, stay there and leave from there. And as for those who do not welcome you, when you leave that town, shake the dust from your feet in testimony against them." Then they set out and went from village to village proclaiming the Good News and curing diseases everywhere.

3) Reflection

- Today's Gospel describes the mission which the twelve received from Jesus. Later, Luke speaks about the mission of the seventy-two disciples (Lk 10:1-12). The two Gospels complete one another and reveal the mission of the Church.
- Luke 9:1-2: The sending out of the twelve on mission. "Jesus called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all devils and to cure diseases. And He sent them out to proclaim the Kingdom of God and to heal". In calling the Twelve, Jesus intensifies the announcement of the Good News. The objective of the mission is simple and clear: they received the power and authority to cast out devils, to cure the sick and to announce the Kingdom of God. Just as people were admired, astonished seeing Jesus' authority over the unclean spirits, and seeing His way of announcing the

Good News (Lk 4:32.36), the same thing should happen with the preaching of the twelve apostles.

- Luke 9:3-5. The instructions for the mission. Jesus sends them out with the following recommendations: “Take nothing for the journey, neither staff, nor haversack, nor bread, nor money and do not have a spare tunic”. Do not go from one house to another, but “Whatever house you enter stay there; and when you leave let your departure be from there”. “As for those who do not welcome you, when you leave their town shake the dust from your feet as evidence against them”. As you will see these recommendations, which seem strange to us, have a very important significance.

- Luke 9:6. The execution of the mission. They go. It is the beginning of a new stage. Now, not only Jesus, but the whole group goes to announce the Good News to the people. If the preaching of Jesus caused conflict, now, with the preaching of the whole group, there will be a greater conflict.

- The four fundamental points of the mission. At the time of Jesus, there were diverse movements of renewal: the Essenes, the Pharisees, and the Zealots. They also were seeking a new way to live in community and they had their own missionaries (cf. Mt 23:15). But when they went on mission, they were advised: to carry a staff, and a haversack to put in it their food. They did not trust the food which was literally not “pure”. Contrary to the other missionaries, the disciples of Jesus received diverse recommendations which help us to understand the fundamental points of the mission, to announce the Good News:

- a) They should take nothing (Lk 9:3; 10:4). That means that Jesus obliges them to trust in the hospitality; because one who goes with nothing, goes because He trusts in the people and thinks that He will be welcomed, received. With this attitude they criticize the laws of exclusion taught by the official religion and they show, by means of a new practice, that they had other criteria in the community.

- b) They should remain in the first house where they enter, until they leave the place (Lk 9:4; 10:7). That is, they should live together in a stable way and not go from one house to another. They should work with all and live from what they receive in exchange “because the laborer deserves his wages” (Lk 10:7). In other words, they should participate in the life and work of the people, and the people will receive them in their community and will share with them house and food. That means that they have to trust in sharing. This explains the severity of the criticism against those who reject the message: shake off the dust from the feet, as a protest against them (Lk 10:10-12), because they are not rejecting anything new but rather their past.

- c) They should cure the sick and drive out the devils (Lk 9:1; 10:9; Mt 10:8). That is, they should carry out the function of “defenders” (goêl) and accept in the clan, in the community, the excluded. With this attitude they criticize the situation of disintegration of community life of the clan and they indicate concrete openings. The expulsion of the devils is a sign of the coming of the Kingdom of God (Lk 11:20).

- d) They should eat what the people give them (Lk 10:8). They could not live separated having their own food, but they should accept the communion with others, eat with others. That means that in the contact with the people, they should not be afraid of losing the purity as it had been taught to them. With this attitude they criticize the laws of purity which were in force and indicate, by means of the new practice, that they possess another access to purity, that is, intimacy with God.

These were the four fundamental points of community living which should characterize the attitude of the missionaries who announce the Good News in the name of Jesus: hospitality, sharing, communion and acceptance of the excluded (defender, goël). If there is a response to these four requirements, then it is possible to cry out all over to the four corners of the world: "The Kingdom has arrived!" (cf. Lk 10:1-12; 9:1-6; Mk 6:7-13; Mt 10:6-16). And the Kingdom of God which Jesus has revealed to us is not a doctrine, nor a catechism, nor a law. The Kingdom of God comes and becomes present when persons, motivated by their faith in Jesus, decide to live together in community to give witness and to reveal, in this way, to all, that God is Father and Mother and that we, the human beings, are brothers and sisters. Jesus wanted the local community to be a new expression of the Covenant of the Kingdom, of the love of God the Father, who makes us all brothers and sisters.

4) Personal questions

- Has participation in the community helped you to accept and to trust persons, especially the simpler and poorer?
- Which is the point of the mission of the Apostles which for us today has greater importance? Why?

5) Concluding Prayer

Lord, set me free from taunts and contempt
since I observe Your instructions.
Though princes sit plotting against me,
Your servant keeps pondering Your will. (Ps 119:22-23)

Lectio Divina Thursday, September 24, 2020

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Father,
guide us, as You guide creation
according to Your law of love.
May we love one another
and come to perfection
in the eternal life prepared for us.
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 9:7-9

Herod the tetrarch heard about all that was happening, and he was greatly perplexed because some were saying, "John has been raised from the dead"; others were saying, "Elijah has appeared"; still others, "One of the ancient prophets has arisen." But Herod

said, "John I beheaded. Who then is this about whom I hear such things?" And he kept trying to see him.

