



Lectio Divina

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Saturday, January 1, 2022

Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God

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. F

Create in us silence 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 from 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 to us the Father and sent us your Spirit. Amen.

Gospel Reading: Luke 2: 16-21

A Key to the Reading:

The reason for Joseph and Mary to go to Bethlehem was the census imposed by Rome's emperor (Lk 2: 1-7). Periodically, the Roman authorities decreed these censuses in the various regions of their immense empire. It was a matter of registering people and knowing how many had to pay taxes. The rich paid taxes on land and goods. The poor paid for the number of children they had. Sometimes the tax was more than 50% of a person's income.

In Luke's Gospel we note a significant difference between the birth of Jesus and that of John the Baptist. John is born at home, in his land, in the midst of parents and neighbors and is welcomed by all (Lk 1: 57-58). Jesus is born unknown, away from his surroundings of family and neighbors and far from his land. "There was no room in the inn." He had to be left in a manger (Lk 2: 7).

Let us try to place and comment on our text (Lk 2:1 6-21) in the wider context of the visit of the shepherds (Lk 2: 8-21). As we read, let us try to pay attention to the following: What surprises do we find and what contrasts appear in this text?

A Division of the Text to Help Us in Our Reading:

- Luke 2: 8-9: The shepherds in the field, the first persons invited
- Luke 2: 10-12: The first announcement of the Good News is made to the shepherds
- Luke 2: 13-14: The praise of the angels
- Luke 2: 15-18: The shepherds go to Bethlehem and tell of their vision of the angels
- Luke 2: 19-20: Mary's attitude and that of the shepherds concerning these events
- Luke 2: 21: The circumcision of the child Jesus

Text:

In the countryside close by there were shepherds out in the fields keeping guard over

their sheep during the watches of the night. An angel of the Lord stood over them and the glory of the Lord shone round them. They were terrified, but the angel said, 'Do not be afraid. Look, I bring you news of great joy, a joy to be shared by the whole people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. And here is a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.' And all at once with the angel there was a great throng of the hosts of heaven, praising God with the words: Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace for those he favors.

Now it happened that when the angels had gone from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, 'Let us go to Bethlehem and see this event which the Lord has made known to us.' So they hurried away and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger. When they saw the child they repeated what they had been told about him, and everyone who heard it was astonished at what the shepherds said to them. As for Mary, she treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart. And the shepherds went back glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, just as they had been told. When the eighth day came and the child was to be circumcised, they gave him the name Jesus, the name the angel had given him before his conception.

A Moment of Prayerful Silence

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

Some Questions

... to help us in our personal reflection.

- What did you like best in this text? Why?
- What surprises and contrasts do you find in this text?
- How does the text teach us that the little ones are great in heaven and the poorest on earth?
- What is Mary's attitude and that of the shepherds concerning the mystery of God just revealed to them?
- What is the message Luke wants to communicate to us through these details?

To Go Deeper into the Theme

The Context of Then and of Today:

The text of the feast of the Mother of God (Lk 2:16-21) is part of the broader description of the birth of Jesus (Lk 2: 1-7) and of the visit of the shepherds (Lk 2: 8-21). The angel had announced the birth of the Savior and gave a sign of recognition: "You will find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger!" They were expecting the Savior of a whole people and they were to recognize him in a newborn child, poor, who lies close to two animals! What a great surprise!

God's plan is fulfilled in an unexpected way, full of surprise. This happens today too. A poor child is the Savior of the people! Can you believe this?

A Commentary on the Text:

- Luke 2: 8-9: The first invited persons

The shepherds were marginalized people, not greatly appreciated. They lived together with the animals, separate from the rest of humanity. Because of their constant contact with animals, they were considered impure. No one would have ever invited them to visit a newly born baby. But it is precisely to these shepherds that the Angel of the Lord appears to pass on the great news of the birth of Jesus. Seeing the vision of the angels, they are full of fear.

Luke 2: 10-12: The first announcement of the Good News

Luke 2: 13-14: The praise of the angels: Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace for those he favors

A multitude of angels appears descending from heaven. It is heaven that bends itself towards the earth. The parts of this verse summarize God's project, his plan. The first part tells us what happens in the world up there: Glory to God in the highest heaven. The second part tells us what will happen in the world here below: On earth peace for those he favors! If people could experience what it means to be favored by God, everything would be different, and peace would dwell on earth. And this would be to the greater glory of God who dwells in the highest!

- Luke 2: 15-18: The shepherds go to Bethlehem and tell of their vision of the angels

The Word of God is no longer a sound produced by the mouth. It is above all an event! The shepherds literally say: "Let us go to Bethlehem and see this event which the Lord has made known to us." In Hebrew, the expression DABAR may mean both word and thing (event), generated by the word. The word of God is a creative force. It fulfills what it says. At creation God said: "Let there be light, and there was light!" (Gen 1: 3). The word of the angel to the shepherds is the event of the birth of Jesus.

- Luke 2: 19-20: Mary's attitude and that of the shepherds concerning these events

Luke immediately adds that, "Mary treasured all these things (events) and pondered them in her heart". These are two ways of perceiving and welcoming the Word of God:

- (i) The shepherds get up to see the events and verify the sign given by the angel, and then, they go back to their flocks glorifying and praising God for all that they had seen and heard.
- (ii) Mary, on the other hand, carefully keeps all these events in her mind and meditates on them in her heart. To meditate on things in one's heart means to ruminate them and throw light on them in the light of the Word of God so as to understand better their full significance for life.

- Luke 2: 21: The Circumcision and Name of Jesus

According to the norms of the law, the child Jesus is circumcised on the eighth day after his birth (cf. Gen 17: 12). Circumcision was a sign of belonging to the people. It gave the person an identity. On such an occasion each child received his name (cf. Lk 1: 59-63). The child receives the name of Jesus that had been given him by the angel before his conception. The angel had said to Joseph that the name of the child had to be Jesus "he is the one who is to save his people from their sins" (Mt 1: 21). The name of Jesus is the same as Joshua and means "God will save." Another name that will gradually be given to Jesus is Christ, which means Anointed or Messiah. Jesus is

the awaited Messiah. A third name is that of Emmanuel, which means God with us (Mt 1: 23). The complete name is Jesus Christ Emmanuel!

Further Information:

Mary in Luke's Gospel

- The Role of the First Two Chapters of Luke's Gospel:

These are two rather well known but less deeply understood chapters. Luke writes them in imitation of the Old Testament. It is as though these two chapters were the last of the Old Testament so as to open the door for the coming of the New Testament. In these chapters, Luke creates an atmosphere of softness and praise. From beginning to end the mercy of God is sung, God who finally comes to fulfil his promises. Luke shows us how Jesus fulfils the Old Testament and begins the New Testament. And he does so in favor of the poor, the anawim, those who knew how to wait for his coming: Elisabeth, Zachary, Mary, Joseph, Simeon, Anna and the shepherds. That is why the first two chapters are history but not in the sense that we today give to history. They were more like a mirror where those, for whom they were written, the Christians converted from paganism, could discover who Jesus was and how he had come to fulfil the prophecies of the Old Testament, satisfying the deepest aspirations of the human heart. These chapters were also a mirror of the events that were taking place within the communities in Luke's time. The communities originating from paganism will be born of the communities of converted Jews. But these were different. The New did not correspond to what the Old Testament imagined and expected. It was "the sign of contradiction" (Lk 2:34) and caused tensions and was the source of much suffering. In Mary's attitude, Luke presents a model of how the communities could react to and persevere in the New.

- A Key to the Reading:

In these two chapters Luke presents Mary as model for the life of the community. The key is given to us in the episode where the woman in the crowd praises the mother of Jesus. Jesus modifies the praise and says: "More blessed still are those who hear the word of God and keep it!" (Lk 11: 27-28). Herein lies the greatness of Mary. It is in the world where Mary knows how to relate to the Word of God that the communities contemplate the more correct way of relating to the Word of God: welcoming it, incarnating it, living it, deepening it, reflecting on it, giving it birth and making it grow, allowing oneself to be overpowered by it even when one does not understand it or when one suffers because of it. This is the vision underlying the two texts of chapters 1 and 2 of Luke's Gospel, which speak of Mary, the mother of Jesus.

- An Application of the Key to the Texts:

- Luke 1: 26-38: The Annunciation: "Let it happen to me as you have said!" Opening one's self so that the Word of God may be welcomed and incarnated.
- Luca 1: 39-45: The Visitation: "Blessed is she who believed!" Recognizing the Word of God in the events of life.
- Luke 1: 46-56: The Magnificat: "The Almighty has done great things for me!" A subversive and resistance hymn of hope.
- Luke 2: 1-20: The Birth: "She treasured all these things and pondered them

in her heart.”

- There was no room for them. The marginalized welcome the Word.
 - Luke 2: 21-32: The Presentation: "My eyes have seen the salvation!" Years of life purify the eyes.
 - Luke 2: 33-38: Simeon and Anna: "A sword will pierce your soul" Being a Christian means being a sign of contradiction.
 - Luke 2: 39-52: At twelve years: " Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"
 - They did not understand the Word of God addressed to them!
- The Contrasts that Stand Out in Our Text:
 - In the darkness of the night a light shines (2: 8-9).
 - The world up there, heaven, seems to embrace our world here below (2: 13).
 - The greatness of God manifests itself in the weakness of a child (2: 7).
 - The glory of God is made present in a manger, close to animals (2: 16).
 - Fear is generated by the sudden apparition of an angel and is changed into joy(2: 9-10).
 - Those completely marginalized are the first invited (2: 8).
 - The shepherds recognize God present in a child (2: 20).

Praying with the Psalm 23 (22)

“Yahweh is my shepherd!”Yahweh is my shepherd,

I lack nothing.

In grassy meadows he lets me lie.By tranquil streams he leads me to restore my spirit.

He guides me in paths of saving justice as befits his name.Even were I to walk in a ravine as dark as death

I should fear no danger,for you are at my side.

Your staff and your crook are there to soothe me.

You prepare a table for me under the eyes of my enemies;you anoint my head with oil; my cup brims over.

Kindness and faithful love pursue me every day of my life.

I make my home in the house of Yahweh for all time to come.

Final Prayer

Lord Jesus, we thank 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.

The first thing the angel says is: Do not be afraid! The second is: Joy to be shared by the whole people! The third is: Today! Then the angel gives three names to indicate who

Jesus is: Savior, Christ and Lord! Savior is the one who frees all people from all ties! The authorities in those days liked to use the title Savior. They attributed the title to themselves. Christ means “anointed” or “messiah.” In the Old Testament this was the title given to kings and prophets. It was also the title of the future Messiah who would fulfill the promises made by God to his people. This means that newly born child, who lies in a manger, has come to fulfill the hopes of the people. Lord was the name given to God himself! Here we have the three greatest titles imaginable. From this announcement of the birth of Jesus as Savior, Christ and Lord, can you imagine anyone with a higher standing? And angel says to you: “Be careful! I give you this sign of recognition: you will meet a child in a manger, in the midst of poor people!” Would you believe him? God’s ways are not our ways!

Sunday, January 2, 2022

Epiphany of the Lord

Opening Prayer

Merciful Father, you have called me to meet you in this word of the Gospel, because you wish that I may have life, you wish to give me yourself. Send, I pray you, your Holy Spirit upon me so that I may let myself be led along the holy way of this passage of Scripture. May I, today, get out of my prison to set out on a journey to seek you. May I recognize the star that you have lit as a sign of your love on my journey to follow it tirelessly, intensely, committing my whole life. May I, finally, enter your house and there see the Lord; may I bend low humbly before you to adore you and offer my life to you, all that I am and all that I have. Lord, by your grace, may I return by a new route, without ever passing through the old paths of sin.

Gospel Reading: Mt. 2: 1-12

Placing the Passage in its Context:

This passage belongs to the first two chapters of Matthew’s Gospel, which constitute a kind of prologue to the whole work. Here we are presented with the historical origin of the Messiah as son of David, as well as his divine origin as Jesus Christ, God-with-us. Matthew immediately leads us into a very deep and engaging meditation, placing before us a precise choice through the persons he introduces in his story: we either recognize and welcome the Lord who is just born, or we remain indifferent even to wanting to eliminate him, kill him. This passage offers us the beautiful story of the journey of the Magi, who come from afar because they want to seek and welcome, love, and adore the Lord Jesus. But their long journey and tireless search, the conversion of their heart are facts that speak of us, facts already written on the scroll of our own sacred story.

An Aid to the Reading of the Passage:

The passage may be divided into two main parts, determined by the locality where the scenes take place: the first part (2: 1-9a) takes place in Jerusalem, whereas the second part is focused around Bethlehem (2: 9b-12).

- **Mt 2: 1-2:** The passage begins with precise indications as to the place and time of the birth of Jesus: in Bethlehem of Judea, at the time of king Herod. Within this quite specific description, the Magi suddenly appear, who, coming from afar, arrive in

Jerusalem under the guidance of a star. It is they who announce the birth of the Lord king. They ask where they might find him because they wish to adore him.

- **Mt 2: 3-6:** On hearing the words of the Magi, king Herod, and with him all of Jerusalem is disturbed and afraid. Rather than welcoming the Lord and opting for him, they seek to eliminate him. Herod calls the authorities of the Jewish people and the experts in Scripture. It is they, by the help of ancient prophecies, who speak and reveal Bethlehem as the place to find the Messiah.
- **Mt 2: 7-8:** Herod calls the Magi in secret because he wants to use them for his own evil ends. His detailed interest is entirely directed towards the elimination of Christ.
- **Mt 2: 9a:** The Magi, urged by strength of faith and led by the star, leave again, and go towards Bethlehem.
- **Mt 2: 9b-11:** The star reappears, moves with the Magi and leads them to the exact spot where the Lord Jesus is. Full of joy, they enter the house and prostrate themselves; they offer precious gifts because they recognize that he is king and Lord.
- **Mt 2: 12:** When they have contemplated and adored the Lord, the Magi receive a revelation from God; it is He who speaks to them. They are new men; they have in them a new heaven and a new earth. They are free of the deceits of Herod and, therefore, they go back to their lives by an entirely new way

The Text:

1 After Jesus had been born at Bethlehem in Judaea during the reign of King Herod, suddenly some wise men came to Jerusalem from the east 2 asking, 'Where is the infant king of the Jews? We saw his star as it rose and have come to do him homage.'

3 When King Herod heard this he was perturbed, and so was the whole of Jerusalem. 4 He called together all the chief priests and the scribes of the people and enquired of them where the Christ was to be born. 5 They told him, 'At Bethlehem in Judaea, for this is what the prophet wrote: 6 And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, you are by no means the least among the leaders of Judah, for from you will come a leader who will shepherd my people Israel.'

7 Then Herod summoned the wise men to see him privately. He asked them the exact date on which the star had appeared 8 and sent them on to Bethlehem with the words, 'Go and find out all about the child, and when you have found him, let me know, so that I too may go and do him homage.' 9 Having listened to what the king had to say, they set out. And suddenly the star they had seen rising went forward and halted over the place where the child was. 10 The sight of the star filled them with delight, 11 and going into the house they saw the child with his mother Mary, and falling to their knees they did him homage. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh.

12 But they were given a warning in a dream not to go back to Herod, and returned to their own country by a different way.

A Moment of Prayerful Silence

I listen deeply to the silent voice of the Lord and let the breath of the Spirit come to me and infuse me. In this silence I seek the Lord and repeat in my heart: "Where are you, my God?"

A Few Questions

- I take the first words that come from the mouths of the Magi and make them my own: *“Where is the infant king of the Jews?”* Do I really feel attracted to the place where the Lord is because I desire to be with him? Am I ready to leave the dark and old places of my habits, of my comfort, to undertake a journey of faith in search of Jesus?
- *“We have come to adore him”*. Here the Word of the Lord tests me, puts me through a crucible: do I really live in a relationship of love with God? Am I able to open my life in his presence and allow him to enter into my very heart-beats?
- *“From you will come a leader who will shepherd my people”*. Am I capable of placing and giving my whole existence to the guidance of the Lord, to trust in him, in his love, in his so real presence even though he remains invisible?
- *“Going into the house they saw the child”*. It is precisely because they accept to go into the house, to enter into communion, to give themselves fully and truly that their eyes can see, contemplate and recognize. Why is it that I am not aware of the fact that the more I stay outside, the more I am distant from the life of my brothers and sisters and the more I become sad and empty?

A Key to the Reading

I look for some key words, some basic themes, that may guide and help me better penetrate the meaning of this passage of the Gospel, so that my life may be enlightened and changed by this Word of the Lord.