3) Reflection

- Today's Gospel presents a reaction from Herod listening to the preaching of Jesus. Herod does not know how to place himself before Jesus. He had killed John the Baptist and now he wants to see Jesus close to him. It is always threatening.

- Luke 9:7-8: Who is Jesus? The text begins with the exposition of the opinion of the people and of Herod on Jesus. Some associated Jesus to John the Baptist and to Elijah. Others identified Him with a Prophet, that is, with a person who speaks in the name of God, who has the courage to denounce injustices of those in power and who knows how to give hope to the little ones. He is the Prophet announced in the Old Testament like a new Moses (Dt 18:15). These are the same opinions that Jesus received from the disciples when He asked them: "Who do people say I am?" (Lk 9:18). People tried to understand Jesus starting from things that they knew, thought and expected. They tried to set Him against the background of the familiar criteria of the Old Testament with its prophecies and hopes, and of the tradition of the ancients with their laws. But these were insufficient criteria; Jesus could not enter into them, He was much bigger!

- Luke 9:9: Herod wants to see Jesus. But Herod said: "John, I beheaded him; so who is this of whom I hear such things?" "And he was anxious to see him". Herod, a superstitious man without scruples, recognizes that he was the murderer of John the Baptist. Now, he wants to see Jesus. Luke suggests thus that the threats begin to appear on the horizon of the preaching of Jesus. Herod had no fear to kill John. He will not be afraid to kill Jesus. On the other hand, Jesus does not fear Herod. When they tell Him that Herod wanted to take Him to kill Him, He sent someone to tell him: "You may go and give that fox this message: Look, today and tomorrow I drive out devils and heal, and on the third day I attain My end." (Lk 13:32). Herod has no power over Jesus. When at the hour of the passion, Pilate sends Jesus to be judged by Herod, Jesus does not respond anything (Lk 23:9). Herod does not deserve a response.

- From father to son. Sometimes the three Herods, who lived during that time, are confused, then the three appear in the New Testament with the same name: a) Herod, called the Great, governed over the whole of Palestine from 37 before Christ. He appears at the birth of Jesus (Mt 2:1). He kills the new-born babies of Bethlehem (Mt 2:16). b) Herod, called Antipas, governed in Galilee from the year 4 to 39 after Christ. He appears at the death of Jesus (Lk 23:7). He killed John the Baptist (Mk 6:14-29). c) Herod, called Agrippa, governed all over Palestine from the year 41 to 44 after Christ. He appears in the Acts of the Apostles (Ac 12:1.20). He killed the Apostle James (Ac 12:2).

When Jesus was about four years old, King Herod, the one who killed the new-born babies of Bethlehem died (Mt 2:16). His territory was divided among his sons. Archelaus would govern Judea. He was less intelligent than his father, but more violent. When he assumed the power, approximately 3000 persons were massacred on the square of the Temple! The Gospel of Matthew says that Mary and Joseph, when they learned that Archelaus had taken over the government of Galilee, were afraid and returned on the road and went to Nazareth, in Galilee, which was governed by another son of Herod, called Herod Antipas (Lk 3:1). This Antipas governed over 40 years. During the thirty-three years of Jesus there was no change of government in Galilee.

Herod, the Great, the father of Herod Antipas, had constructed the city of Caesarea Maritime, inaugurated in the year 15 before Christ. It was the new port to get out the products of the region. They had to compete with the large port of Tyron in the North and, thus, help to develop trade and business in Samaria and in Galilee. Because of this, from the time of Herod the Great, the agricultural production in Galilee began to orientate itself no longer according to the needs of the families, as before, but according to the demands of the market. This process of change in the economy continued during all the time of the government of Herod Antipas, another forty years, and found in him an efficient organizer. All these governors were 'servants of power'. In fact, the one who commanded in Palestine, from the year 63 before Christ, was Rome, the Empire.

4) Personal questions

- It is well always to ask ourselves: Who is Jesus for me?
- Herod wants to see Jesus. His was a superstitious and morbid curiosity. Others want to see Jesus because they seek a sense for their life. Others seek Him out of earthly wants. What motivation do I have which moves me to see and encounter Jesus?

5) Concluding Prayer

Each morning fill us with Your faithful love,
we shall sing and be happy all our days;
let our joy be as long as the time that You afflicted us,
the years when we experienced disaster. (Ps 90: 14-15)

Lectio Divina Friday, September 25, 2020

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Father,
guide us, as You guide creation
according to Your law of love.
May we love one another
and come to perfection
in the eternal life prepared for us.
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 9:18-22

Once when Jesus was praying in solitude, and the disciples were with him, he asked them, "Who do the crowds say that I am?" They said in reply, "John the Baptist; others, Elijah; still others, 'One of the ancient prophets has arisen.'" Then he said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter said in reply, "The Christ of God." He rebuked them and directed them not to tell this to anyone. He said, "The Son of Man must suffer

greatly and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed and on the third day be raised."