- **The Journey:**

This passage seems to be shot through with the grand theme of a journey, an exodus, a going out. The Magi, these mysterious characters, get moving, go far away from their land and go seeking the king, the Lord. Matthew presents this fact by means of some verbs that proceed along development of the event: came, we have come, sent them, go, set out, went before them, going into, not to go back, returned. The physical journey of the Magi hides a much more important and meaningful journey, the journey of faith. This is the movement of the soul born from a desire to meet and know the Lord. At the same time, it is God's invitation, who calls and attracts us with his own power; it is he who gets us to stand up and sets us in motion, who offers us signs and does not cease to walk with us. Scripture gives us many important examples, and these help us enter into this path of grace and blessings. To Abraham God said: “Leave your country, your family and your father's house, for the land I will show you” (Gen 12: 1). Jacob too was a pilgrim of faith and conversion; in fact, of him is written: “Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Haran” (Gen 28: 10) and: “Moving on, Jacob went to the land of the sons of the East” (Gen 29: 1). Many years later, the Lord spoke to him and said: “Go back to the land of your forefathers and to your kindred; and I will be with you” (Gen 31: 3). Moses too was a man on a journey; God himself showed him the way, the exodus, in his heart, in his depths, and made of his whole life a long march of salvation for him and for his brothers and sisters: “So come, I send you to Pharaoh to bring the sons of Israel, my people, out of Egypt!” (Ex 3: 10). Also, the new people of God, we the children of the promise and of the new covenant, are called to go out all the time and to set out on a journey in the footsteps of the Lord Jesus. The exodus never ceased; the liberation that comes from faith is still always active. Let us look at Jesus, at his apostles, at Paul: not one of them

stands still, not one of them hides. All these witnesses speak to us today by their deeds and they repeat: "Blessed is he who finds in you his strength and one who decides in his heart to go on the holy journey" (Ps 83: 6).

- **The Star:**

This is a very important and central element in this passage because the star has the role of guiding the Magi to their destination, of enlightening their nights along the journey, of indicating precisely the place of the presence of the Lord, of giving great joy to their hearts. Throughout the Bible, stars appear as signs of blessing and glory, almost a personification of God, who does not abandon his people, and, at the same time, a personification of the people that does not forget its God and praises and blesses him (cfr. Ps 148: 3; Bar 3: 34). The word star appears for the first time in Scripture in Genesis 1: 16, when, on the fourth day, the story of creation tells us of the appearance in the heavens of the sun, the moon and stars, as signs and as light, to set order and give light. The Jewish term for "star" kokhab is very beautiful and full of meaning. In fact, the letters that make up the word reveal the immensity of the presence that these celestial elements bring with them. We find two letters kaf, which signify "hand" and which enclose the letter waw, which means man, understood in his vital structure, in his backbone, which keeps him erect, which makes him rise towards heaven, towards contact with his God and Creator. Thus, within the stars there are two hands, kaf and kaf, that lovingly hold within them waw, man: these are the hands of God that never cease to hold us, if only we entrust ourselves to them. Then appears the letter bet, which means house. Thus, the stars speak to us of our journey towards our house, of our constant migrating from and returning there, whence we have come, from the day of our creation and even from all eternity. Often God compares the descendants of Abraham to the stars in the heavens, almost as if each person is a star, born to give light in the night: "Look up to heaven and count the stars if you can" and then he adds: "Such will be your descendants" (Gen 15: 5). Jesus also is a star, the star that takes its rise from Jacob (Num 24: 17), that rises from on high, that is the radiant morning star, as the Apocalypse says (22: 16). In fact, in him has taken flesh the infinite love of God, which bends itself down towards us, his children, and opens the palms of his hands to gather and welcome us. Only such love can give our infinite weakness the capacity and courage, the perseverance and joy of accepting to leave, to go on the long and arduous journey of faith, which takes us to Bethlehem, to the place where God appears to us.

- **The Adoration:**

The act of adoration is as old as humankind itself, because since the beginning, the relationship with the divinity has been accompanied by this demand of love, of humility, of self-offering. Before the greatness of God, we, little people, feel and discover that we are nothing, a speck of dust, a drop from a bucket. In the Old Testament, the act of adoration appears as an act of deep love towards the Lord, an act that demands the involvement of the whole person: the mind, the will to choose, love full of desire and a body that bows and prostrates itself even to the ground. It is said in several places that the act of adoration is accompanied by a prostration with the face touching the ground; the face of man, his gaze, his breath returns to the dust whence he has his origin and there he recognises himself as creature of God, as a breath of God's nostrils. "Come in, let us bow, prostrate ourselves, and kneel in front of Yahweh our maker" (Ps 94: 6): this is the invitation of Scripture to us every day, showing us the way to walk so that we may again and again come to the truth and so live fully.

- The New Testament goes even deeper in its spiritual reflection on this fact and seems to want to accompany us on a pedagogical journey of conversion and of maturity in our interior life. In the Gospels we see the disciples, men and women, adoring the Lord Jesus after his resurrection (Mt 28: 9; Lk 24: 52), because they recognize him as God. Jesus' words in his dialogue with the Samaritan woman give us a deep insight into the truth of this act, which, after all, involves the whole of life and is an attitude of the heart: adoration is for God the Father and does not happen here or there but in Spirit and in truth, that is, in the Spirit and the Son, Jesus. We must not deceive ourselves; it is not by moving from one place to another, nor by seeking this or that spiritual person that we can adore our God. The movement, the journey is an interior one and takes place in our deepest being and is a complete surrender of ourselves, our life, our whole being, to the wings of the Holy Spirit and into the arms of Jesus, wide open on the cross and ever ready to attract all things to himself. St. Peter says clearly: "Simply reverence the Lord Christ in your hearts" (1 Pt 3: 15). The act of bowing to the ground, of prostrating ourselves before the Lord comes from the heart. If we let ourselves be touched and reach into our hearts, if we allow the Lord to enter our hearts, that sacred space, then He will change us completely, transform the whole of our person and make of us new men and women.

A Moment of Prayer: Psalm 84

A hymn concerning the trust of man on his journey to the house of God

Res. I have seen your star, Lord, and I have come to adore you!

How lovely are your dwelling-places, Yahweh Sabaoth. My whole being yearns and pines for Yahweh's courts, My heart and my body cry out for joy to the living God. Even the sparrow has found a home, the swallow a nest to place its young: your altars, Yahweh Sabaoth, my King and my God.

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. As they pass through the Valley of the Balsam, they make there a waterhole, and -- a further blessing -- early rain fills it. They make their way from height to height; God shows himself to them in Zion. Yahweh, God Sabaoth, hear my prayer, listen, God of Jacob.

God, our shield, look, and see the face of your anointed. Better one day in your courts than a thousand at my own devices, to stand on the threshold of God's house than to live in the tents of the wicked. For Yahweh God is a rampart and shield, he gives grace and glory; Yahweh refuses nothing good to those whose life is blameless. Yahweh Sabaoth, blessed is he who trusts in you.

Closing Prayer

Lord, my Father, I have really seen your star, I have opened my eyes to your presence of love and salvation and I have received the light of life. I have contemplated the night changed into light, pain into joy and solitude into communion; yes, all this happened before you, in your Word. You have led me through the desert; you have led me to your house and opened the door for me to enter. There I saw you, your Son Jesus, Savior of my life; there I prayed and adored, I cried and found your smile, I kept silence and learnt to speak. In your house, merciful Father, I have found life once more!

And now I am going back, I have resumed my journey, but the way is not the one I took before and my life is not what it was before. Your Word has left me with a new heart,

capable of opening itself to love, to listen, to welcome and become home to so many brothers and sisters whom you have placed in my way. I was not aware, Lord, but you have made me into a child again, you have given birth to me with Jesus. Thank you, Father, my Father!

Monday, January 3, 2022

Christmas Time

Opening Prayer

Lord, let the light of your glory shine within us, and lead us through the darkness of this world to the radiant joy of our eternal home.

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.

Gospel Reading - Matthew 4: 12-17, 23-25

Hearing that John had been arrested he withdrew to Galilee, and leaving Nazareth he went and settled in Capernaum, beside the lake, on the borders of Zebulun and Naphtali. This was to fulfil what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: Land of Zebulun! Land of Naphtali! Way of the sea beyond Jordan. Galilee of the nations! The people that lived in darkness have seen a great light; on those who lived in a country of shadow dark as death a light has dawned.

From then onwards Jesus began his proclamation with the message, 'Repent, for the kingdom of Heaven is close at hand.'

He went round the whole of Galilee teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing all kinds of disease and illness among the people.

His fame spread throughout Syria, and those who were suffering from diseases and painful complaints of one kind or another, the possessed, epileptics, the paralysed, were all brought to him, and he cured them. Large crowds followed him, coming from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judaea, and Transjordan.

Reflection

Some brief information on the objective of the Gospel of Matthew.

- The Gospel of Matthew was written during the second half of the first century in order to encourage the small and fragile community of the converted Jews who lived in the region of Galilee and Syria. They suffered persecution and threats on the part of the Jewish brothers because they had accepted Jesus as the Messiah and for having received the Pagans. In order to strengthen them in their faith, the Gospel of Matthew insists on saying that Jesus is really the Messiah and that the salvation which Jesus comes to bring is not only for the Jews, but for all of humanity.
- At the beginning of his Gospel, in the genealogy, Matthew already indicates this universal vocation of Jesus, because being "son of Abraham" (Mt 1: 1, 17) he will be a source of blessings for all the nations of the world" (cfr. Gen 12: 3). In the visit of the Magi, who came from the East, he suggests once again that the salvation is

addressed to the Pagans (Mt 2: 1-12). In the text of today's Gospel, he shows that the light which shines in the Galilee of the Gentiles" shines also outside the frontiers of Israel, in the Decapolis and beyond the Jordan (Mt 4: 12-25).

- Further on, in the Sermon on the Mountain, Jesus will say that the vocation of the Christian community is that of being "salt of the earth and light of the world" (Mt 5: 13-14) and he asks to love the enemies (Mt 5: 43-48). Jesus is the servant of God who announces the rights of the nations (Mt 12: 18). Helped by the Canaanite woman, Jesus himself overcomes the barriers of races (Mt 15: 21-28). He also overcomes the laws of purity which prevented the Gospel to be opened to the Pagans (Mt 15: 1-20).
- And finally, when Jesus sends his disciples to all Nations, the universality of salvation is even clearer (Mt 28: 19-20). In the same way, the communities are called to open themselves to all, without excluding anyone, because all are called to live as sons and daughters of God.
- Today's Gospel describes how this universal mission is an initiative. The news of the imprisonment of John the Baptist impels Jesus to begin his preaching. John had said: "Repent, because the Kingdom of God is at hand!" (Mt 4, 17). This was the reason why he was imprisoned by Herod. When Jesus knew that John had been imprisoned, he returned to Galilee proclaiming the same message: "Repent, because the Kingdom of God is at hand!" (Mt 4, 17). In other words, from the beginning, the preaching of the Gospel had risks, but Jesus did not allow himself to be frightened. In this way, Matthew encourages the communities which were running the same risks of persecution. He quotes the text of Isaiah: "The people who lived in darkness have seen a great light!" Like Jesus, the communities are also called to be "the light of nations!"
- Jesus began the announcement of the Good News going through the whole of Galilee. He does not stop, waiting for the people to arrive, but he goes toward the people. He himself participates in the meetings, in the Synagogues, to announce his message. The people bring the sick, the possessed, and Jesus accepts all, and cures them. This service to the sick forms part of the Good News and reveals to the people the presence of the Kingdom.
- Thus, the fame of Jesus is diffused in all the region, goes beyond the frontier of Galilee, penetrates Judah, and reaches Jerusalem, goes beyond the Jordan and reaches Syria and the Decapolis. In this region there are also some communities for whom Matthew was writing his Gospel. Now they know that, in spite of all the difficulties and the risks, there is already the light which shines in the darkness.

Personal Questions

- Some times, are you also light for others?
- Today, many close themselves up in the Catholic Religion. How can we live today the universality of salvation?

Concluding Prayer

I will proclaim the decree of Yahweh: He said to me, "You are my son, today have I fathered you." (Ps 2: 7)

Tuesday, January 4, 2022

Christmas Time

Opening Prayer

Father, your Son became like us
when he revealed himself in our nature; help us to become more like him,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading - Mark 6: 34-44

So as he stepped ashore he saw a large crowd; and he took pity on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd, and he set himself to teach them at some length.

By now it was getting very late, and his disciples came up to him and said, 'This is a lonely place, and it is getting very late, so send them away, and they can go to the farms and villages round about, to buy themselves something to eat.' He replied, 'Give them something to eat yourselves.' They answered, 'Are we to go and spend two hundred denarii on bread for them to eat?' He asked, 'How many loaves have you? Go and see.' And when they had found out they said, 'Five, and two fish.' Then he ordered them to get all the people to sit down in groups on the green grass, and they sat down on the ground in squares of hundreds and fifties. Then he took the five loaves and the two fish, raised his eyes to heaven and said the blessing; then he broke the loaves and began handing them to his disciples to distribute among the people. He also shared out the two fish among them all.

They all ate as much as they wanted. They collected twelve basketfuls of scraps of bread and pieces of fish. Those who had eaten the loaves numbered five thousand men.

Reflection

- It is always good to look at the context in which the text of the Gospel is found, because it enlightens us in order to discover better the sense of it. A bit before (Mk 6: 17-19), Mark narrates the banquet of death, organized by Herod with the great persons of Galilee, in the Palace of the Capital city, during which John the Baptist was killed. In today's text, he describes the banquet of life, promoted by Jesus with the hungry crowds of Galilee, there in the desert. The contrast of this context is great and enlightens the text.
- In Mark's Gospel, the multiplication of the loaves is very important. It is mentioned twice: here and in Mk 8: 1-9. And Jesus himself questions the disciples on the multiplication of the loaves (Mk 8: 14-21). This is why it is worthwhile to observe and to reflect up to the point of discovering in what the importance of the multiplication of the loaves consists of.
- Jesus had invited the disciples to rest a bit in a place in the desert (Mk 6: 31). The crowds perceived that Jesus had gone to the other side of the lake, and they followed him and arrived there before he did (Mk 6: 33). When Jesus, getting down from the boat, sees that large crowd waiting for him, he becomes sad "because they were like

sheep without a shepherd". This phrase recalls the Psalm of the Good Shepherd (Ps 23). Before the people without a shepherd, Jesus forgets to rest and begins to teach, he begins to be a Shepherd. With his words he orientates and guides the crowds in the desert of life; and in this way the crowd could sing: "The Lord is my Shepherd! There is nothing I shall want!" (Ps 23: 1).

- Time went by and it began to be late and dark. The disciples were concerned and asked Jesus to send the people away. They affirm that there in the desert it is not possible to find anything to eat for so many people. Jesus says: "You, yourselves give them to eat!" But they were afraid: "Do you want us to go and buy bread for 200 *denarius*?" (that is, the salary of 200 days!). The disciples seek a solution outside the crowds and for the crowds. Jesus does not seek the solution outside, but rather within the crowd and for the crowd and he asks: "How many loaves do you have? Go and see." The answer is: "Five loaves and two fish!" It is very little for so many people! Jesus orders the crowd to sit down in groups and asks the disciples to distribute the bread and the fish. Everybody ate enough to be satisfied!
- It is important to observe how Mark describes this fact: Jesus took the five loaves and the two fish, raised his eyes to Heaven, pronounced the blessing, broke the bread and gave it to the disciples to distribute it". This way of speaking makes the communities think about what? No doubt, this made them think about the Eucharist. Because these same words will be used (even now) in the celebration of the Supper of the Lord. Thus, Mark suggests that the Eucharist has to lead us to share. It is the Bread of Life which gives us courage and leads us to face the problems of people in a different way, not from outside, but from inside.
- In the way of describing the facts, Mark recalls the Bible in order to enlighten the sense of the facts. To feed the hungry crowds in the desert, Moses was the first one to do it (cfr. Ex 16: 1-36). And to ask the people to organize themselves and sit down in groups of 50 or 100 reminds us of the census of the People in the desert after they left Egypt (cfr. Nb 1-4). In this way, Mark suggests that Jesus is the new Messiah. The people of the communities knew the Old Testament, and for one who understands well, few words suffice. In this way they discovered the mystery which surrounded the person of Jesus.

Personal Questions

- Jesus forgets to rest in order to serve the people. Which is the message which I discover for myself?
- If today we would share what we have, there would be no hunger in the world. What can I do?

Concluding Prayer

In his days uprightness shall flourish, and peace in plenty till the moon is no more. His empire shall stretch from sea to sea, from the river to the limits of the earth. (Ps 72: 7-8)

Wednesday, January 5, 2022

Christmas Time

Opening Prayer

God, light of all nations,

give us the joy of lasting peace and fill us with your radiance as you filled the hearts of our fathers.

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.

Gospel Reading - Mark 6: 45-52

And at once he made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side near Bethsaida, while he himself sent the crowd away. After saying goodbye to them he went off into the hills to pray.