3) Reflection

- The Gospel today follows the same theme as that of yesterday: the opinion of the people on Jesus. Yesterday, beginning with Herod, today it is Jesus who asks what people think, and the Apostles respond giving the same opinion which was given yesterday. Immediately follows the first announcement of the Passion, death and Resurrection of Jesus.
- Luke 9:18: The question of Jesus after His prayer. "One day, while Jesus was praying alone, His disciples came to Him and He put this question to them: "Who do the crowds say I am?" In Luke's Gospel, on several important and decisive occasions, Jesus is presented in prayer: in His Baptism when He assumes His mission (Lk 3:21); in the 40 days in the desert, when He overcame the temptations presented by the devil Lk 4:1-13); the night before choosing the twelve apostles (Lk 6:12); in the Transfiguration, when with Moses and Elijah, He spoke about His passion in Jerusalem (Lk 9:29); in the Garden when He suffers His agony (Lk 22:39-46); on the Cross, when He asks pardon for the soldiers (Lk 23:34) and when He commits His spirit to God (Lk 23:46).
- Luke 9:19: The people's opinion of Jesus. "They answered, "For some, John the Baptist; others Elijah, but others think that You are one of the ancient prophets who has risen from the dead". Like Herod, many thought that John the Baptist had risen in Jesus. It was a common belief that the prophet Elijah had to return (Mt 17:10-13; Mk 9:11-12; Mal 3:23-24; Sir 48:10-12). All nourished the hope of the coming of the prophet promised by Moses (Deut 18:15). This was an insufficient response.
- Luke 9:20: Jesus' question to the disciples. After having heard the opinion of others, Jesus asks, "And you, who do you say I am?" Peter answers, "The Messiah of God!" Peter recognizes that Jesus is the one whom the people are waiting for and that He comes to fulfill the promise. Luke omits the reaction of Peter, who tries to dissuade Jesus to follow the way of the cross and omits also the harsh criticism of Jesus to Peter (Mk 8:32-33; Mt 16:22-23).
- Luke 9:21: The prohibition to reveal that Jesus is the Messiah of God. "Then Jesus gave them strict orders and charged them not to say this to anyone". It was forbidden to them to reveal to the people that Jesus is the Messiah of God. Why does Jesus prohibit this? At that time, as we have already seen, everybody was expecting the coming of the Messiah, but, each one in his own way: some expected a king, others a priest, others a doctor, a warrior, a judge or a prophet! Nobody seemed to expect the Messiah Servant, announced by Isaiah (Isa 42:1-9). Anyone who insists in maintaining Peter's idea, that is, of a glorious Messiah, without the cross, understands nothing and will never be able to assume the attitude of a true disciple. He will continue to be blind, exchanging people for trees (cf. Mk 8:24). Because without the cross it is impossible to understand who Jesus is and what it means to follow Jesus. Because of this, Jesus insists again on the Cross and makes the second announcement of His passion, death and resurrection.
- Luke 9:22: The second announcement of the Passion. Jesus adds, "The Son of Man is destined to suffer grievously, to be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes and to be put to death, and to be raised up on the third day". The full understanding of the following of Jesus is not obtained through theoretical instruction, but through

practical commitment, walking together with Him along the road of service, from Galilee up to Jerusalem. The road of the following is the road of the gift of self, of abandonment, of service, of availability, of acceptance of conflict, knowing that there will be a resurrection. The cross is not an accident on the way; it forms part of our way. This because, in the organized world starting from egoism, love and service can exist only if they are crucified! Anyone who makes of his life a service to others disturbs those who live attached to privileges, and suffers.

4) Personal questions

- We all believe in Jesus. But there are some who understand Him in one way and others in another way. Today, what is the more common Jesus in the way people think?
- How does propaganda interfere in my way of seeing Jesus? What do I do so as not to allow myself to be drawn into the propaganda? What prevents us today from recognizing and assuming the plan of Jesus?

5) Concluding Prayer

Blessed be Yahweh, my rock,
who trains my hands for war and my fingers for battle,
my faithful love, my bastion, my citadel, my Savior;
I shelter behind Him. (Ps 144:1-2)

Lectio Divina Saturday, September 26, 2020

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Father,
guide us, as You guide creation
according to Your law of love.
May we love one another
and come to perfection
in the eternal life prepared for us.
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 9:43b-45

While they were all amazed at his every deed, Jesus said to his disciples, "Pay attention to what I am telling you. The Son of Man is to be handed over to men." But they did not understand this saying; its meaning was hidden from them so that they should not understand it, and they were afraid to ask him about this saying.