When evening came, the boat was far out on the sea, and he was alone on the land. He could see that they were hard pressed in their rowing, for the wind was against them; and about the fourth watch of the night, he came towards them, walking on the sea. He was going to pass them by, but when they saw him walking on the sea, they thought it was a ghost and cried out; for they had all seen him and were terrified. But at once he spoke to them and said, 'Courage! It's me! Don't be afraid.' Then he got into the boat with them, and the wind dropped. They were utterly and completely dumbfounded, because they had not seen what the miracle of the loaves meant; their minds were closed.

Reflection

- After the multiplication of the loaves (yesterday's Gospel), Jesus ordered the disciples to go into the boat. Why? Mark does not explain this. The Gospel of John says the following. According to the hope people had at that time, the Messiah would repeat the gesture of Moses and would feed the multitude in the desert. This is why, before the multiplication of the loaves, the people concluded that Jesus must be the expected Messiah, announced by Moses (cf. Dt 18: 15-18) and they wanted to make him a King (cfr. Jn 6: 14-15). This decision of the people was a temptation for Jesus as well as for the disciples. And for this reason, Jesus obliged the disciples to take the boat and leave. He wanted to avoid that they got contaminated with the dominating ideology, because the "leaven of Herod and of the Pharisees was very strong (Mk 8: 15). Jesus himself faces the temptation through prayer.
- Mark describes the events with great art. On one side, Jesus goes up to the mountain to pray. On the other, the disciples go toward the sea and get into the boat. It almost seems like a symbolical picture which foreshadows the future: it is as if Jesus went up to Heaven, leaving the disciples alone in the midst of the contradictions of life, in the fragile boat of the community. It was night. They are in the high seas, all together in the small boat, trying to advance, rowing, but the wind was strong and contrary to them. They were tired. It was night, between three and six o'clock in the morning. The communities of the time of Mark were like the disciples. In the night! Contrary wind! They caught no fish, in spite of the efforts made! Jesus seemed to be absent! But he was present and came close to them, but they, like the disciples of Emmaus, did not recognize him (Lk 24: 16).
- At the time of Mark, around the year 70, the small boat of the communities had to face the contrary wind on the part of some converted Jews who wished to reduce

the mystery of Jesus to the prophecies and figures of the Old Testament, as well as some converted Pagans who thought it was possible to have a certain alliance of the faith in Jesus with the empire. Mark tries to help the Christians to respect the Mystery of Jesus and not to want to reduce Jesus to their own desires and ideas.

- Jesus arrives walking on the water of the sea of life. They scream taken up by fear, because they think that it is a question of a phantasm. As it happens in the passage of the Disciples of Emmaus, Jesus pretends that he wants to continue to walk (Lk 24: 28). But they cry out and this causes him to change the way, he gets close to them and says: "Courage, it is I, do not be afraid!". Here, once again, for one who knows the story of the Old Testament this recalls some very important facts: (a) Remember that the people, protected by God, crossed the Red Sea without fear; (b) Remember, that God calling Moses, declared his name several times, saying "I am he who is!" (cfr. Ex 3: 15); (c) Also remember the Book of Isaiah which represents the return from the exile as a new Exodus, where God appears repeating numerous times: "I am he who is!" (cfr. Is 42: 8; 43: 5-11-13; 44: 6, 25; 45: 5-7). This way of recalling the Old Testament, of using the Bible, helped the communities to perceive better the presence of God in Jesus and in the facts of life. Do not be afraid!
- Jesus goes into the boat and the wind ceased. But the fear of the disciples, instead of disappearing, increases. Mark, the Evangelist, makes a commentary criticizing them and says: "They had not understood what the miracle of the loaves meant, their minds were closed" (6: 52). The affirmation their minds were closed reminds us of the heart of Pharaoh which was hardened (Ex 7: 3, 13, 22) and of the people in the desert (Ps 95: 8) who did not want to listen to Moses and thought only of returning to Egypt (Nb 20: 2-10), where there was plenty of bread and meat to satisfy them (Ex 16: 3).

Personal Questions

- Night, stormy sea, contrary wind! Have you ever felt like this? What have you done to overcome it?
- Have you been afraid so many times because you have not known how to recognize Jesus present and acting in your life?

Concluding Prayer

He has pity on the weak and the needy and saves the needy from death.

From oppression and violence, he redeems their lives, their blood is precious in his sight. (Ps 72: 13-14)

Thursday, January 6, 2022

Christmas Time

Opening prayer

God our Father, through Christ your Son
the hope of eternal life dawned on our world.
Give to us the light of faith

that we may always acknowledge him as our Redeemer and come to the glory of his kingdom,

where he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading - Luke 4, 14-22a

Jesus, with the power of the Spirit in him, returned to Galilee; and his reputation spread throughout the countryside. He taught in their synagogues, and everyone glorified him. He came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day as he usually did. He stood up to read, and they handed him the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. Unrolling the scroll, he found the place where it is written: The spirit of the Lord is on me, for he has anointed me to bring the good news to the afflicted. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives, sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim a year of favor from the Lord.

He then rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the assistant and sat down. And all eyes in the synagogue were fixed on him.

Then he began to speak to them, 'This text is being fulfilled today even while you are listening.'

And he won the approval of all, and they were astonished by the gracious words that came from his lips.

Reflection

- Animated by the Spirit, Jesus returns toward Galilee and begins to announce the Good News of the Kingdom of God. Being in the community and teaching in the Synagogues, he reaches Nazareth, where he grew up. He was returning to the community, where, since he was small, had participated in the celebration during thirty years. The following Saturday, according to his custom, he went to the Synagogue to be with the people and to participate in the celebrations.
- Jesus rises to go to read. He chooses a text from Isaiah which speaks about the poor, of the prisoners, of the blind and the oppressed. The text reflects the situation of the people of Galilee, in the time of Jesus. In the name of God, Jesus takes a stand to defend the life of his people, and with the words of Isaiah, he defines his mission: to proclaim the Good News to the poor, to proclaim freedom to the prisoners, to restore sight to the blind, and freedom to the oppressed. Going back to the ancient tradition of the prophets, he proclaims: "a year of grace of the Lord". He proclaims a jubilee year. Jesus wants to reconstruct the community, the clan in such a way that once again it may be the expression of their faith in God! And then, if God is Father/Mother of all we should all be brothers and sisters of one another.
- In ancient Israel, the great family, the clan or the *community*, was the basis of social living together. It was the protection of the families and of the persons, the guarantee of the possession of the land, the principal channel of tradition and of the defense of the people. It was a concrete way of embodying the love of God in the love for neighbor. To defend the clan, the community, was the same as defending the Covenant with God. In Galilee at the time of Jesus, there was a two-fold segregation, that of the politics of Herod Antipas (4 BC to 39 AD) and the segregation of the official religion. And this because of the system of exploitation and of repression of the politics of Herod Antipas supported by the Roman Empire. Many

people were homeless, excluded and without work (Lk 14: 21; Mt 20: 3.5-6). The result was that the clan, the community, was weakened. The families and the persons remained without any help, without any defense. And the official religion maintained by the religious authorities of the time, instead of strengthening the community, in a way in which it could receive and accept the excluded, strengthened this segregation even more. The Law of God was used to legitimize the exclusion of many people: women, children, Samaritans, foreigners, lepers, possessed, Publicans, sick, mutilated, paraplegic. It was all the contrary of the Fraternity which God had dreamt for all! And this was the political and economic situation, as well as the religious ideology, everything conspired to weaken the local community more and hinder, in this way, the manifestation of the Kingdom of God. Jesus' program, based on the prophecy of Isaiah, offered an alternative.

- After finishing the reading, Jesus updated the text applying it to the life of the people, saying: "Today, this reading, which you have heard with your own ears, has been fulfilled!" His way of joining the Bible with the life of the people, produced a two-fold reaction. Some remained surprised, amazed, and admired. Others had a negative reaction. Some were scandalized and wanted to have nothing more to do with him. They said: "Is he not the son of Joseph?" (Lk 4: 22). Why were they scandalized? Because Jesus says to accept and receive the poor, the blind, the oppressed. But they did not accept his proposal. And thus, when he presented his project to accept the excluded, he himself was excluded!

Personal Questions

- Jesus joined the faith in God with the social situation of his people. And I, how do I live my faith in God?
- Where I live, are there any blind, prisoners, oppressed? What do I do?

Concluding Prayer

May his name be blessed forever, and endure in the sight of the sun.

In him shall be blessed every race in the world, and all nations call him blessed. (Ps 72: 17)

Thursday, January 7, 2022

Christmas Time

Opening Prayer

All-powerful Father,

you have made known the birth of the Savior by the light of a star.

May he continue to guide us with the light,

for he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading - Luke 5: 12-16

Now it happened that Jesus was in one of the towns when suddenly a man appeared, covered with a skin-disease. Seeing Jesus he fell on his face and implored him saying, 'Sir, if you are willing you can cleanse me.'

He stretched out his hand, and touched him saying, 'I am willing. Be cleansed.' At once the skin-disease left him. He ordered him to tell no one, 'But go and show yourself to the priest and make the offering for your cleansing just as Moses prescribed, as evidence to them.'

But the news of him kept spreading, and large crowds would gather to hear him and to have their illnesses cured, but he would go off to some deserted place and pray.

Reflection

- A leper came close to Jesus. He had to live far away from others, because whoever touched him remained impure! But that leper had great courage. He transgressed or broke the norms of religion so as to be able to get close to Jesus. He said: *Lord, if you want, you can heal me!* That is: "It is not necessary for you to touch me. It is sufficient for the Lord to want it, and he cured him!" The sentence shows two evils:
 - a) the *evil of leprosy* which renders him impure;
 - b) the *evil of solitude* to which he was condemned by society and by religion.

This also reveals the man's great faith in the power of Jesus. And Jesus profoundly moved, heals him from both evils! In the first place, to cure the solitude, he touches the leper. It is as if he would say: "For me you are not excluded. I accept you as a brother!" And then he cures the leper saying: *I want it, be cured!*

- The leper, in order to be able to enter in contact with Jesus, had transgressed the norms of the law. Jesus also, in order to be able to help that excluded man and reveal to him a new face of God, transgresses the norms of his religion and touches the leper. At that time, whoever touched a leper became impure according to the religious authority and by the law of the time.
- Jesus, not only cures, but also wants the cured person to be able to live with others. He once again inserts the person in society so that he can live together with others. At that time for a leper to be accepted again in the community, he needed a certificate from a priest, that he had been cured. It is the same today. The sick person leaves the hospital having a document signed by the doctor of the section. Jesus obliges the person to go and look for the document, so that he can live normally with the others. He obliges the authority to recognize that this man has been cured.
- Jesus forbids the leper to speak about the healing. The Gospel of Mark informs us that this prohibition was not effective, did not serve. The leper, *went away, but then started freely proclaiming and telling the story everywhere, so that Jesus could no longer go openly into any town, but stayed outside in deserted places* (Mk 1: 45) Why? Because Jesus had touched a leper. For this reason, according to the opinion of the religion of the time, now he himself was impure and should be far away from everybody. He could no longer enter into the cities. And Mark says that the people did not care at all about these official norms, in fact, *people came to him from all parts* (Mk 1: 45). Total Subversion!
- The two-fold message which Luke and Mark give the community of their time and to all of us is the following: a) to announce the Good News means to give witness of the concrete experience that one has of Jesus. What does the leper announce? He tells the others the good that Jesus has done to him. That is all! All this! And this is

the witness which impels the others to accept the Good News of God, those brought by Jesus. b) In order to take the Good News to people, it is not necessary to be afraid to transgress the religious norms which are contrary to God's project, and which render communication, dialogue and the lived experience of love, difficult. Even if this implies difficulty for the people, as it happened with Jesus.

Personal Questions

- In order to help the neighbor, Jesus transgresses the law of purity. In the Church today, are there any laws which render difficult or prevent the practice of love toward neighbor?
- In order to be cured, the leper had the courage to challenge the public opinion of his time. And I?

Concluding Prayer

Praise Yahweh, Jerusalem, Zion, praise your God. For he gives strength to the bars of your gates, he blesses your children within you. (Ps 147: 12-13)

Friday, January 8, 2022

Christmas Time

Opening Prayer

God our Father,

through your Son you made us a new creation. He shared our nature and became one of us; with his help, may we become more like him, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading - John 3: 22-30

After this, Jesus went with his disciples into the Judaeen countryside and stayed with them there and baptized. John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, where there was plenty of water, and people were going there and were being baptized. For John had not yet been put in prison.

Now a discussion arose between some of John's disciples and a Jew about purification, so they went to John and said, 'Rabbi, the man who was with you on the far side of the Jordan, the man to whom you bore witness, is baptizing now, and everyone is going to him.' John replied: 'No one can have anything except what is given him from heaven. 'You yourselves can bear me out. I said, "I am not the Christ; I am the one who has been sent to go in front of him." 'It is the bridegroom who has the bride; and yet the bridegroom's friend, who stands there and listens to him, is filled with joy at the bridegroom's voice. This is the joy I feel, and it is complete. He must grow greater, I must grow less.

Reflection

- Both John the Baptist and Jesus indicated a new way to the crowds. But Jesus after having adhered to the movement of John the Baptist, and after having been baptized by him, advanced a step ahead and created his own movement. He baptized the persons in the Jordan River, when John the Baptist was also doing it. Both of them attracted the poor and abandoned people of Palestine, by announcing the Good News of the Kingdom of God.
- Jesus, the new preacher, had a certain advantage over John the Baptist. He baptized more people and attracted more disciples. Thus, a tension arose between the disciples of John and those of Jesus, concerning the “purification”, that is, concerning the value of Baptism. The disciples of John the Baptist experienced a certain envy and went to John to speak to him and informed him about the movement of Jesus.
- The response of John to his disciples is a beautiful response, which reveals his great spirit. John helps his disciples to see things more objectively. And he uses three arguments: a) Nobody receives anything which is not given by God. If Jesus does such beautiful things, it is because he receives them from God (Jn 3: 27). Instead of having envy, the disciples should feel joy. b) John reaffirms once again that he, John, is not the Messiah but only the precursor (Jn 3: 28). c) And at the end he uses a comparison, taken from the wedding feast. At that time, in Palestine, on the day of the wedding, in the house of the bride, the so called “friends of the bridegroom” waited for the arrival of the bridegroom to present him to the bride. In this case, Jesus is the bridegroom, the crowd is the bride. John the friend of the bridegroom. John the Baptist says that, in the voice of Jesus, he recognizes the voice of the bridegroom and can present him to the bride, to the crowds. At this moment, the bridegroom, the people, leave the friend of the bridegroom and follow Jesus, because they recognize in him the voice of their bridegroom!. And for this reason, the joy of John is great, “complete joy”. John wants nothing for himself! His mission is to present the bridegroom to the bride! The last sentence summarizes everything: “He must grow greater; I must grow less!” This phrase is also the program for any person who follows Jesus.
- At the end of the first century, in Palestine as well as in Asia Minor, where there were some communities of Jews, there were also people who had been in contact with John the Baptist who had been baptized by him (Acts 19: 3). Seen from outside, the movement of John the Baptist and that of Jesus were very similar to one another. Both of them announced the coming of the Kingdom (cfr. Mt 3: 1-2; 4: 17). There must have been some confusion between the followers of John and those of Jesus. And because of this, the witness of John about Jesus was very important. The four Gospel are concerned about giving the words of John the Baptist saying that he is not the Messiah. For the Christian communities, the Christian response, the response of John, “*He must grow greater and I must grow less*” was valid not only for the Disciples of John at the time of Jesus, but also for the disciples of the Baptist or Cambric community of the end of the first century.

Personal Questions

- “He must grow greater, I must grow less”. This is John’s program. Is this also my program?
- What is important is that the bride finds the bridegroom. We are only spokespersons, nothing more. And, am I this?

Concluding Prayer

They shall dance in praise of his name, play to him on tambourines and harp! For Yahweh loves his people, he will crown the humble with salvation. (Ps 149: 3-4)

Sunday, January 9, 2022

The Baptism of Jesus

Opening Prayer

Lord, our God and our Father, grant us to know the mystery of the baptism of your Son. Grant that we may understand it as the Evangelist, Luke, understood it; as the early Christians understood it. Father, grant that we may contemplate the mystery of Jesus' identity as you revealed it at his baptism in the waters of the Jordan and who is present in our baptism.

Lord Jesus, by listening to your word, teach us what it means to be children in You and with You. You are the true Christ because you teach us to be children of God as you are. Grant us a deep awareness of the action of the Spirit who invites us to listen to the word with docility and attention.

Holy Spirit we ask you to calm our anxieties and fears so that we may become more free, simple and meek in listening to the voice of God who reveals himself in the word of Jesus Christ, our brother and redeemer. Amen!

Gospel Reading: Luke 3: 15-16, 21-22

A Key to the Reading:

The account of the baptism of Jesus, presented to us in this Sunday's liturgy, invites us to meditate on it and touches on a crucial question concerning our faith: **Who is Jesus?** At the time of Jesus and throughout history, this question has been answered in infinite ways and these indicate the attempt of human beings and believers to understand better the mystery of the person of Jesus. However, in this meditative exercise of ours, we wish to draw deeply from the more genuine and reliable source, the word of God. In describing the scene of Christ's baptism in the Jordan, Luke is not interested in telling us the historical and concrete details of this event, but rather invites us who read the Gospel in this liturgical year, to consider the main elements that enable us to grasp **the identity of Jesus**.

A Division of the Text to Help Us with the Reading:

This passage from Luke contains two declarations on the identity of Jesus, namely the declaration of John (3: 15-16) and that of God himself (3: 21-22).

- The first declaration is provoked by the people's reaction to the preaching and baptism of conversion of John: might he not be the Messiah? (3: 15). John replies that there is a substantial difference between his baptism by water and Jesus' baptism administered in the «Holy Spirit and fire» (3: 16).
- The second declaration comes from heaven and is made during Jesus' baptism. In the background, there are the baptised from among whom the figure of Jesus comes forward to be baptized (3: 21). The focal point of the scene is not the baptism,

but the events surrounding it: the heavens open, the Spirit descends on him and a voice is heard proclaiming Jesus' identity (3: 22).

The Text:

15 As the people were in expectation, and all men questioned in their hearts concerning John, whether perhaps he was the Christ, 16 John answered them all, "I baptize you with water; but he who is mightier than I is coming, the thong of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

21 Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, 22 and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form, as a dove, and a voice came from heaven, "Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased."

A Moment of Prayerful Silence

In the silence, try to bring to life in your heart the Gospel scene just read. Try to assimilate it and make the words your own, thus identifying your thoughts with the content or meaning of the words.

A Few Questions

... to help us in our meditation and prayer.

- What effect did the "voice of God" declaring Jesus "the" only, beloved Son of God, have on you?
- Is this truth a shared and conscious conviction for you?
- Has the baptism of Jesus convinced you that God is not distant, closed in his transcendence and indifferent to humanity's need of salvation?
- Does it not surprise you that Jesus goes down into the water of the Jordan to receive the baptism of penance, becoming one with sinners, he who is sinless?
- Jesus is no sinner, but he does not refuse to become one with sinful humanity. Are you convinced that salvation begins with the law of solidarity?
- You, who have been baptized in the name of Christ, «in the Holy Spirit and fire», are you aware that you have been called by God to experience God's solidarity with your personal history, so that you may no longer identify with sin that isolates and divides, but with love that unites?

A Key to the Reading

... for those who wish to deepen their understanding.

The Context of the Jesus' Baptism

After the childhood accounts and in preparation for the public activities of Jesus, Luke tells us of John the Baptist's activities, the baptism and temptations of Jesus. These introduce Jesus' own activities and give them meaning. The Evangelist includes in one unique and complete frame all the activities of John: from the beginning of his preaching on the banks of the Jordan (3: 3-18) to his capture by Herod Antipas (3: 19-

20). When Jesus appears on the scene in 3: 21 to be baptized, John is no longer mentioned. Through this silence, Luke makes explicit his reading of salvation history: John is the last prophetic voice of the promise of the Old Testament. Now the center of history is Jesus, and it is he who begins the time of salvation, which is extended into the time of the Church.

A not insignificant element in the understanding of the events previous to those of John the Baptist and of Jesus is the geographical and political description of Palestine in the thirties. The Evangelist wants to present a historical dimension and a theological meaning to the Jesus event. He wants to say that it is not worldly political power (represented by Tiberius Caesar) nor religious power (represented by the high priests) that gives value or meaning to human events; but rather it is “the word of God that rests upon John, son of Zachary, in the desert” (Lk 1: 2). For Luke, the new or developed aspect of the history inaugurated by Jesus, lies in this context or political situation of profane and religious dominance and power. In previous times, in the accounts of the prophets, the word of God was addressed to a particular historical-political situation, but in John’s message there is an urgency: God comes in the person of Jesus. Thus, the word of God calls John the Baptist from the desert to send him to the people of Israel. The task of this last prophet of the Old Testament is to prepare for the coming of the Lord among his people (Lk 1: 16-17, 76). He accomplishes this task by preparing all to receive God’s forgiveness through the baptism of conversion (Jer 3: 34; Ez 36: 25), which means a change in the way of seeing one’s relationship with God. Changing one’s life means practicing fraternity and justice according to the teaching of the prophets (Lk 3: 10-14). As opposed to religious or social conformism, the reader of Luke’s Gospel is invited to be open to the person of Jesus, the saving Messiah. Moreover, Luke emphasizes that the prophet John did not pretend to be the rival of Jesus. On the contrary, the prophet of the Jordan saw himself as entirely subordinate to the person of Jesus: «the thong of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie» (3: 16). Again, Jesus is stronger because he gives the Spirit.

John’s life comes to a violent end in the manner of the classical prophets. The authenticity of a prophet is measured by his freedom in facing political power. Indeed, he courageously denounces the evil actions of Herod towards his people. There are two reactions to the call of the prophet: the people and sinners become converted, whereas the powerful react with repressive violence. John ends his days in prison. Through this tragic event, John anticipates the fate of Jesus who is rejected and killed, but who becomes the point of reference for all those persecuted by repressive power.

Finally, the Jordan is the physical setting of John’s preaching. Luke means to establish a close tie between this river and the Baptist: after his baptism, Jesus will never go to the Jordan again and John will never cross into Galilee and Judea, because these are places reserved for the activities of Jesus.

A Commentary on the Text

- The Baptist’s Words Concerning Jesus (Lk 3: 15-16)

In the first scene of the Gospel passage of today’s liturgy, John prophetically affirms that there is one “who is mightier” than he who is to come. This is the answer of the prophet of the Jordan to the opinion of the crowd that he might be the Christ. The crowds here are called the people in expectation. For Luke, Israel is considered a people open and prepared to receive the messianic salvation (at least during the time before the crucifixion). John’s words draw on the images of the Old Testament and act to exalt the mysterious person whose imminent coming he announces: «he who is mightier than I is coming» (3: 16).

- The figure of “the mightier”

The Baptist begins to paint the figure of Christ with the adjective “mighty” already used by Isaiah of the king-Messiah: «mighty, powerful like God» (9: 5) and a term used in the Old Testament to signify an attribute of the Creator, considered sovereign of the universe and of history: «Yahweh is king, robed in majesty, Yahweh is robed in power, he wears it like a belt» (Ps 93: 1). The expression “one is coming” echoes a title of messianic flavor found in Psalm 118, a processional hymn sung during the feast of the Tabernacles: «Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord». Luke applies this hymn to Jesus when he enters Jerusalem. The famous messianic proclamation in the book of the prophet Zachariah bears the same message: «See now, your king comes to you...» (9: 9).

- A humble gesture: «the thong of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie»
- This is another way the Evangelist describes the figure of Christ and has a typically oriental flavor: «to untie the thong of the sandals». This is the task of a slave. The Baptist sees himself as a servant of the Messiah who is to come, moreover he feels humble and unworthy: «the thong of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie».
- Then he presents the baptism that the proclaimed person will perform: «he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire». In Psalm 104: 3 the Spirit of God is defined as the principle that creates and regenerates all being: «Send forth your Spirit, and they shall be created, and you shall renew the face of the earth». The fire, however, is *par excellence* the symbol of divinity: it brings heat and enkindles, animates, and destroys, it is the source of warmth and death.

- The Words from Heaven Concerning Jesus (Lk 3: 1-22)

In the second scene we have a new profile or revelation of Christ. This time, it is God himself, and not John, who paints the figure of Christ with solemn words: «You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.» This introduction and definition of Christ is supported by a real and particular heavenly choreography (the heavens open... the Spirit descends in the form of a dove... the voice from heaven) to show the divine quality of the words pronounced on the person of Jesus.

- The dove is the symbol of the Spirit of God who possessed the prophets, but who now is infused in his fullness on the Messiah foretold by Isaiah: “On him the Spirit of Yahweh rests” (11:2). The symbol of the dove shows that with the coming of Jesus the perfect presence of God takes place who manifests himself in the pouring out of his Spirit. It is this fullness of the Holy Spirit that consecrates Christ for his saving mission and for the task of revealing to people the definitive word of the Father. It is certain that the sign of the dove shows the reader of the passage concerning the baptism that God is about to meet with humanity. This meeting is verified in the person of Jesus. The Baptist presented Jesus as the Messiah – who in the OT remains simply a man, even though perfect – and now God defines Jesus as the “beloved” Son. This title shows the supreme presence of God, which goes beyond that experienced in the cult or any other aspect of life in Israel.
- The divine voice is another sign accompanying the revelation of Jesus in the waters of the Jordan. The voice recalls two texts of the Old Testament. The first is a messianic hymn that cites some words of God addressed to his king-Messiah: “You are my son, this day I have begotten you” (Ps 2:7). In the OT both the figure of the king and the Messiah were considered as adoptive sons of God. Jesus, however, is the beloved son, synonymous with the only

son. The second text that throws light on the words pronounced by the voice from heaven is a passage taken from the Hymns of the servant of the Lord and that the liturgy of the word of this Sunday gives us for the first reading: "Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom my soul delights" (Is 42: 1). Two figures presented by Isaiah converge in Jesus: the hope of the Messiah-king and the figure of the suffering Messiah. It would not be improper to say that the scene of the baptism as presented by Luke is a true catechesis on the mystery of the person of Jesus, Messiah, king, servant, prophet, Son of God.

- Again, from the voice from heaven we can see the transcendent, divine, unique quality of Jesus. This belonging of Jesus to the world of God will become visible, palpable, experienced in his humanity, in his belonging in the midst of people, in his wandering along the roads of Palestine.

Thus the Word of God this Sunday, through the account of Jesus' baptism, is meant to introduce Jesus to the world in a solemn way. This presentation will be complete only on the cross and in the resurrection. Indeed, on the cross, two faces of Christ are presented, the human-saving face through his death on the cross for our redemption, and the divine face in the profession of faith of the centurion: "Indeed, this is the Son of God!". The word of God on this day of the Lord, invites us to contemplate and adore the face of Christ that St. Augustine presented in one of his reflections: "In that face we can also see our features, those of the adoptive son revealed in our baptism."

Psalm 42

When we experience the silence of God in our life, let us not grow discouraged, but let us always cultivate our thirst for Him together with all our brothers and sisters. Let us walk on the roads of the Kingdom, sure to find his presence in Christ Jesus.

Seeking the face of God

As a hart longs for flowing streams, so longs my soul for thee, O God.

My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and behold the face of God? My tears have been my food day and night, while men say to me continually, "Where is your God?" These things I remember, as I pour out my soul: how I went with the throng, and led them in procession to the house of God, with glad shouts and songs of thanksgiving.

Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my help and my God.

Closing Prayer

Lord God, when your Son Jesus was being baptized by John the Baptist in the Jordan he prayed. Your divine voice heard his prayer that opened the heavens. The Holy Spirit too revealed his presence under the form of a dove. Listen to our prayer! We implore you to sustain us with your grace so that we may behave truly as children of the light. Grant us the strength to abandon the habits of the old man so that we may be constantly renewed in the Spirit, clothed, and imbued by the thoughts and feelings of Christ.

Lord Jesus, you willed to be baptized by John the Baptist with the baptism of penance. We turn the eyes of our heart to you so that we may learn to pray as you prayed to the Father at your baptism, with filial trust and complete faithfulness to his will. Amen!

Monday, January 10, 2022

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father of love, hear our prayers. Help us to know your will with courage and faith.

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.

Gospel Reading - Mark 1: 14-20

After John had been arrested, Jesus went into Galilee. There he proclaimed the gospel from God saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent, and believe the gospel.'

As he was walking along by the Lake of Galilee he saw Simon and Simon's brother Andrew casting a net in the lake -- for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, 'Come after me and I will make you into fishers of people.' And at once they left their nets and followed him.

Going on a little further, he saw James, son of Zebedee, and his brother John; they too were in their boat, mending the nets. At once he called them and, leaving their father Zebedee in the boat with the men he employed, they went after him.

Reflection

- After John had been arrested, Jesus went to Galilee. There he proclaimed the Gospel of God. John was arrested by King Herod for having denounced the immoral behavior of the King (Lk 3: 18-20). The imprisonment of John the Baptist did not frighten Jesus! On the contrary, all the opposite! In that he saw a symbol of the coming of the Kingdom. And today, would it be that we know how to read the facts of politics and of urban violence to announce or proclaim the Good News of God?
- Jesus proclaimed the Good News of God. The Good News is of God not only because it comes from God, but also and, above all, because God is its content. God, himself, is the greatest Good News for human life. He responds to the deepest aspiration of our heart. In Jesus we see what happens when a human person allows God to enter and to reign. This Good News of the Kingdom of God proclaimed by Jesus has four different aspects:
 - The time is fulfilled, has arrived. For the other Jews the time was not as yet fulfilled, had not arrived. There was still much missing for the coming of the Kingdom. For the Pharisees, for example, the Kingdom could be attained only when the observance of the Law would be perfect. Jesus had another way of reading the facts. He says that the time is fulfilled, it has arrived.
 - The Kingdom of God is close at hand! For the Pharisees the coming of the Kingdom depended on their efforts. It would have arrived only after they had observed the Law. Jesus says the contrary: "The Kingdom is close at

hand". It is already here! Independently of the efforts made! When Jesus says: "The Kingdom is close at hand", he does not mean to say that the Kingdom has been reached only at that moment, but rather that it was already there. What everybody was expecting was already present in their life, and they did not know it, they did not perceive it (cf. Lk 17: 21). Jesus perceived it! Because he saw and read reality with a different look and it is in this hidden presence of the Kingdom in the midst of the people that Jesus reveals himself to the poor of his land. And this is the seed of the Kingdom which will receive the rain of his Word and the warmth of his love.

- Convert yourselves! The exact meaning is change the way of thinking and of living. In order to be able to perceive the presence of the Kingdom in life, the person should begin to think and to live in a diverse way. The person should change way of life and find another way of living together with others! He/she should leave aside all legalism of the teaching of the Pharisees and allow the new experience of God to invade his/her life and give him/her a new way of looking so as to read and understand the facts in a new way.
- To believe in the Good News! It was not easy to accept this message. It is not easy for us to begin to think in a different way from all that we have learnt, since we were small children. This is possible only through an act of faith. When someone give a diverse news, it is difficult to accept it, and it is accepted only if we trust the person who gives the news. And thus, you will say to others: "You can accept! I know this person! This person does not deceive! You can trust him/her! We can trust Jesus!
- The first objective of the proclamation of the Good News is that of forming a community. Jesus goes by, he sees and he calls. The first four who were called, Simon, Andrew, John and James, listen, abandon everything and follow Jesus in order to form a community with him. It seems to be love at first sight! According to Mark's account, everything takes place in the first encounter with Jesus. Comparing with the other Gospels, people perceive that the four already knew Jesus (Jn 1: 39; Lk 5: 1-11). They had already had the opportunity to live with him, to see him help the people and to listen to him in the Synagogue. They knew how he lived and what he thought. The call was not something of one moment, but a question of repeated calls and invitations, of progressing and of retreating. The call begins and begins again always anew! In practice, it coincided with the living together with Jesus for two or three years, since the time of the Baptism until the moment when Jesus went to Heaven (Acts 1: 21-22). And then, why does Mark present this as something sudden, an act of love at first sight? Mark thinks in the ideal: the encounter with Jesus should bring about a radical change in our life!

Personal Questions

- A political fact, the imprisonment of John, led Jesus to begin the proclamation of the Good News of God. Today, do the facts of politics and of the police, exercise any influence in the proclamation of the Good News that we present to people?
- "Convert yourselves! Believe in the Good News!" How is this taking place in my own life?

Concluding Prayer

For you are Yahweh, Most High over all the earth, far transcending all gods. (Ps 97: 9)

Tuesday, January 11, 2022

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father of love, hear our prayers.

Help us to know your will and to do it with courage and faith.

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.

Gospel Reading - Mark 1: 21-28

They went as far as Capernaum, and at once on the Sabbath he went into the synagogue and began to teach. And his teaching made a deep impression on them because, unlike the scribes, he taught them with authority.

And at once in their synagogue there was a man with an unclean spirit, and he shouted, 'What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are: the Holy One of God.' But Jesus rebuked it saying, 'Be quiet! Come out of him!'

And the unclean spirit threw the man into convulsions and with a loud cry went out of him. The people were so astonished that they started asking one another what it all meant, saying, 'Here is a teaching that is new, and with authority behind it: he gives orders even to unclean spirits and they obey him.'