3) Reflection

- The Gospel today presents the second announcement of the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus. The disciples do not understand the words about the cross, because they are not able to understand a Messiah who becomes the servant of his brothers. They continue to dream about a glorious Messiah.
- Luke 9:43b-44: The contrast. “Everyone was full of admiration for all He did”. Jesus said to His disciples “For your part you must have these words constantly in mind: The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the power of men”. The contrast is very big. On one side, the vibration and admiration of the people for everything that Jesus said and did. Jesus seems to correspond to all that people dream, believe and expect. On the other side, the affirmation of Jesus that He will be put to death and delivered in the hands of men, that is, the opinion of the authority on Jesus is totally contrary to the opinion of the people.
- Luke 9:45: The announcement of the Cross. “But they did not understand what He said; for them it was so mysterious, that they did not understand the meaning and were afraid to ask questions concerning this argument”. The disciples listened to Him but they did not understand the words about the cross. But even in this way, they do not ask for any clarification. They are afraid to show their ignorance!
- The title Son of Man. This name appears quite frequently in the Gospels: 12 times in John, 13 in Mark, 28 in Luke, 30 in Matthew. In all, it appears 83 times in the four Gospels. This is the name which pleased Jesus the most. This title comes from the Old Testament. In the Book of Ezekiel, is indicated the very human condition of the prophet (Ezek 3:1,4,10, 17; 4:1 etc.). In the Book of Daniel, the same title appears in the apocalyptic vision (Dan 7:1-28) in which Daniel describes the empires of the Babylonians, of the Medes, of the Persians and of the Greeks. In the vision of the prophet, these four empires have the appearance of “monstrous animals” (cf. Dan 7: 3-8). They are animal empires which are brutal, inhuman, which persecute, dehumanize and kill (Dan 7:21,25). In the vision of the prophet, after the anti-human kingdoms, the Kingdom of God appears which has the appearance, not of an animal, but rather of a human person, a Son of Man. That is, a Kingdom with the appearance of people, a human kingdom, which promotes life, it humanizes (Dan 7:13-14). In the prophecy of Daniel the Son of Man represents, not an individual, but rather, as he himself says, the “people of the Saints of the Most High” (Dan 7:27; cf. Dan 7:18). It is the People of God who do not allow themselves to be dehumanized nor deceived or manipulated by the dominating ideology of the animal empires. The mission of the Son of Man, that is, of the People of God, consists in realizing the Kingdom of God as a human kingdom. That is, a Kingdom which promotes life, which humanizes persons. Presenting Himself as Son of Man to the disciples, Jesus makes this mission His own which is the mission of all the People of God. It is as if He were to say to them and to all of us: “Come with Me! This mission is not only Mine, but it belongs to all of us! Let us go together to carry out the mission which God has entrusted to us, and thus realize the human and humanizing Kingdom of which He dreamt!” And He did this during all his life, especially during the last three years. Pope Leo the Great said, “Jesus was so human, but so human, like only God can be human”. The more human He was, the more divine He was. The more He is “Son of Man” the more He is “Son of God!” Everything which dehumanizes persons draws away from God. That was condemned by God, who

has placed the good of the human person above all the laws, above the Sabbath or Saturday (Mk 2:27). At the moment when He was condemned to death by the religious tribunal of the Synedrium, Jesus assumes this title. When He was asked if He was “the Son of God” (Mk 14:61), He answered that He is the “Son of Man”: “I am. And you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Almighty” (Mk 14: 62). Because of this affirmation He was declared, by the authorities, guilty, deserving death. He Himself knew it because He had said, “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many” (Mk 10: 45).

4) Personal questions

- How do you combine suffering and faith in God in your life?
- In the time of Jesus there was contrast: people thought and expected or hoped in a certain way; the religious authority thought and expected or hoped in a different way. Today, this same contrast exists.

5) Concluding Prayer

For ever, Yahweh,
Your word is planted firm in heaven.
Your constancy endures from age to age;
You established the earth and it stands firm. (Ps 119:89-90)

Lectio Divina Sunday, September 27, 2020

The parable of the two sons
Disobedient obedience and obedient disobedience
Matthew 21: 28-32

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:

Jesus recounts a very common event in family life. One son says to the father, "I'm going!" but then does not go. Another son says, "I'm not going!" but then goes. Jesus

asks his listeners to pay attention and express an opinion. In our reading let us be attentive so as to discover the precise point to which Jesus wishes to call our attention.

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

Mt. 21:28-31^a: The comparison

Mt 21:31b-32: The application of the comparison.

c) The text:

28-31a: 'What is your opinion? A man had two sons. He went and said to the first, "My boy, go and work in the vineyard today." He answered, "I will not go," but afterwards thought better of it and went. The man then went and said the same thing to the second who answered, "Certainly, sir," but did not go. Which of the two did the father's will?' They said, 'The first.'

31b-32: Jesus said to them, 'In truth I tell you, tax collectors and prostitutes are making their way into the kingdom of God before you. For John came to you, showing the way of uprightness, but you did not believe him, and yet the tax collectors and prostitutes did. Even after seeing that, you refused to think better of it and believe in him.'



3. A moment of prayerful silence

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

4. Some questions

to help us in our personal reflection.

- a) Which point in this story of the two sons most caught your attention? Why?
- b) To whom does Jesus address Himself? Why does He tell this parable?
- c) What is the main point underlined by Jesus in the attitude of the two sons?
- d) What kind of obedience does Jesus suggest through this parable?
- e) How exactly do the prostitutes and publicans get preference over the priests and elders?
- f) And I? Where am I? Am I among the prostitutes and sinners or among the priests and elders?

5. A key to the reading

for those who wish to go deeper into the text

a) The context within which Matthew places these words of Jesus (Matthew chapters 18-23):

* The context of Matthew's Gospel within which this parable is found is one of tension and danger. After the Discourse on the community (Mt 18:1-35), Jesus leaves Galilee, crosses the Jordan and begins His last journey towards Jerusalem (Mt 19:1). Long before, He had said that He was to go to Jerusalem to be apprehended and killed and

that then He would rise again (Mt 16:21; 17:22-23). Now the time has come to go to the capital city and to face prison and death (Mt 20:17-19).

* When He arrives in Jerusalem, Jesus becomes the subject of conflict. On the one hand the people welcome Him joyfully (Mt 21:1-11). Even children acclaim Him when, with a prophetic gesture, He expels the sellers from the temple and He heals the blind and the lame (Mt 21:12-15). On the other hand the priests and doctors criticize Him. They ask Him to tell the children to keep quiet (Mt 21:15-16). The situation is so tense, that Jesus has to spend the night outside the city (Mt 21:17; cf. Jn 11:53-54). But the following day He goes back early in the morning and, on the road to the temple, curses the fig tree, symbol of Jerusalem, a fruitless tree bearing only leaves (Mt 21:18-22). He then goes into the temple and begins to teach the people.