And his reputation at once spread everywhere, through all the surrounding Galilean countryside.

Reflection

- Sequence of the Gospels of the days of this week. Yesterday's Gospel informed us concerning the first activity of Jesus: he called four persons to form the community with them (Mk 1: 16-10). Today's Gospel describes the admiration of people before the teaching of Jesus (Mt 1: 21-22) and the first miracle when he expels the devil (Mk 1: 23-28). The Gospel of tomorrow narrates the cure of Peter's mother-in-law (Mk 1: 29-31), the healing of many sick persons (Mk 1: 32-34) and the prayer of Jesus in an isolated place (Mk 1: 35-39). Mark gathers all these episodes which had been transmitted orally in the communities and he joins them together like bricks of one only wall. In the years '70's, the year in which he writes, the Communities needed orientation. By describing how Jesus began his activity, Mark indicates what they should do and how, to announce the Good News. Mark gives them a catechesis, by telling the Communities the events of the life of Jesus.
- Jesus teaches with authority, differently from the way the Scribes do it. The first thing that the people perceive is the diverse way in which Jesus teaches. It is not so much the content, but rather the way in which he teaches that impresses the people.
- For this reason, by his different way, Jesus creates a critical conscience in people concerning the religious authority of that time. The people perceive, they compare and says: He teaches with authority, in a way different from the way the Scribes do it. The Scribes of that time taught quoting the authority. Jesus does not quote any

authority, but he speaks beginning with his experience of God and of his life. His word is rooted in the heart.

- You have come to destroy us! In Mark, the first miracle is the expulsion of the devil. Jesus struggles and expels the power of evil which takes possession of persons and alienated them from themselves. The man possessed by the devil shouts: "I know who you are: You are the Holy One of God!" The man repeated the official teaching which presented the Messiah as the "Holy One of God", that is as a High Priest, or like a King, Judge, Doctor or General. Even today also, many people live alienated from themselves, deceived by the power of mass media, means of communication, by propaganda of business. They repeat what they hear others say. They live as slaves of consumerism, oppressed by the power of money, threatened by debtors. Many think that their life is not as it should be if they cannot buy what the propaganda announces and recommends.
- Jesus rebuked the evil spirit: "Be quiet! Come out of him!" The spirit threw the man into convulsions, and with a loud cry went out of him. Jesus restores the person to himself. He gives him back his conscience and his liberty. He makes the person recover his complete judgment (cf. Mk 5: 15). Then it was not easy, it was not easy yesterday, it is not easy today to do in such a way that a person begins to think and to act in a way diverse from the official ideology.
- A new teaching! He commands even the evil spirits. The first two signs of the Good News are these: his different way of teaching the things of God, and his power over evil spirits. Jesus opens a new road in order that people can attain purity. At that time, a person who was declared impure could not present himself/herself before God to pray and to receive the blessing promised by God to Abraham. He/she should first purify himself/herself. These and many other laws and norms made the life of people very difficult and marginalized many persons who were considered impure, far from God. Now, purified by the contact with Jesus, persons could present themselves before God. This was for them a great Good News!

Personal Questions

- Could I really say: "I am fully free, master of myself? If I cannot say it of myself, then something in me is possessed by other powers. What do I do to expel this strange power?"
- Today many people do not live but are lived. Do not think, but they are thought by the means of communication, by mass media. Do not have a critical mind or way of thinking. They are not masters of themselves. How can this "devil" be expelled?

Concluding Prayer

Yahweh our Lord, how majestic is your name throughout the world!

What are human beings that you spare a thought for them, or the child of Adam that you care for him? (Ps 8: 1.4)

Wednesday, January 12, 2022

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father of love, hear our prayers.

Help us to know your will and to do it with courage and faith.

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.

Gospel Reading - Mark 1: 29-39

And at once on leaving the synagogue, he went with James and John straight to the house of Simon and Andrew. Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed and feverish, and at once they told him about her. He went in to her, took her by the hand and helped her up. And the fever left her and she began to serve them.

That evening, after sunset, they brought to him all who were sick and those who were possessed by devils. The whole town came crowding round the door, and he cured many who were sick with diseases of one kind or another; he also drove out many devils, but he would not allow them to speak, because they knew who he was.

In the morning, long before dawn, he got up and left the house and went off to a lonely place and prayed there.

Simon and his companions set out in search of him, and when they found him, they said, 'Everybody is looking for you.' He answered, 'Let us go elsewhere, to the neighboring country towns, so that I can proclaim the message there too, because that is why I came.'

And he went all through Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out devils.

Reflection

- Jesus restores life for the service. After having participated in the celebration of Saturday in the Synagogue, Jesus went to Peter's house and cured his mother-in-law. Once healed, she gets up and, with her health restored and having recovered her dignity, she begins to serve the persons. Jesus does not only heal the person, but he does it in such a way that she begins to serve life.
- Jesus accepts the marginalized. When it begins to get dark, in the afternoon, at the end of Saturday when the first star shines in the sky, Jesus accepts and cures the sick and those possessed whom people had brought to him. The sick and those possessed were the most marginalized persons of that time. They had nobody to whom to have recourse. They depended on public charity. Besides this, religion considered them impure. They could not participate in the community; it was as if God rejected and excluded them. Therefore, it can very clearly be seen in what the Good News of God consists of and that which he wants to do in the life of people: to accept the marginalized and the excluded, and to insert them again to live together in the community.
- To remain united to the Father, in prayer. Jesus is presented to us while he prays. He makes a great effort to have the time and the adequate environment to pray. He rises before the others and goes to a deserted place, to be able to be alone with God. Many times, the Gospels speak to us about the prayer of Jesus, in silence (Mt 14: 22-23); Mk 1: 35; Lk 5: 15-16; 3: 21-22). Through prayer he maintains alive the awareness of his mission.

- To maintain alive the awareness of the mission and not to close oneself up in the results already obtained. Jesus is known. Everybody follows him. This publicity pleases the disciples. They go to look for Jesus to take him back to the people who were seeking for him, and they tell him: All are looking for you. They thought that Jesus would go to the banquet. They were disillusioned! Jesus does not pay attention and tells them: Let us go elsewhere. It is precisely for this that I have come! Surely, they must have been surprised! Jesus was not like what they had imagined him to be. Jesus had a very clear conscience of the mission and wants to transmit this to the disciples. He does not want them to close up themselves in the results already obtained. They should not look back. But, like Jesus, they should maintain alive the conscience of their mission. It is the mission received from the Father, which has to orientate their decisions.
- It is precisely for this that I have come! This was the first misunderstanding between Jesus and his disciples. At present, it is only a question of a small divergence. Later on, in the Gospel of Mark, this misunderstanding, in spite of the many advertences of Jesus, will grow and will practically become almost a break between Jesus and the disciples (cf. Mk 8: 14-21, 32-33; 9: 32; 14: 27). Today also, there are some misunderstandings on the way of the proclamation of the Good News. Mark helps one to be attentive to the divergences so as not to allow them to grow until they produce a break.

Personal Questions

- Jesus did not come to be served, but to serve. Peter's mother-in-law began to serve. And I, do I act in such a way that my life is a service to God and to my brothers and sisters?
- Jesus is conscious, aware of his mission through prayer. And my prayer?

Concluding Prayer

Sing to Yahweh, bless his name! Proclaim his salvation day after day, declare his glory among the nations, his marvels to every people! (Ps 96: 2-3)

Thursday, January 13, 2022

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father of love, hear our prayers.

Help us to know your will and to do it with courage and faith.

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.

Gospel Reading - Mark 1: 40-45

A man suffering from a virulent skin-disease came to him and pleaded on his knees saying, 'If you are willing, you can cleanse me.'

Feeling sorry for him, Jesus stretched out his hand, touched him and said to him, 'I am willing. Be cleansed.' And at once the skin-disease left him and he was cleansed. And at once Jesus sternly sent him away and said to him, 'Mind you tell no one anything, but go and show yourself to the priest, and make the offering for your cleansing prescribed by Moses as evidence to them.'

The man went away, but then started freely proclaiming and telling the story everywhere, so that Jesus could no longer go openly into any town, but stayed outside in deserted places. Even so, people from all around kept coming to him.

Reflection

- Accepting and curing the leper, Jesus reveals a new face of God. A leper came near Jesus. He was an excluded, an impure person. He should be far away. Anybody who touched him, would also become impure! But that leper had great courage. He transgresses the norms of religion to be able to get near Jesus. And he calls out: If you want, you can heal me. You need not touch me! It suffices that you want, and I will be healed! This phrase reveals two evils: a) the evil of leprosy which made him impure; b) the evil of solitude to which he was condemned by society and by religion. It also reveals the great faith of the man in the power of Jesus. And Jesus profoundly moved, cures both evils. In the first place, to cure solitude, he touches the leper. It is as if he said: "For me, you are not an excluded one. I accept you as a brother!" And then he cures the leper saying: I want it! Be cured! The leper, to enter into contact with Jesus, had transgressed the norms of the Law. Jesus also, to be able to help that excluded person and therefore, reveal a new face of God, transgresses the norms of his religion and touches the leper. At that time, whoever touched a leper became impure according to the religious authority and by the law of that time.
- He integrated anew the excluded person in the fraternal living together. Jesus, not only cures, but also wants the cured person to be able to live with the others. He once again inserts the person in society to live with others. At that time for a leper to be accepted again in the community, it was necessary to get a certificate from the priest that he had been cured. It is like today. A sick person leaves the hospital with a document signed by the doctor of the department where he had been hospitalized. Jesus obliges the person to look for that document, in such a way that he will be able to live normally with others. He obliges the authority to recognize that this man has been cured.
- The leper announces the good that Jesus has done to him and Jesus becomes an excluded person. Jesus forbids the leper to speak about the cure. The Gospel of Mark informs that this prohibition does not serve. The leper, walking away, began to diffuse the fact, to the point that Jesus could no longer enter publicly into a city, but remained outside, in a deserted place (Mk 1: 45). Why? Because Jesus had touched the leper. Because of this, according to the opinion of the religion of that time, now he himself was impure and should live far away from all others. He could no longer enter the city. And Mark says that people did not care about these official norms, in fact, people came to him from everywhere (Mk 1: 45). Total subversion!
- Summarizing. In the year 70, when Mark wrote, as well as today, the time in which we live, it was and continues to be important to have before our eyes models of how to live and how to proclaim the Good News of God and of how to evaluate our mission. In verses 16 to 45 of the first chapter of his Gospel, Mark describes the mission of the community and presents eight criteria in order that the communities of his time could evaluate their mission. The following is the outline:

Text Activity of Jesus Objective of the Mission'

- Mark 1: 16-20. Jesus calls his first disciple to form the community
- Mark 1: 21-22 The people were admired at his teaching
to create a critical conscience
- Mark 1: 23-28. Jesus expels a devil
- Mark 1: 29-31 To overcome the force of evil
He cures Peter's mother-in-law
To give life back so as to serve
- Mark 1: 32-34. He cures the sick and the possessed
To accept the marginalized
- Mark 1: 35 Jesus rises early to pray
To remain united with the Father
- Mark 1: 36-39. Jesus continues the announcement.
Not to stop at the results
- Mark 1: 40-45 He cures a leper

Personal Questions

To integrate anew the excluded

- To proclaim the Good News means to give witness of the concrete experience of Jesus that one has. What does the leper announce? He tells others the good that Jesus has done to him. Only this! And this witness leads others to accept the Good News of God which Jesus brings to us. Which is the witness that you give?
- To take the Good News to the people, it is not necessary to be afraid to transgress the religious norms which are contrary to God's project and which make communication, dialogue and the living out of love difficult. Even if this causes difficulty for the people, as it caused difficulty for Jesus. Do I have this courage?

Concluding Prayer

Come, let us bow low and do reverence; kneel before Yahweh who made us!

For he is our God, and we the people of his sheepfold, the flock of his hand. (Ps 95: 6-7)

Friday, January 14, 2022

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father of love, hear our prayers.

Help us to know your will and to do it with courage and faith.

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.

Gospel Reading - Mark 2: 1-12

When he returned to Capernaum, sometime later word went round that he was in the house; and so many people collected that there was no room left, even in front of the door. He was preaching the word to them when some people came bringing him a paralytic carried by four men, but as they could not get the man to him through the crowd, they stripped the roof over the place where Jesus was; and when they had made an opening, they lowered the stretcher on which the paralytic lay. Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the paralytic, 'My child, your sins are forgiven.'

Now some scribes were sitting there, and they thought to themselves, 'How can this man talk like that? He is being blasphemous. Who but God can forgive sins?'

And at once, Jesus, inwardly aware that this is what they were thinking, said to them, 'Why do you have these thoughts in your hearts? Which of these is easier: to say to the paralytic, "Your sins are forgiven" or to say, "Get up, pick up your stretcher and walk"? But to prove to you that the Son of man has authority to forgive sins on earth' - he said to the paralytic - 'I order you: get up, pick up your stretcher, and go off home.' And the man got up, and at once picked up his stretcher and walked out in front of everyone, so that they were all astonished and praised God saying, 'We have never seen anything like this.'

Reflection

- In Mark 1: 1-15, Mark shows how the Good News of God should be prepared and spread. In Mark 1: 16-45, he indicates which is the objective of the Good News and which is the mission of the community. Now, in Mk 2: 1 to 3: 6 there is the effect of the proclamation of the Good News. A community faithful to the Gospel lives values which are in contrast with the interests of the society which surrounds it. This is why one of the effects of the proclamation of the Good News, is the conflict with those who defend the interests of society. Mark gathers together five conflicts which the proclamation of the Good News brought to Jesus.
- In the year 70, the time when he wrote his Gospel, there were many conflicts in the life of the communities, but they did not always know how to behave before the accusations which they received from the Roman authorities and from the Jewish leaders. This series of five conflicts found in Mk 2: 1 to 3: 6 served as a guide to orientate the communities, those of the past as well as those of today. Because the conflict is not an incident of the road, even if it forms part of the journey.
- The following is the outline of the five conflicts which Mark presents in his Gospel:
Texts conflict:
 - 1st conflict: Mk 2: 1-12
 - 2nd conflict: Mk 2: 13-17
 - 3rd conflict: Mk 2: 18-22
 - 4th conflict: Mk 2: 23-28
 - 5th conflict: Mk 3: 1-6

Adversaries of Jesus:

- Scribes
- The Scribes of the Pharisees
- The disciples of John and the Pharisees
- The Pharisees
- The Pharisees and the Herodians

Cause of the conflict:

- Forgiveness of sins
 - To eat with sinners
 - The practice of fasting
 - Observance of Saturday
 - To cure on Saturday
- The solidarity of the friends obtains for the paralytic the forgiveness of sins. Jesus is returning to Capernaum. Many people gather before the door of the house. He accepts everybody and begins to teach them. To teach, to speak of God, was what Jesus did the most. A paralytic, carried by four persons, arrived. Jesus is their only hope. They do not doubt to go up and make an opening in the roof over the place where Jesus was. It must have been a poor house, the roof, mud covered with leaves. They lowered the stretcher with the man, before Jesus. Jesus, seeing their faith, says to the paralytic: seeing their faith, says to the paralytic: your sins are forgiven you. At that time people thought that physical defects (paralytic) were a punishment from God for any sin that had been committed. The Doctors of the Law taught that the person remained impure and therefore, incapable of getting close to God. For this reason, the sick, the poor, the paralytics, felt that they were rejected by God! But Jesus did not think this way. Such a great faith was an evident sign of the fact that the paralytic was accepted by God. And for this reason, he declares: "Your sins are forgiven you!" With this affirmation Jesus denies that the paralysis was a punishment due to the sin of the man.
 - Jesus is accused of blasphemy by those who held power. The affirmation of Jesus was contrary to the catechism of the time. It was not in accordance with the idea that they had of God. And because of this they react against and accuse Jesus: he blasphemes! According to them only God could forgive sins. And only the priest could declare someone forgiven and purified. How could it be that Jesus, a man without studies, a lay person, a simple carpenter, could declare persons forgiven and purified of their sins? And there was also another reason which pushed them to criticize Jesus. They had thought: "If it is true what Jesus says, we will lose our power! We will lose our source of income".
 - By curing, Jesus shows that he also has the power to forgive sins. Jesus perceives the criticism. This is why he asks: "Which of these is easier to say to the paralytic: Your sins are forgiven you, or to say, Get up, pick up your stretcher and walk!? It is easier to say: "Your sins are forgiven you". Because nobody can verify if truly the sins have been forgiven or not. But if I tell him: "Get up and walk!", there, all can see if I have or not the power to heal. And in order to show that he had the power to forgive sins, in the name of God, Jesus says to the paralytic: Get up, take up your stretcher and go off home! He cures the man! And thus, through a miracle he taught that the paralysis of the man was not a punishment from God, and he showed that the faith of the poor is a proof that God accepts them in his love.