* While He is speaking to the people, the authorities come to discuss with him. Jesus answers them one by one (Mt 21:33-22:45), the high priests and the elders (Mt 21:23), the Pharisees (Mt 21:45; 22:41), the disciples of the Pharisees and of the Herodians (Mt 22:16), the Sadducees (Mt 22:23), and the doctors of the law (Mt 22:35). Finally, Jesus denounces at length, and in harsh terms, the scribes and the Pharisees (Mt 23:1-36), followed by a tragic accusation against Jerusalem, the city that will not be converted (Mt 23:37-39). It is within this context of tension and danger that Jesus tells the parable of the two sons, the subject of our meditation.

b) Commentary on the words of Jesus as found in Matthew:

Matthew 21:28-30: An example taken from family life

* What is your opinion? This is a provocative question. Jesus asks His listeners to be attentive and to reply. In the context of the parable, the listeners invited to give their opinion are the high priests and elders of the people (Mt 21:23). These are the ones who, from fear of the people, would not give an answer to the question as to the origin of John the Baptist, whether He was from heaven or from earth (Mt 21:24-27). These are the ones who will seek a way to arrest Him (Mt 21:45-46).

* A man had two sons. Jesus tells the story of a father who says to one of his sons "My boy, you go and work in the vineyard today". The young man replies, "Certainly, sir!" but then does not go. The father then says the same thing to his other son. This son replies, "I will not go!" but then goes. The listeners too are fathers of families and must have known these matters from personal experience.

* *Which of the two did the father's will?* Jesus ends the parable by making explicit His initial question. The priests and elders answer promptly, *the second!* The answer came quickly because the matter concerned a familiar situation, well known and evident, one that they experienced in their own families and, most probably, practiced by them (and by all of us) when they were young. Thus, in reality, the answer was a judgment, not on the two sons in the parable, but also on themselves. By answering, *the first*, they were judging their own attitudes. For, in times past, they had so often told their father, "I will not go!" but then went under pressure of circumstances or because remorse led them to do what the father asked. In their reply they show themselves as if they were obedient children.

* This is precisely the function or the "trap" of the parable, namely, to bring the listeners to feel involved in the story, so that using their own experience as criterion, they would come to a value judgment of the story told in the parable. This judgment will soon be used as a key to apply the parable to life. The same didactic procedure may be found also in the parable of the vineyard (Mt 21:41-46) and that of the debtors (Lk 7:40-46).

Matthew 21:31-32: *Application of the parable* * *I tell you solemnly, tax collectors and prostitutes are making their way into the kingdom of God before you!* Using the reply given by the priests and elders as a key, Jesus applies the parable to the sinful silence of His listeners before the message of John the Baptist. The reply they gave becomes their own condemnation. According to this sentence, it is the publicans and prostitutes, who, at first, had said *no* to the father but then did the will of the Father, because they had received and accepted the message of John the Baptist as coming from God. Whereas they, the priests and elders, were the ones who, at first, had said *yes* to the father, but had not carried out what the father had asked, because they would not accept the message of John the Baptist, not even in the face of so many who did accept it as from God.

* Thus, by means of the parable, Jesus turns everything upside down: those who were considered transgressors of the Law and therefore condemned, were in truth those who had obeyed God and tried to walk *the way of justice*, while those who considered themselves obedient to the Law of God, were in fact those who disobeyed God.

* The reason for this harsh judgment from Jesus lies in the fact that the religious authorities, priests and elders, would not believe that John the Baptist came from God. The publicans and the prostitutes, however, believed. This means that for Jesus, the contemplative outlook, the ability to recognize the active presence of God in persons and things of life, was not in the priests, not even among their leaders. Yet it was in those who were despised as sinners and unclean. It is easy to understand why these authorities decided to apprehend and kill Jesus: "when they heard these parables, the chief priests and the scribes realized He was speaking about them" (Mt 21:45-46).

* Anyone who wishes to apply this parable today would probably provoke the same anger that Jesus did through his conclusion. The same thing happens today. Prostitutes, sinners, the ignorant, some women, children, lay people, workers, people of color, prisoners, homosexuals, persons with AIDS, drunkards, drug addicts, divorced persons, married clergy, heretics, atheists, unmarried mothers, the unemployed, the illiterate, the sick, that is, all those marginalized as not part of the religious circle, frequently have a sharper outlook in perceiving *the way of justice* than those of us who live all day in church and are part of the religious hierarchy. It is not just because a person belongs to the religious hierarchy, therefore, that he or she has an outlook that allows him or her to perceive the things of God in life.

To throw light on the words of Jesus

* A new way of teaching people and to speak of God

Jesus was not a scholar (Jn 7:15). Unlike the apostle Paul (Acts 23:3), He did not go to the high school in Jerusalem.

He came from the country, from Nazareth, a small town in Galilee. Now, this carpenter

from Galilee goes to Jerusalem and, without getting permission from the authorities, starts teaching the people in the square in front of the temple! He said new things. He spoke differently, divinely! The people were impressed by his way of teaching, "A new doctrine! Taught with authority! Different from that of the Scribes! (Mk 1:22, 27). What Jesus did most was teach, it was a habit with Him. Many times the Evangelists say that Jesus taught. If they do not always say what Jesus taught, it is not because they are not interested in the content, but because the content comes through not only in the teaching but also in the gestures and in His attitude toward the people. The content is never separate from the person who communicates it. The goodness and love that come through in His way of acting and of being with others are part of the content. They are like the "tempera"; good content without goodness is like spilt milk.

* Teaching through parables.

Jesus taught above all through parables. He had an extraordinary capacity to find comparisons in order to explain the things of God: things that are not so evident by means of simple and clear examples, which the people knew and experienced in their lives in their daily struggle to survive. This presupposes two things: keeping to the experiences of life and keeping to the things of God, of the Realm of God.

Usually, Jesus does not explain the parables, but says, "Those who have ears to hear, listen!" Or "You have heard. Now try to understand!" For instance, the farmer who hears the parable of the seed says, "I know what the seed that falls on the ground is all about! But Jesus said that this is connected with the Realm of God. What does He mean?" We can then imagine the long conversations and discussions among the people. Once a bishop asked the community, "Jesus said that we must be like salt. What is salt used for?" The community discussed this and came up with more than ten purposes for salt! They then applied all this to the life of the community and discovered that to be salt is difficult and demanding. The parable had worked!

In some parables there are things that do not usually happen in life. For instance, when have we ever seen a shepherd leave ninety-nine sheep to go looking for the one that is lost? (Lk 15:4). When have we ever seen a father who welcomes his dissolute son with a feast and not a word to scold him? (Lk 15:20-24). Where have we ever seen a Samaritan who is better than a Levite or a priest? (Lk 10:29-37). In this way, the parable provokes thought. It invites us to be involved in the story and to reflect on ourselves, starting from the experience of life and then confronting this with God. It makes us discover from experience that God is present in our everyday life. The parable is a participative form of teaching, of educating. It does not present every little detail. It does not give all the facts, but entices us to discover. A parable changes our view; it makes us contemplatives, persons who delve into reality. Herein lies the novelty of Jesus' teaching in parables. It is different from the teaching of the doctors who taught that God manifests Himself only in the observance of the law. For Jesus, "The Realm of God is not the fruit of observance. The Realm of God is among you!" (Lk 17:21).

6. Psalm 121

The contemplative eye discovers the presence of God in life

I lift up my eyes to the hills.
Whence does my help come?

My help comes from the Lord,
who made heaven and earth.
He will not let your foot be moved,
He who keeps you will not slumber.
Behold, He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.
The Lord is your keeper;
the Lord is your shade on your right hand.
The sun shall not smite you by day,
nor the moon by night.
The Lord will keep you from all evil;
He will keep your life.
The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in
from 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 that which 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, September 28, 2020

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Father,
You show Your almighty power
in Your mercy and forgiveness.
Continue to fill us with Your gifts of love.
Help us to hurry towards the eternal life You promise
and come to share in the joys of Your kingdom.
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 9:46-50

An argument arose among the disciples about which of them was the greatest. Jesus realized the intention of their hearts and took a child and placed it by his side and said to them, "Whoever receives this child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me. For the one who is least among all of you is the one who is the greatest." Then John said in reply, "Master, we saw someone casting out demons in your name and we tried to prevent him because he does not follow in our company." Jesus said to him, "Do not prevent him, for whoever is not against you is for you."

3) Reflection

- The text enlightens us. If Luke had previously presented the convergence of the men around Jesus to recognize Him in faith, to pay attention to Him and to be present to His cures, now a new stage is opened in His public itinerary. The person of Jesus does not monopolize the attention of the crowds any more, but He is presented as the one who is slowly being drawn away from His own to go toward the Father. Such an itinerary foresees His journey to Jerusalem. And while He is about to undertake that journey, Jesus reveals to them the destiny that is awaiting Him (9:22). He is then transfigured before them to indicate the starting point of His “exodus” toward Jerusalem. Immediately after the light that He experiences in the transfiguration, Jesus once again announces His Passion, leaving the disciples uncertain and disturbed. Jesus’ words on the event of His Passion, “The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the power of men” (Lk 9:45), they did not understand and they were afraid to ask Him.
- Jesus takes a child. The enigma of Jesus being delivered caused a great dispute among the disciples, as they wondered to whom the first place would belong. Without being asked His opinion, Jesus, who, being God, knew how to read hearts, intervenes with a symbolic gesture. To begin, He takes a child and places him at His side. Such a gesture is an indication of election, of privilege, that is extended at the moment that one becomes a Christian (Lk 10:21-22). So that this gesture will be understood, and not baffling, Jesus gives a word of explanation: the “greatness” of the child is not stressed but is an inclination to “acceptance”. The Lord considers “great” anyone who, like a child, knows how to accept God and His messengers. Salvation presents two aspects: the election on the part of God, which is symbolized by Jesus’ gesture, who accepts the child, and the acceptance of the one who has sent Him, the Father of Jesus (who is the Son) and of every person. The child embodies Jesus, and both, in their smallness and suffering, realize God’s presence (Bovon). The two aspects of salvation are also indicative of faith: in the gift of election the passive element emerges; in service, the active one emerges; two pillars of Christian existence. To accept God or Christ in faith has the consequence of total acceptance of the little ones on the part of the believer or of the community. “To be great,” which the disciples were talking about, is not a reality of something beyond, but it refers to the present moment and is expressed in the “diaconia” of service. Lived love and faith fulfill two functions: we are accepted by Christ (takes the child); but also we have the particular gift of receiving Him (“anyone who accepts the child, accepts Him, the Father”, v. 48). A brief dialogue follows between Jesus and John (vv. 49-50). This last disciple is considered among Jesus’ intimates. The exorcist, who does not belong to those who are intimate with Jesus, is entrusted the same role that is given to the disciples. He is an exorcist who, on the one side is external to the group, but on the other, is inside the group because he has understood the Christological origin of divine force that guides him (“in Your name”). Jesus’ teaching is clear: a Christian group should not place obstacles to the missionary activity of other groups which are true to the teachings of Jesus. There are no Christians who are “greater” than others, but one is “great” in being and in becoming Christian. Then missionary activity has to be in the service of God and not to increase one’s own fame or renown, or to proclaim distorted beliefs and interpretations. That emphasis on the power of the name of Jesus is of crucial importance: it is a reference to the liberty

of the Holy Spirit, whose presence is certainly within the Church, but it can extend beyond the instituted or official ministries.