- The message of the miracle and the reaction of people. The paralytic gets up, he takes his stretcher, and begins to walk, and all say: "We have never seen anything like this!" This miracle reveals three very important things: a) The sicknesses of persons are not a punishment for sins. b) Jesus opens a new way to reach God. What the system called impurity was no more an obstacle for persons to get close to God. c) The face of God revealed through the attitude of Jesus was different from the severe face of God revealed by the attitude of the Doctors.
- This reminds us of what a drug addict said once he had recovered and who is now a member of a community in Curitiba, Brazil: "I grew up in the Catholic religion. I abandoned it. My parents were good practicing Catholics and wanted us, their children to be like them. People were obliged always to go to Church, every Sunday and every feast day. And when one did not go, they would say: "God will punish you." I went because this was imposed upon me, and when I became an adult, I no longer went to Mass. I did not like the God of my parents. I could not understand that God, the Creator of the world, could extend over me, a small child, threatening me with the punishment of hell. I liked much more the God of my uncle who never went to Church, but who every day, and I repeat, every day, bought twice as much bread than what he ate, in order to give to the poor!"

Personal Questions

- Do you like the God of the uncle or the God of the parents of the ex-drug addict?
- Which is the face of God that others discover in my behavior?

Concluding Prayer

What we have heard and know, what our ancestors have told us we shall not conceal from their descendants, but will tell to a generation still to come: the praises of Yahweh, his power, the wonderful deeds he has done. (Ps 78: 3-4)

Saturday, January 15, 2022

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father of love, hear our prayers.

Help us to know your will and to do it with courage and faith.

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.

Gospel Reading - Mark 2: 13-17

He went out again to the shore of the lake; and all the people came to him, and he taught them. As he was walking along, he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax office, and he said to him, 'Follow me.' And he got up and followed him.

When Jesus was at dinner in his house, several tax collectors and sinners were also

sitting at table with Jesus and his disciples; for there were many of them among his followers. When the scribes of the Pharisee party saw him eating with sinners and tax collectors, they said to his disciples, 'Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?' When Jesus heard this he said to them, 'It is not the healthy who need the doctor, but the sick. I came to call not the upright, but sinners.'

Reflection

- In yesterday's Gospel, we have seen the first conflict which arose concerning the forgiveness of sins (Mk 2: 1-12). In today's Gospel we meditate on the second conflict which arose when Jesus sat at table with the sinners (Mk 2: 13-17). In the years 70's, the time when Mark wrote, in the communities there was a conflict between Christians who had been converted from Paganism and those from Judaism. Those from Judaism found great difficulty to enter into the house of converted Pagans and to sit with them around the same table (cf. Acts 10: 28; 11: 3). In describing how Jesus faces this conflict, Mark orientates the community to solve the problem.
- Jesus taught, and the people were happy to listen to him. Jesus goes out again to go near the sea. People arrive and he begins to teach them. He transmits the Word of God. In Mark's Gospel, the beginning of the activity of Jesus is characterized by much teaching and much acceptance on the part of the people (Mk 1: 14, 21, 38-39; 2: 2, 13), in spite of the conflicts with religious authority. What did Jesus teach? Jesus proclaimed the Good News of God (Mk 1: 14). He spoke about God, but he spoke in a new way, different. He spoke starting from his experience, of the experience which he himself had of God and of Life. Jesus lived in God. And surely he had touched the heart of the people who liked to listen to him (Mk 1: 22, 27). God, instead of being a severe Jew who threatens from far, at a distance, with punishment and hell, becomes once again, a friendly presence, the Good News for the people.
- Jesus calls a sinner to be a disciple and invites him to eat in his house. Jesus calls Levi, a tax collector, and he, immediately, leaves everything and follows Jesus. He begins to be part of the group of the disciples. Immediately, the text says literally:
- While Jesus was at table in his house. Some think that in his house means the house of Levi. But the most probable translation is that it was a question of the house of Jesus. It is Jesus who invites all to eat in his house: sinners and tax collectors, together with the disciples.
- Jesus has come not for the just, but for sinners. This gesture or act of Jesus causes the religious authority to get very angry. It was forbidden to sit at table with tax collectors and sinners, because to sit at table with someone meant that he was considered a brother! Instead of speaking directly with Jesus, the Scribes of the Pharisees speak with the disciples: How is it that he eats and drinks together with tax collectors and sinners? Jesus responds: "It is not the healthy who need the doctor, but the sick. I came to call not the upright, but sinners! As before with the disciples (Mk 1: 38), now also, it is the conscience of his mission which helps Jesus to find the response and to indicate the way for the proclamation of the Good News of Jesus.

Personal Questions

- Jesus calls a sinner, a tax collector, a person hated by the people, to be his disciple. Which is the message for us in this act of Jesus, of the Catholic Church?

- Jesus says that he has come to call sinners. Are there laws and customs in our Church which prevent sinners to have access to Jesus? What can we do to change these laws and these customs?

Concluding Prayer

May the words of my mouth always find favor, and the whispering of my heart, in your presence, Yahweh, my rock, my redeemer. (Ps 19: 14)

Sunday, January 16, 2022

Second Sunday in Ordinary Time.

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 in us silence 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 from 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 to us the Father and sent us your Spirit. Amen.

Reading

A Key to the Reading:

The Gospel of this second Sunday of Ordinary Time places us before the celebration of the Wedding at Cana, in Galilee. At that time, just as now, everybody likes feasts: the feast for a marriage or for a Baptism, the birthday party, the feast of the Patron or Patroness of the Church, the feast at the end of the year, the feast and more feast... There are some feasts which remain engraved in our memory and, which with time, always acquire a more profound significance. Other feasts, we forget. We no longer remember them because they have lost their significance. The feast of the Wedding of Cana, as it has been described in the Gospel of John (Jn 2: 1-12), has remained alive in the memory of the Christian people, and it has given a few a more profound sense.

To understand this progressive discovery of the significance of the Wedding at Cana we must remember that the Gospel of John is different from the other Gospels. John describes the facts of the life of Jesus in such a way that the readers discover in them a more profound dimension, which only faith can perceive. John, at the same time, presents a photograph and the X-Rays. This is why, during the reading, it is good to be very attentive to the details of the text, especially to the two following things: (i) to the attitudes and to the behavior of the persons and (ii) to what is lacking and to the abundance which appear in the Wedding at Cana.

A Division of the Text to Help in the Reading:

- John 2: 1-2: Feast of the Wedding. Mary is present, Jesus is the one who has been invited.
- John 2: 3-5: Jesus and His Mother before the lack of wine.
- John 2: 6: The jars for the ablutions are empty.
- John 2: 7-8: The initiative of Jesus and of the servants.
- John 2: 9-10: The discovery of the sign by the president of the feast.
- John 2: 11-12: The comment of the Evangelist.

Text: Jn 2: 1-11

1 On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee. The mother of Jesus was there, 2 and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited. 3 And they ran out of wine, since the wine provided for the feast had all been used, and the mother of Jesus said to him, 'They have no wine.' 4 Jesus said, 'Woman, what do you want from me? My hour has not come yet.' 5 His mother said to the servants, 'Do whatever he tells you.'

6 There were six stone water jars standing there, meant for the ablutions that are customary among the Jews: each could hold twenty or thirty gallons. 7 Jesus said to the servants, 'Fill the jars with water,' and they filled them to the brim. 8 Then he said to them, 'Draw some out now and take it to the president of the feast.' 9 They did this; the president tasted the water, and it had turned into wine. Having no idea where it came from -- though the servants who had drawn the water knew -- the president of the feast called the bridegroom 10 and said, 'Everyone serves good wine first and the worse wine when the guests are well wined; but you have kept the best wine till now.' 11 This was the first of Jesus' signs: it was at Cana in Galilee. He revealed his glory, and his disciples believed in him.

12 After this he went down to Capernaum with his mother and his brothers and his disciples, but they stayed there only a few days.

A Moment of Prayerful Silence

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

Some Questions

... to help us in our personal reflection.

- Which point in this text pleased you the most and which one impressed you the most? Why?
- What struck you in the attitude and in the behaviour of the persons? Why?
- Which type of lack and of abundance was there in the feast? Which is the significance of this detail?
- What did Jesus do and how did He do it to offer wine in abundance?
- Jesus begins the announcement of the Kingdom in a Wedding feast. What does He want to teach us with this gesture?
- Which is the message of this text for us today?

For Those Who Wish to Go Deeper into the Theme

The Context in order to Understand the Photograph and the X-Rays:

When we say “Photograph”, we indicate the facts in themselves, just as they appear before our eyes. When we say “X-Rays”, we indicate a more profound dimension, invisible to our eyes, which is enclosed in the facts that only faith makes us perceive and reveals to us.

It is in the way in which John describes the facts that he takes an X-Ray of the words and the gestures of Jesus. Through these small details and references, he makes evident the symbolical dimension and, in doing this, he helps us to penetrate deeper into the mystery of the person and the message of Jesus. In the Wedding at Cana, in Galilee, there is the change of the water of the ablutions of the Jews into the wine for the Wedding feast. Let us look closely at the details with which John describes the feast, in a way that we can understand the more profound significance of this beautiful and very well-known episode.

Comment on the Text:

- John 2: 1-2: Feast of the wedding. Jesus has been invited.

In the Old Testament, the wedding feast was a symbol of God’s love for His people. That was what everyone expected in the future (Hos 2: 21-22; Is 62: 4-5). And it is precisely in a wedding feast, around a family and a community, that Jesus fulfils his “first sign” (Jn 2: 11). The Mother of Jesus was also in the feast. Jesus and His disciples had been invited. That is, the Mother of Jesus forms part of the feast. This symbolizes the Old Testament. Together with His disciples He is the New Testament which is arriving: The Mother of Jesus will help to pass from the Old Testament to the New Testament.

- John 2: 3-5: Jesus and His Mother before the lack of wine

Right in the middle of the celebration, the wine is finished. The Mother of Jesus recognizes the limitations of the Old Testament and takes the initiative, in order that the New Testament may be manifested. She approaches Jesus and affirms: “They have no wine!” Here we have the photograph and the X-Ray. the **Photo** represents the Mother of Jesus like a person who is attentive to the problems of others and to become aware that the lack of wine would ruin the feast. She is not only aware of the problem, but also takes the effective initiative to solve it. The **X-Rays** reveal the deepest dimension of the relationship between the Old Testament (the Mother of Jesus) and the New Testament (Jesus). The phrase, “They have no wine!”, comes from the Old Testament, and awakens in Jesus the action which will bring to light the New one. Jesus says: “Woman, what do you want from me?” That is, which is the link between the Old and the New Testament? “My hour has not come yet!” Mary did not understand this response as negative, as a no, because she tells the servants: “Do whatever He tells you!” It is in doing that which Jesus teaches that one goes from the Old to the New Testament! The **hour** of Jesus, in which the passage from the Old to the New Testament will take place, is His Passion, Death and Resurrection. The change of the water into wine is the anticipated indication of what is new which will come from the Death and Resurrection of Jesus.

- At the end of the first century, the first Christians discussed concerning the validity of the Old Testament. Some no longer wanted to know anything about the Old Testament. In the meeting of the apostles in Jerusalem, James defended the

continuity of the use of the Old Testament (Acts 15: 13-21). In fact, at the beginning of the second century, Marcione rejected the Old Testament and remained only with the books of the New Testament. Some even affirmed that after the coming of the Holy Spirit, Jesus of Nazareth should no longer be remembered, but that we should speak only of the Risen Christ. In the name of the Holy Spirit, they said: "Anathema Jesus!" (I Co 12: 3).

- John 2: 6 The jars for the ablutions are empty

It is a question of a small detail, very significant. The jars were usually full, especially during a feast. Here they are empty! Why? The observance of the law of purification, symbolized by the six jars, has exhausted all their possibilities. The ancient law has already succeeded to prepare the people to be able to have the union of grace and justification before God. The jars, the old Covenant, are empty! They are no longer capable to generate a new life.

- John 2: 7-8 Jesus and the servants

The recommendation of the Mother of Jesus to the servants is the last order of the Old Testament: "Do whatever He tells you!" The Old Testament looks toward Jesus. From now on, the words and gestures and actions of Jesus will be the ones to direct our life. Jesus calls the servants and orders them to fill the six empty jars. In all, over six hundred liters! Immediately He orders them to draw from the jars and to take to the president of the ceremony. This initiative of Jesus takes place without the intervention of the president of the feast. Neither Jesus, nor His Mother, nor the servants were obviously the patrons. No one of them went to ask permission from the president or the bridegroom. Renewal passes for the persons who do not belong to the center of power.

- John 2: 9-10 Discovery of the sign by the president of the feast

The president of the feast tasted the water transformed into wine and said to the bridegroom: "Everyone serves good wine first. But you have kept the best wine until now!" The president of the feast, the Old Testament, recognizes publicly that the New is better! Where before there was water for the rite of the ablutions of the Jews, now there is abundant wine for the feast. There was a lot of wine! Over six hundred liters, and the feast was almost over! Which is the sense of this abundance? What was done with the wine which was left over? We are drinking it up until now!

- John 2: 11-12 Comment of the Evangelist

This is the first sign. In the Fourth Gospel, the first sign takes place to help in the building up of the family, of the community, in order to mend the relationships between persons. Other six signs will follow. John does not use the word miracle, but the word sign. The word sign indicates that the actions of Jesus in behalf of the persons have a more profound value, that can only be discovered with the X-Rays of faith. The small community which had formed around Jesus that week, seeing the sign, was ready to perceive the more profound significance and "believe in Him."

Extending the Information:

- **A Much Expected Wedding**

In the Gospel of John, the beginning of the public life of Jesus takes place in a wedding feast, a moment of great joy and of great hope. For this same reason, the wedding at Cana has a very intense symbolical significance. In the Bible, matrimony is the image used to signify the realization of the perfect union between God and His

people. This marriage between God and His people was expected for a long time, for over eight hundred years!

It was prophet Hosea (toward the year 750 BC) that, for the first time, he represented the hope of this marriage when he narrates the parable of the infidelity of the people before the proposal of Yahweh. The monarchy in Israel had abandoned Yahweh and his mercy, leading the people towards false gods. But the Prophet, sure of God's love, says that the people will be led once again to the desert to listen to the following promise from God: "I shall betroth you to myself forever, I shall betroth you in uprightness and justice, and faithful love and tenderness,. Yes, I shall betroth you to myself in loyalty and in the knowledge of Yahweh!" (Hos 2: 21-22). This marriage between God and the people indicates that the ideal of the exodus will be attained (Hos 2: 4-25). About a hundred and fifty years later, the prophet Jeremiah takes the words of Hosea to denounce the monarchy of Judah. And he says that Judah will have the same destiny as Israel because of its infidelity (Jer 2: 2-5; 3: 11-13). But Jeremiah also looks towards the hope of a perfect marriage with the following novelty: it will be the woman who will seduce the husband (Jer 31: 22). And in spite of the crisis created by the exile of Babylonia, the people do not lose hope that one day this marriage will take place. Yahweh will have compassion of his abandoned spouse (Is 54: 1-8). With the return of the exiled, the "Abandoned one" will again be the spouse accepted with great joy (Is 62: 4-5).

Finally, looking at the Novelty which is taking place, John the Baptist looks towards Jesus, the awaited bridegroom (Jn 3: 29). In his teachings and conversations with the people, Jesus takes back the parable of Hosea, the dream of the perfect marriage. He presents himself as the awaited for bridegroom (Mk 2: 19). In his conversation with the Samaritan woman, he discreetly presents himself as the true bridegroom, the seventh one (Jn 4: 16-17). The Christian communities will accept Jesus as the awaited for bridegroom (2 Co 11: 2; Eph 5: 25-31). The wedding at Cana wishes to show that Jesus is the true bridegroom who arrives for the so awaited wedding, bringing a tasteful and abundant wine. This definitive marriage is described with beautiful images in the book of Apocalypses (Ap 19: 7-8; 21: 1a, 22: 5).

- **The Mother of Jesus in the Gospel of John**

Even though she is never called with the name of Mary, the Mother of Jesus appears two times in the Gospel of John: at the beginning of the Wedding at Cana (Jn 2: 1-5), and at the end, at the foot of the Cross (Jn 19: 25-27). In both cases she represents the Old Testament which is waiting for the New one to arrive, and in both cases, she contributes to the arrival of the New One. Mary is the bond of union between what was before and that which will come afterwards. At Cana, she, the Mother of Jesus, symbol of the Old Testament, is the one who perceives the limitations of the Old Testament and takes the necessary steps in order to attain to the New one. At the foot of the Cross, she is at the side of the "Beloved Disciple". The Beloved Disciple is the community which grows around Jesus, he is the son born from the Old Testament. At the petition of Jesus, the son, the New Testament, receives Mary, the Old Testament, in his house. Both of them have to walk together. In fact, the New one cannot be understood without the Old one. The New one would have no basis, foundation. And the Old one without the New one would be incomplete: a tree without fruit.