4) Personal questions

- How do you, as a baptized believer, understand success and suffering?
- What type of “greatness” do you live in your service to life, to people? Are you able to change competition into cooperation?
- Do you recognize those in society today who use Christianity or missionary activity for personal fame or personal gain?

5) Concluding Prayer

I praise Your name Lord for Your faithful love and Your constancy;
for You have exalted Your word and Your name above everything.
You heard me on the day when I called,
and You gave new strength to my heart. (Ps 138:2-3)

Lectio Divina Tuesday, September 29, 2020

Ordinary Time

John 1,47-51

1) Opening prayer

Father,
You show Your almighty power
in Your mercy and forgiveness.
Continue to fill us with Your gifts of love.
Help us to hurry towards the eternal life Your promise
and come to share in the joys of Your kingdom.
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 1:47-51

Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, "Here is a true child of Israel. There is no duplicity in him." Nathanael said to him, "How do you know me?" Jesus answered and said to him, "Before Philip called you, I saw you under the fig tree." Nathanael answered him, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel." Jesus answered and said to him, "Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than this." And he said to him, "Amen, amen, I say to you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

3) Reflection

- Today's Gospel presents the dialogue between Jesus and Nathanael in which the following phrase appears: "In all truth I tell you, you will see heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending over the Son of Man". This phrase helps to clarify something concerning the archangels.
- John 1:47-49: The conversation between Jesus and Nathanael. Philip took Nathanael to Jesus (Jn 1:45-46). Nathanael had exclaimed: "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" Nathanael was from Cana, which was close to Nazareth. Seeing Nathanael, Jesus said: "There, truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deception!" And He affirms that He knew him already when he was under the fig tree. How could Nathanael be an "authentic Israelite", if he did not accept Jesus as Messiah? Nathanael "was under the fig tree". The fig tree was the symbol of Israel (cf. Mq 4:4; Zc 3:10; 1K:5,5). "To be under the fig tree" was the same as being faithful to the project of the God of Israel. The authentic Israelite is the one who knows how to detach himself from his own ideas when he perceives that these are not in agreement with God's project. The Israelite who is not ready to converse is neither authentic nor honest. Nathanael is authentic. He expected the Messiah according to the official teaching of that time, according to which the Messiah came from Bethlehem in Judea. The Messiah could not come from Nazareth in Galilee (Jn 7:41-42.52). This is why Nathanael resists accepting Jesus as Messiah. But the encounter with Jesus helps him to become aware that God's project is not always as one imagines it or desires that it be. Nathanael recognizes his own deception, he changes his idea, accepts Jesus as Messiah and confesses: "Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel!"
- The diversity of the call. The Gospels of Mark, Matthew and Luke present the call of the first disciples in quite a brief way: Jesus walks along the seashore, and He calls Peter and Andrew. Then He calls John and James (Mk 1:16-20). The Gospel of John has a different way of describing the beginning of the first community which was formed around Jesus. John does it by narrating very concrete stories. One is struck by the variety of the calls and of the encounters of persons among themselves and with Jesus. Thus John teaches what is necessary to do to begin a community. It is by means of contacts and personal invitations, and it is like that even today! Jesus calls some directly (Jn 1:43). Others indirectly (Jn 1:41-42). One day He called two disciples of John the Baptist (Jn 1:39). The following day He called Philip who, in turn, called Nathanael (Jn 1:45). No call is repeated because every person is diverse. People will never forget the important calls which have marked their life. One even remembers the hour and the day (Jn 1:39).
- John 1:50-51: The angels of God who descend and ascend on the Son of Man. The confession of Nathanael is only at the beginning. Anyone who is faithful, will see heaven open and the angels who go up and descend on the Son of Man. They will experience that Jesus is the new bond of union between God and us, human beings. It is the realization of the dream of Jacob (Gn 28:10-22).
- The angels who go up and descend the ladder. The three Archangels: Gabriel, Raphael, and Michael. Gabriel explained to prophet Daniel the meaning of the vision (Dn 8:16; 9:21). The angel Gabriel also took God's message to Elizabeth (Lk 1:19) and to Mary, the Mother of Jesus (Lk 1:26). His name means "God is strong". Raphael appears in the Book of Tobit. He accompanies Tobias, the son of Tobit and of Anna, throughout the

trip and protects him from all danger. He helps Tobias to liberate Sara from the evil spirit and to cure Tobit, his father, from his blindness. His name means "God heals". Michael helped the prophet Daniel in his struggles and difficulties (Dn 10:13.21; 12:1). The letter of Jude says that Michael disputed with the devil over the body of Moses (Jude 1:9). It was Michael who obtained victory over Satan, throwing him out of Heaven and throwing him into hell (RV 12:7). His name means: "Who is like God!" The word 'angel' means messenger. He takes a message from God. In the bible, the entire nature could be the messenger of God Himself, when it turns its face on us and reveals God's love for us (Ps 104:4). The angel can be God Himself, when He turns His face on us and reveals His loving presence to us.

4) Personal questions

- Have you already had some encounter which has marked your whole life? How have you discovered the call of God there?
- Have you been interested, some times, like Philip, to call another person to participate in the community?

5) Concluding Prayer

I thank You, Yahweh, with all my heart,
for You have listened to the cry I uttered.
In the presence of angels I sing to You,
I bow down before Your holy Temple. (Ps 138:1-2)

Lectio Divina Wednesday, September 30, 2020

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Father,
You show Your almighty power
in Your mercy and forgiveness.
Continue to fill us with Your gifts of love.

Help us to hurry towards the eternal life You promise
and come to share in the joys of Your kingdom.
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 9:57-62

As Jesus and his disciples were proceeding on their journey, someone said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." Jesus answered him, "Foxes have dens and birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to rest his head." And to another he said, "Follow me." But he replied, "Lord, let me go first and bury my father." But he answered him, "Let the dead bury their dead. But you, go and proclaim the Kingdom of

God." And another said, "I will follow you, Lord, but first let me say farewell to my family at home." Jesus answered him, "No one who sets a hand to the plow and looks to what was left behind is fit for the Kingdom of God."

3) Reflection

- In today's Gospel the long and hard journey of Jesus continues from the periphery of Galilee to the capital city. Leaving Galilee, Jesus enters Samaria and continues toward Jerusalem. Not all understand Him. Many abandon Him because the demands are enormous. Others get close to Him and decide to follow Jesus. At the beginning of His pastoral activity in Galilee, Jesus had called three: Peter, James and John (Lk 5:8-11). Also, in Samaria, there are three people who present themselves, who are called. In Jesus' responses there are requirements or conditions for being able to be His disciples.

- Luke 9:56-58: The first one of the three new disciples. At that time, as they traveled along, they met a man who said to Jesus, "I will follow You wherever You go." Jesus answered, "Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man has nowhere to lay His head." To this first person who wants to be His disciple, Jesus asks him to divest himself of everything: he will have nowhere to lay his head.

- Luke 9:59-60: The second one of the three new disciples. To another one He says "Follow Me". And he replied, "Let me go and bury my father first". Jesus replied, "Leave the dead to bury their dead; your duty is to go and spread the news of the Kingdom of God". To this second person called by Jesus to follow Him, He asks him to let the dead bury the dead. It was a popular saying which meant this: leave aside the things of the past. Do not lose time with what happened. Look ahead. After having discovered new life in Jesus, the disciple should not waste time on what has happened in the past. This theme was also in Gn 19:17, as Lot was instructed. In the Sacrament of Reconciliation we see this as well. It is important to have "detachment from sin", as well as contrition. Do not look back and see the past as something to yearn for, but instead, leave the sin of the past and look to follow Jesus.

- Luke 9:61-62: The third one of the three new disciples. Another said, "I will follow You, Sir, but first let me go and say good-bye to my people at home". But Jesus replied, "Once the hand is laid on the plough, no one who looks back is fit for the Kingdom of God". Jesus asks this third person called to discipleship to break the bonds of family unity. On another occasion He had said, "Anyone who loves his father and his mother more than Me cannot be My disciple" (Lk 14:26; Mt 10:37). Jesus is more demanding than the prophet Elijah, who allowed Elisha to greet and take leave of his parents (1 Kings 19:19-21). This also means to break the nationalistic bonds of race and the patriarchal family structure.

- These are three fundamental requirements for those who want to be the disciples of Jesus: (a) to abandon material goods, (b) not to be attached to things of the past (c) to break away from the family bonds. In reality, nobody, not even one wishing to do so, can break the family bonds or break away from things lived in the past. What is asked is to know how to re-integrate everything (material goods, personal life and family life)

in a new way around the new axis, which is Jesus and the Good News of God which He has brought to us.

- Jesus lived and became aware of what He was asking of His followers. With His decision to go up to Jerusalem, Jesus reveals His plan. His journey toward Jerusalem (Lk 9:51–19:27) is depicted as the undertaking (Lk 9:51), the exodus (Lk 9:31) or the crossing (Lk 17:11). Arriving in Jerusalem Jesus fulfills the exodus, the undertaking or the definitive crossing from this world toward the Father (Jn 13:1). Only a truly free person can do this, because such an exodus presupposes the dedication of one's whole life for the brothers (Lk 23:44-46; 24:51). This is the exodus, the crossing, the undertaking of which the communities should be aware, if they are to carry on Jesus' mission.

4) Personal questions

- Compare each one of these three requirements with your life. How well are you fulfilling these requirements?
- What problems arise in your life as a result of the decision which you have made to follow Jesus?

For further study

St Francis was one who took the call from Jesus seriously. Like many saints, he was very involved in the pleasures of the time. However, once he recognized the call, he began to follow, ultimately “not looking back”. He was serious about not compromising in this regard, and his sincerity even moved Pope Innocent III. In fact, most saints don't begin as “saints”, but at some time decide to follow these three requirements of Jesus without compromise. Take some time to read the lives of a few saints such as St Francis of Assisi, St Ignatius of Loyola, St Benedict, or St Bernard, just to name a few.

5) Concluding prayer

Yahweh, You examine me and know me,
You know when I sit,
when I rise,
You understand my thoughts from afar. (Ps 139:1-2)