- **The Seven Days of the New Creation**

The text begins by saying: "*On the third day*" (Jn 2: 1). in the previous chapter, John had already repeated the expression: "*On the following day*" (Jn 1, 29.35.43).

Considering this, it offers the following schema: The witness of John the Baptist on Jesus (Jn 1: 19-28) takes place on the first day. "The day after" (Jn 1: 29), that is the second day, is the Baptism of Jesus (Jn 1: 29-34). The third day, the call of the disciples and of Peter takes place (Jn 1: 35-42). On the fourth day, Jesus calls Philip and Philip calls Nathanael (Jn 1: 43-51). finally, "*three days later*" that is on the seventh day, that is, on Saturday, the first **sign**, that of the Wedding at Cana, takes place (Jn 2: 1). Throughout the Gospel, Jesus realizes seven signs.

John uses the outline of the *week* to present the beginning of the activity of Jesus. The Old Testament uses the same outline to present creation. In the first six days, God created all things calling them by name. On the seventh day he rested, and worked no more (Jn 1: 1-2, 4). In the same way, Jesus in the first days of his activity, He calls the persons and creates the community, the new humanity. On the seventh day, that is on Saturday, Jesus does not rest, but works the first sign. Throughout the next chapters, from 2 until 19 included, he realizes six other signs, always on Saturday (Jn 5: 16; 9: 14). Finally, in the morning of the Resurrection, when Mary Magdalene goes to the sepulchre, it is said: "the first day of the week" (Jn 20: 1). It is the first day of the new creation, after that prolonged Saturday in which Jesus worked the seven signs. Accused of working on Saturday, Jesus answers: "My Father still goes on working and I am at work too" (Jn 5: 17). Through the activity of Jesus between Cana and the Cross, the Father completes what is lacking in the old creation, in a way in which the new creation can emerge in the Resurrection of Jesus.

Pray with Psalm 148

Alleluia! Praise Yahweh from the heavens, praise him in the heights.

Praise him, all his angels, praise him, all his host!

Praise him, sun and moon, praise him, all shining stars, praise him, highest heavens, praise him, waters above the heavens. Let them praise the name of Yahweh at whose command they were made; he established them for ever and ever by an unchanging decree.

Praise Yahweh from the earth, sea-monsters and all the depths, fire and hail, snow and mist, storm-winds that obey his word, mountains and every hill, orchards and every cedar, wild animals and all cattle, reptiles and winged birds, kings of the earth and all nations, princes and all judges on earth, young men and girls, old people and children together.

Let them praise the name of Yahweh, for his name alone is sublime, his splendor transcends earth and heaven. For he heightens the strength of his people, to the praise of all his faithful, the children of Israel, the people close to him.

Final Prayer

Lord Jesus, we thank 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.

Monday, January 17, 2022

Opening Prayer

Father of heaven and earth, hear our prayers and show us the way to your peace in the world.

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

Gospel Reading - Mark 2: 18-22

John's disciples and the Pharisees were keeping a fast, when some people came to him and said to him, 'Why is it that John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not?'

Jesus replied, 'Surely the bridegroom's attendants cannot fast while the bridegroom is still with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. But the time will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then, on that day, they will fast. No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak; otherwise, the patch pulls away from it, the new from the old, and the tear gets worse. And nobody puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost and the skins too. No! New wine into fresh skins!'

Reflection

- The five conflicts between Jesus and the Religious authority. In Mark 2: 1-12 we have seen the first conflict. It was about the forgiveness of sins. In Mark 2: 13-17, the second conflict is on communion around the same table, with sinners. Today's Gospel presents the third conflict concerning fasting. Tomorrow we have the fourth conflict, concerning the observance of the Sabbath (Mk 2: 13-28). Day after tomorrow, the last conflict concerning the cure on the Sabbath (Mk 3: 1-6). The conflict concerning fasting has a central place. For this reason, the words on sewing a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak and the new wine into fresh skins (Mk 2: 21-22) should be understood in the light which radiates clearly also on the other conflicts, two before and two after.
- Jesus does not insist on the practice of fasting. Fasting is a very ancient practice, practiced by practically all religions. Jesus himself practiced it during forty days (Mt 4: 2). But he does not insist with his disciples so that they do the same thing. He leaves them free. This is why the disciples of John the Baptist and those of the Pharisees, who were obliged to fast, want to know why Jesus does not insist on fasting.
- When the bridegroom is with them they do not have to fast. Jesus responds with a comparison. When the bridegroom is with the friends of the bridegroom, that is, during the wedding feast, they do not need to fast. Jesus considers himself as the bridegroom. The disciples are the friends of the bridegroom. During the time in which Jesus is with the disciples, there is the wedding feast. A day will come in which the bridegroom will be absent and then, if they wish they can fast. Jesus refers to his death. He knows and feels that if he wishes to continue on this path of freedom, the religious authority will want to kill him.

- To sew a new piece of cloth on an old cloak, new wine in new skins. These two affirmations of Jesus, which Mark places here, clarify the critical attitude of Jesus before religious authority. One does not sew a piece of new cloth on an old cloak. When the cloak is washed, the new piece of cloth tears the cloak and the tear becomes bigger. Nobody puts new wine in old skins, because the fermentation of the new wine will tear the old skins. New wine in new skins! The religion defended by the authority was like an old cloak, like an old skin. It is not necessary to want to change what is new and brought by Jesus, for old customs. The novelty brought by Jesus cannot be reduced to fit the measure of Judaism. Either one or the other! The wine which Jesus brings tears the old skins. It is necessary to know how to separate things. Jesus is not against what is "old". What he wants to avoid is that the old imposes itself on the new and, thus he begins to manifest it. It would be the same as reducing the message of the Vatican Council II to the catechism of the time before the Council, as some are wanting to do.

Personal Questions

- Beginning with the profound experience of God which encouraged him interiorly, Jesus had great freedom concerning the relationship to the norms and religious practices. And today, do we have this same liberty or do we lack the freedom of the mystics?
- A new piece of cloth on an old cloak, new wine in old skins. Does this exist in my life?

Concluding Prayer

We have recognized for ourselves, and put our faith in, the love God has for us. (1 Jn 4: 16)

Tuesday, January 18, 2022

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father of heaven and earth, hear our prayers, and show us the way to your peace in the world.

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

Gospel Reading - Mark 2: 23-28

It happened that on Sabbath day he was taking a walk through the cornfields, and his disciples began to make a path by plucking ears of corn.

And the Pharisees said to him, 'Look, why are they doing something on the Sabbath day that is forbidden?' And he replied, 'Have you never read what David did in his time of need when he and his followers were hungry - how he went into the house of God when Abiathar was high priest, and ate the loaves of the offering which only the

priests are allowed to eat, and how he also gave some to the men with him?'

And he said to them, 'The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath; so the Son of man is master even of the Sabbath.'

Reflection

- The Law exists for the good of persons. One day on the Sabbath, the disciples passed by a cornfield and they opened a path by plucking ears of corn. In Matthew 12: 1 it is said that they were hungry. Quoting the Bible, the Pharisees criticized the attitude of the disciples. It would be a transgression of the law of the Sabbath (cf. Ex 20: 8-11). Jesus responded quoting the Bible also to indicate that the arguments of the others have no meaning, no reason for being. He recalls that David himself did something which was prohibited, because he took the sacred bread of the temple and gave it to the soldiers to eat because they were hungry (1 Sam 21: 2-7). And Jesus ends with two important phrases (a) the Sabbath is made for man and not man for the Sabbath, (b) The Son of Man is the Lord of the Sabbath!
- The Sabbath is made for man and not man for the Sabbath. For more than five-hundred years, since the time of the Babylonian captivity to the time of Jesus, the Jews had observed the law of the Sabbath. This secular observance became for them a strong sign of identity. The Sabbath was rigorously observed. At the time of the Maccabees, toward the end of the second century before Christ, this observance had reached a critical point. Attacked by the Greeks on Sabbath, the rebellious Maccabees preferred to allow themselves to be killed rather than to transgress the law of the Sabbath using arms to defend their own life. For this, one thousand persons died (1 Mac 2: 32-38). Reflecting on the massacre the Maccabee leaders concluded that they should resist and defend their own life, even on the Sabbath (1 Mac 2: 39-41) Jesus used the same attitude: to consider the law of the Sabbath in a relative way in favor of the human life, because the law exists for the good of human life, and not vice-versa!
- The Son of Man is also the Lord of the Sabbath! The new experience of God as Father/Mother makes Jesus, the Son of Man, to have the key to discover the intention of God who is at the origin of the Law of the Old Testament. For this reason, the Son of Man is also the Lord of the Sabbath. Living with the people of Galilee during thirty years and feeling in his own person the oppression and the exclusion to which so many brothers and sisters were condemned in the name of the Law of God, Jesus perceives that this could not be the significance of that law. If God is Father, then he accepts all as sons and daughters. If God is Father, then we should be brothers and sisters to others. And this is what Jesus lived and preached, from the beginning to the end. The Law of the Sabbath must be at the service of life and of fraternity. It was precisely because of his fidelity to this message that Jesus was condemned to death. He disturbed the system, he was uncomfortable for them, and the system defended itself, using force against Jesus, because he wanted the Law itself to be at the service of life and not vice-versa.
- Jesus and the Bible. The Pharisees criticized Jesus in the name of the Bible. Jesus responds and criticizes the Pharisees using the Bible. He knew the Bible by heart. At that time, there were no printed Bibles as we have today! In every community there was only one Bible, handwritten which remained in the Synagogue. If Jesus knew the Bible so well, it means that during 30 years of his life in Nazareth, he participated intensely in the life of the community, where the Scripture was read every Saturday.

We still lack very much in order to have the same familiarity with the Bible and the same participation in the community!

Personal Questions

- Saturday is for the human being and not vice-versa. Which are the points in my life which I must change?
- Even without having the Bible at home, Jesus knew it by heart. And I?

Concluding Prayer

I give thanks to Yahweh with all my heart, in the meeting-place of honest people, in the assembly. Great are the deeds of Yahweh, to be pondered by all who delight in them.
(Ps 111: 1-2)

Wednesday, January 19, 2022

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father of heaven and earth, hear our prayers, and show us the way to your peace in the world.

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

Gospel Reading - Mark 3: 1-6

Another time he went into the synagogue, and there was a man present whose hand was withered. And they were watching him to see if he would cure him on the Sabbath day, hoping for something to charge him with. He said to the man with the withered hand, 'Get up and stand in the middle!' Then he said to them, 'Is it permitted on the Sabbath day to do good, or to do evil; to save life, or to kill?' But they said nothing.

Then he looked angrily round at them, grieved to find them so obstinate, and said to the man, 'Stretch out your hand.' He stretched it out and his hand was restored. The Pharisees went out and began at once to plot with the Herodians against him, discussing how to destroy him.

Reflection

- In today's Gospel we meditate on the last of the five conflicts which Mark presents at the beginning of his Gospel (Mk 2: 1 to 3: 6). The four previous conflicts were provoked by the enemies of Jesus. This last one is provoked by Jesus himself and reveals the seriousness of the conflict between him and the religious authority of his time. It is a conflict of life or death. It is important to note the category of enemies which has arisen in this conflict. It is a question of the Pharisees and the Herodians, that is of the religious and the civil authority. When Mark wrote his Gospel in the year

70, many of them still remembered very well the terrible persecution of the 60's, perpetuated by Nero against the Christian communities. In hearing that Jesus himself had been threatened to death and how he behaved in the midst of these dangerous conflicts, the Christians found a source of courage and orientation so as not to be discouraged along the journey.

- Jesus in the synagogue on the Sabbath. Jesus enters into the Synagogue. He had the habit of participating in the celebrations of the people. A man was there who had a withered hand. A physically disabled person who could not participate fully, because he was considered to be impure. Even if he was present in the community, he was marginalized. He had to remain far away from the rest.
- The concern of the enemies of Jesus. The enemies were observing him to see if Jesus would cure on Saturday. They wanted to accuse him. The second commandment of the Law of God ordered to "sanctify the Sabbath". It was prohibited to work on that day (Ex 20: 8-20). The Pharisees said that to cure a sick person was the same as working. And for this reason, they taught: "It is prohibited to cure on the Sabbath!" They placed the law above the well-being of persons. Jesus was an uncomfortable person for them, because he placed the well-being of persons above the norms and the laws. The concern of the Pharisees and of the Herodians was not the zeal for the Law, but rather the will, the desire to accuse and get rid of Jesus.
- Get up and stand in the middle! Jesus asks two things of the physically disabled person: Get up and stand in the middle! The word "get up" is the same one which the communities of Mark also used to say "rise, resurrect". The disabled person has to "resurrect," to get up, to live in the middle and to take his place in the center of the community! The marginalized, the excluded, have to live in the middle! They cannot be excluded. They must be together with the others! Jesus calls the excluded one to stand in the middle.
- The question of Jesus leaves the others without knowing what to say. Jesus asks: Is it permitted on the Sabbath to do good or to do bad? To save life or to kill? He could have asked: "On the Sabbath is it permitted to cure: yes or no?!" And in this way all would have answered: "No, it is not permitted!" But Jesus changed the question. For him, in that concrete case, "to cure" was the same as "to do good" or "to save a life", and not "to kill!" . With his question Jesus put the finger on the wound. He denounced the prohibition of curing on the Sabbath considering this to be a system of death. A wise question! The enemies remain without knowing what to answer.
- Jesus looked angrily around at them, grieved to find them so obstinate. Jesus reacts with indignation and sadness before the attitude of the Pharisees and the Herodians. He orders the man to stretch out his hand, and he cures him. By curing the disabled man, Jesus shows that he does not agree with the system which places the law above life. In response to the action of Jesus, the Pharisees and the Herodians decide to kill him. With this decision they confirm that, in fact, they are defenders of a system of death! They are not afraid to kill in order to defend the system against Jesus who attacks and criticizes it in the name of life.

Personal Questions

- The disabled man was called to stand in the center of the community. In our community, do the poor and the excluded have a privileged place?

- Have you already confronted yourself, sometimes, with persons such as the Herodians and the Pharisees who place the law above the well-being of persons? What did you feel at that moment? Have you agreed with them, or have you criticized them?

Concluding Prayer

Yet you are merciful to all, and nothing that you have made disgusts you, Lord, lover of life! (Wis 11: 23-26)

Thursday, January 20, 2022

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father of heaven and earth, hear our prayers, and show us the way to your peace in the world.

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

Gospel Reading - Mark 3: 7-12

Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the lakeside, and great crowds from Galilee followed him. From Judaea, and from Jerusalem, and from Idumaea and Transjordan and the region of Tyre and Sidon, great numbers who had heard of all he was doing came to him.

And he asked his disciples to have a boat ready for him because of the crowd, to keep him from being crushed. For he had cured so many that all who were afflicted in any way were crowding forward to touch him.

And the unclean spirits, whenever they saw him, would fall down before him and shout, 'You are the Son of God!' But he warned them strongly not to make him known.

Reflection

- The conclusion reached at the end of this fifth conflict (Mk 2 to 3: 6), is that the Good News as it was announced by Jesus, said exactly the contrary of the teaching of the religious authority of the time. This is why, that at the end of the last conflict, it is foreseen that Jesus will not have an easy life and will be put to death. Death is already appearing in the horizon. They decide to make him die (Mk 3: 6). Without a sincere conversion it is not possible for persons to attain a correct understanding of the Good News.
- A summary of the evangelizing action of Jesus. The verses of today's Gospel (Mk 3: 7-12) are a summary of the activity of Jesus and they stress an enormous contrast. Earlier, in Mk 2: 1 to 3: 6, it was spoken only of conflicts, including the conflict of the life and death between Jesus and the civil and religious authority of Galilee (Mk 3: 1-6). And here, in the summary, we have the contrary: an immense popular movement,

greater than the movement of John the Baptist, because people come not only from Galilee, but also from Judaea, from Jerusalem, from Idumaea, from Transjordan, and even from the pagan region of Tyre and Sidon to encounter Jesus! (Mk 3: 7-12). All want to see him and to touch him. The people are so numerous, that Jesus himself is concerned. There is the danger of being crushed by the multitude. This is why he asks the disciples to have a boat ready for him so that the crowd would not crush him. And from the boat he spoke to the crowds. There were especially the excluded and the marginalized who came to him with their ailments: the sick and those possessed. Those who were not accepted to live in the society of the time were accepted by Jesus. Here is the contrast: on the one side the religious and civil leaders decided to put Jesus to death (Mk 3: 6); on the other side, an immense popular movement seeking salvation in Jesus. Who will win?

- The unclean spirits and Jesus. Mark insists very much on the expulsion of the unclean spirits. The first miracle of Jesus is the expulsion of the unclean spirits (Mk 1: 25). The first impact caused by Jesus is due to the expulsion of the devil (Mk 1: 27). One of the principal causes of the clash of Jesus with the Scribes is the expulsion of the unclean spirits. (Mk 3: 22). The first power which the Apostles received when they were sent out on mission was the power to expel the demons (Mk 16: 17). What does it mean in Mark's Gospel to drive out or expel the evil spirits?
- At the time of Mark, the fear of the devil was increasing. Some religions instead of liberating the people, increased fear and anguish. One of the objectives of the Good News of Jesus is precisely to help people to liberate themselves from this fear. The coming of the Kingdom means the coming of a stronger power. Jesus is "the stronger man" who has come to conquer and overcome Satan, the power of evil, and to take away from him, to rob humanity imprisoned by fear (Mk 3: 27). This is why Mark insists very much on the victory of Jesus over the power of evil, over the devil, over Satan, sin and death. From the beginning to the end, with almost similar words, he repeats the same message: "And Jesus drove out, expelled the impure spirits!" (Mk 1: 26, 27, 34, 39; 3: 11-12, 15, 22, 30; 5: 1-20; 6: 7, 13; 7: 25-29; 9: 25-27, 38; 16: 9, 17). It seems almost a refrain which is repeated! Today, instead of using always the same words, we prefer to use diverse words. We would say: "The power of evil, Satan, which causes so much fear to people, Jesus overcomes him, dominates him, conquers him, threw him off the throne, drove him out or expelled him, eliminated him, annihilated him, knocked him down, destroyed him and killed him!" What Mark wants to tell us is the following: "Christians are forbidden to be afraid of Satan!" After Jesus rose from the dead, it is a mania and a lack of faith to call in cause Satan, at every moment, as if he still had any power on us. To insist on the danger of the devil in order that people may return to Church, means to ignore the Good News of the Kingdom. It is a lack of faith in the Resurrection of Jesus!

Personal Questions

- How do you live your faith in the Resurrection of Jesus? Does it help in some way to help you overcome fear?
- To drive away or expel the devil! What do you do in order to neutralize this power in your life?

Concluding Prayer

Joy and happiness in you to all who seek you! Let them ceaselessly cry, 'Great is Yahweh'

who love your saving power. (Ps 40)

Friday, January 21, 2022

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Almighty God,

ruler of all things in heaven and on earth, listen favorably to the prayer of your people, and grant us your peace in our day.

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.

Gospel Reading - Mark 3: 13-19

Jesus went up onto the mountain and summoned those he wanted. So they came to him and he appointed twelve; they were to be his companions and to be sent out to proclaim the message, with power to drive out devils. And so he appointed the Twelve, Simon to whom he gave the name Peter, James the son of Zebedee and John the brother of James, to whom he gave the name Boanerges or 'Sons of Thunder'; Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, the man who was to betray him.

Reflection

The Gospel today describes the acceptance and mission of the twelve apostles. Jesus begins with two disciples to whom he adds other two (Mk 1: 16-20). Gradually, the number increased. Luke tells us that he called the 72 disciples so as to go on mission with him (Lk 10: 1).

- Mark 3: 13-15: The call for a two-fold mission. Jesus calls whom he wants and they go with him, they follow him. Then, "He appointed Twelve, to be his companions and to be sent out to proclaim the message, with power to drive out devils". Jesus calls them for a double purpose, for a two-fold mission: (a) To be with Him, that is, to form the community of which He, Jesus, is the center. (b) To pray and to have power to drive out devils, that is, to announce the Good News and to fight against the power of evil that ruins the life of people and alienates persons. Mark says that Jesus went up to the mountain and while he was there, he called the disciples. The call means climbing up. In the Bible to climb up the mountain recalls the mountain that Moses climbed and had the encounter with God (Ex 24: 12). Luke says that Jesus went up to the mountain, prayed all night and, the following day, he called the disciples. He prayed to God so as to know whom to choose (Lk 6: 12-13). After having called them, Jesus makes the election official and creates a more stable group of twelve persons in order to give more consistency to the mission; and also, to signify the continuity of God's project. The twelve Apostles of the New Testament are the successors of the twelve Tribes of Israel.
- Thus, the first community of the New Testament comes into being, is born, a model community, which gradually grows around Jesus during the three years of his public activity. At the beginning they are only four (Mk 1: 16-20). Shortly afterwards the

community increases in the measure in which the mission is developing, extending in the towns and villages of Galilee. There is a time in which they do not even have the time to eat or to rest (Mk 3: 2). This is why Jesus was concerned about giving the disciples some rest (Mk 6: 31) and to increase the number of missionaries (Lk 10: 1). In this way, Jesus tries to maintain the two-fold objective of the call: to be with Him and to go on mission. The community which is formed in this way around Jesus has three characteristics which belong to his nature: it is a forming, missionary community, and is inserted among the poor of Galilee.

- Mark 3: 16-19: The list of names of the twelve apostles. Immediately after, Mark gives the names of the twelve: Simon to whom he gave the name of Peter; James and John the sons of Zebedee, to whom he gave the name of Boanerges, which means Sons of Thunder, Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, the man who was to betray him. The majority of these names come from the Old Testament. For example, Simon is the name of one of the sons of the Patriarch Jacob (Gn 29: 33). James is the same as Jacob (Gn 25: 26). Judas is the name of the other son of Jacob (Gn 35: 23). Matthew also bore the name of Levi (Mk 2: 14), who was the other son of Jacob (Gn 35: 23). Of the twelve Apostles, seven have a name that comes from the time of the Patriarchs. Two have the name of Simon; two are called James; Two Judas; one Levi. There is only one who has a Greek name: Philip. It would be like in a family where all have names of ancient times and only one has a modern name. This reveals the desire that people have to remake history, from the beginning! It is worthwhile to think about the names which we give our children today. Like them, each one of us is called by God by our name.

Personal Questions

- To be with Jesus and to go on Mission is the two-fold purpose of the Christian community. How do you assume this commitment in the community to which you belong?
- Jesus called the twelve disciples by their name. You, I, we, all of us exist because God calls us by our name. Think about this!

Concluding Prayer

Show us, Lord, your faithful love, grant us your saving help.

His saving help is near for those who fear him, his glory will dwell in our land. (Ps 85: 7, 9)

Saturday, January 22, 2022

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Almighty God,

ruler of all things in heaven and on earth, listen favorably to the prayer of your people, and grant us your peace in our day.

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.

Gospel Reading - Mark 3: 20-21

Jesus went home again, and once more such a crowd collected that they could not even have a meal. 21 When his relations heard of this, they set out to take charge of him; they said, 'He is out of his mind.'

Reflection

- The Gospel today is very short. There are only two verses. It speaks about two things: (a) about the great activity of Jesus up to the point of not even having time to eat, and (b) the contrary reaction of the family of Jesus up to the point of thinking that he was out of his mind. Jesus had problems with his family. Sometimes, the family helps, and other times it constitutes an obstacle. This is what happened with Jesus, and this is what happens with us also.
- Mark 3: 20: The activity of Jesus. Jesus returned home. His home is now in Capernaum (Mk 2: 1). He is no longer living with his family in Nazareth. People knowing that Jesus was in the house, they went there. Such a crowd of people gathered there that He and his disciples did not even have time to eat calmly (Mk 6: 31)
- Mark 3: 20: Conflict with his family. When Jesus' relatives knew this, they said: "He has lost his mind!" Perhaps, this was so because Jesus did not seem to be behaving normally. Perhaps, because they thought that with this he jeopardized the name of the family. Whatever it was, the relatives decided to take him back to Nazareth. This is a sign that the relationship of Jesus with his family was suffering. This must have been a source of suffering, for him as well as for Mary, his Mother. Later on (Mk 3: 31-35) Mark tells how the encounter of Jesus with his relatives was. They arrived to the house where Jesus was staying. Probably they had gone there from Nazareth. There is a distance of about 40 km. from there to Capernaum. His mother was with them. They could not enter the house because there were many people there at the entrance. This is the reason why they sent him a message: "Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside asking for you!" The reaction of Jesus was firm and he asked: "Who are my mother and my brothers?" And he himself answers pointing out to the crowd gathered there around him: "Here are my mother and my brothers. Anyone who does the will of God, that person is my brother and sister and mother". He extended the family! Jesus does not allow the family to draw him away from the mission.
- The situation of the family at the time of Jesus. In the ancient Israel, the clan, that is, the large family (the community) was the basis of social living together. This was the protection of the small families and of the persons, the guarantee of the possession of the land, the principal channel of tradition, the defense of identity. That was the concrete way in which the people of that time had to incarnate the love of God in the love toward neighbor. To defend the clan, the community it was the same as to defend the Covenant. In Galilee at the time of Jesus, because of the Roman system, introduced and imposed during the long years of government of Herod the Great (37 BC to 4 BC) and of his son Herod Antipas (4 BC to 39 AD), all this had ceased to exist, or existed every day less. The clan (community) was becoming weaker. The taxes that had to be paid to the government and to the Temple, the increasing getting into debt, the individualist mentality of the Hellenistic ideology, the frequent

threats of the violent repression on the part of the Romans, the obligation to accept the soldiers and to give them lodging, the always greater problems for survival, all this led the families to close up in themselves and in their own needs. Hospitality was no longer practiced; neither was sharing, nor communion around the table, the acceptance of the excluded. This closing up was strengthened by the religion of the time. The observance of the norms of purity was a factor of marginalization for many people: women, children Samaritans, foreigners, lepers, possessed, publicans or tax collectors, the sick, mutilated persons, the paraplegics. These norms, instead of helping and favoring acceptance, sharing and communion, favored separation and exclusion.

- Thus, the political, social and economic situation as well as the religious ideology of the time, everything was against and contributed to weaken the central values of the clan, of the community. Therefore, in order that the Kingdom of God could manifest itself, once again, in the community living of the people, persons had to overcome the narrow limits of the small family and open themselves up once again to the large family, the Community.
- Jesus gives the example. When his relatives get to Capernaum and try to take hold of him to take him back home, he reacts. Instead of remaining closed up in his small family, he extends the family (Mk 3: 33-35). He creates the community. He asks the same thing to those who want to follow him. Families cannot close up in themselves. The excluded and the marginalized should be accepted, once again, into the community, and in this way feel accepted by God (cf. Lk 14: 12-14). This is the path to be followed in order to attain the objective of the Law which said: "Let there be no poor among you" (Dt 15: 4). Just like the great prophets, Jesus tries to strengthen and affirm community life in the villages of Galilee. He takes the profound sense or significance of the clan, of the family, of the community, like an expression of the incarnation of the love of God in the love toward neighbor.

Personal Questions

- Does the family help participation in the Christian community or does it make it difficult? How do you assume your commitment in the Christian community?
- What can all this tell us concerning our relationships in the family and in the community?

Concluding Prayer

Clap your hands, all peoples, acclaim God with shouts of joy.

For Yahweh, the Most High, is glorious, the great king over all the earth. (Ps 47: 1-2)

Sunday, January 23, 2022

Third Sunday of Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Shaddai, God of the mountain, You who make of our fragile life the rock of your dwelling place, lead our mind to strike the rock of the desert, so that water may gush to

quench our thirst.

May the poverty of our feelings cover us as with a mantle in the darkness of the night and may it open our heart to hear the echo of silence until the dawn, wrapping us with the light of the new morning, may bring us, with the spent embers of the fire of the shepherds of the Absolute who have kept vigil for us close to the divine Master, the flavor of the holy memory.

Lectio

Gospel Text: Luke 1: 1-4; 4: 14-21

1 In as much as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things which have been accomplished among us, 2 just as they were delivered to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word, 3 it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, 4 that you may know the truth concerning the things of which you have been informed.

14 And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee, and a report concerning him went out through all the surrounding country. 15 And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all.

16 And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up; and he went to the synagogue, as his custom was, on the sabbath day. And he stood up to read; 17 and there was given to him the book of the prophet Isaiah. He opened the book and found the place where it was written, 18 "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, 19 to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord." 20 And he closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant, and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. 21 And he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

Comment:

A brief introductory summary presents Jesus' activity and his person, and the scene of this Gospel (Lk 4: 14-21) takes place in the synagogue in Nazareth on a Saturday. Jesus' return to the place from where his fame had spread everywhere in the region of Galilee and to which the Spirit led his steps, has a special reason. In concise terms, Luke tries to give a salvific interpretation to the events by shedding light on the salient aspects. The fact of Jesus teaching in the synagogue signifies his Jewish origin and his wish to be part of the cult so as to emphasise the vital role of the law that God had entrusted to his people and to offer himself as fulfilment and hope of Israel.

To the question implied in the narrative: Is Jesus a prophet? the reply becomes clearer according to the criteria of discernment used by Israel to verify whether a prophet was sent by Yahweh or not: is his teaching in accordance with the teachings of the law, do his works correspond with God's commandments, do his prophecies concerning the future come true. In Nazareth, Jesus presents himself as a prophet – in fact he compares himself to Elijah and Elisha – even though he does not define himself as such in keeping with his custom that avoids any attempt at defining himself.

A Moment of Silence:

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

Meditatio

Some Questions:

- *To research accurately every circumstance*: are we always in a hurry during our day? Do we really wish to research accurately that which happens to us?
- *He sent me to proclaim the good news to the poor*: do I always think of the poor as the others while I belong to the haves and those who know, and that consequently I do not need anyone?
- *Today this scripture has been fulfilled*: what Scripture do we know so well as to recognize it as incarnation in our day?

A Key to the Reading:

An historical contextualisation

The passage of the synagogue of Nazareth is part of programmed angle that later will form the key to the reading of what follows in Luke's Gospel. The reference to the prophet Isaiah is basic because therein is revealed the continuity of the human history of God. Jesus' gestures, placed in parallel, "*He stood and opened the scroll*" (v.17), "*he closed the scroll and sat down*" (v.20), give the narrative a liturgical character that is customary yet new.

The newness occurs in the homily that renders the prophecy present. *Today*, a key word in Luke, expresses the fulfilment in Christ of God's purpose. The immediate reactions to this *today* are of surprise and unbelief, of wonder and scandal even to rejection already found in the question that follows Jesus' proclamation, a question hanging in the air without an answer: "*Is not this the son of Joseph?*" (v. 22). The contrast with the Word proclaimed of a man who is invested by the spirit of the Lord, consecrated by an anointing, sent on a special mission of messianic flavour: to bring the good news, to forgive, to proclaim...creates a conflict of identity.

A literary contextualisation

This passage does not have precise parallels in the synoptic Gospels. Jesus' visit to Nazareth in Matthew 13: 53-58 and in Mark 6: 1-6a is limited to a question concerning Jesus' origin and his rejection. There is no description of the rite in the synagogue nor is there a record of the words Jesus pronounced and of the interpretation of the present fulfilment of the sacred Word. The only concordance, apart from the diversity of the contexts, is in the rejection of Jesus by the Nazarenes.

Through Jesus' discourse in Nazareth, Luke wants to introduce and shed light on the whole public mystery of Jesus. Isaiah 61: 1-2 contains a synthesis of the great themes that characterize Luke's Gospel and those most dear to him: the Holy Spirit, the messianic anointing, the eschatological liberation, the messianic joy, the divine intervention in favor of the poor and oppressed, the proclamation of the year of grace. The program inaugurated in Mark with the proclamation: "*The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the gospel*" (Mk 1: 14-15) and in Matthew in the discourse on the mountain (Mt 5: 1-48), appears in Luke at the center of the Jewish cult: that which is fulfilled is not the time but the Scripture. The reader is invited to see the necessity of "walking" with Christ and to imitate him on the way of conformity to the will of the Father. Jerusalem, the end of a long journey (Lk 9: 51-18: 14) that leads Jesus towards the decisive moment of his life, is also the final point of his earthly mission (Lk 24) and the beginning of the life of the newborn Church (Acts 1-2).

Literary genre

In this passage, we can see a slight literary unity. The editorial intervention of Luke that begins from traditional data, follows its own purpose. The unitary design of both parts shows internal clarity and accurate external delimitation. For Luke the two fields of questioning are inseparable: *Who is Jesus?* and *To whom is his work addressed?* The relationship between word and action is very strong, dramatic action of a proclamation that takes place in life. This passage wants to introduce the public mystery of Jesus, almost enabling him to act on the confines of his belonging to Israel. The Spirit abundantly given to Jesus: at his birth (1: 35), at his baptism (3: 22), during the temptations (4: 1) at the beginning of his mission (4: 14) is the Spirit mentioned in Isaiah (v.18) who makes God's action explicit. An action without ethnic limits and that does not seek notoriety, but that is in favor of those in need of salvation: the poor, prisoners, the blind, the oppressed, and to begin the time of grace of the Lord. The prophet sent by God is free from all limiting and binding pretense. We pass from a cult of the synagogue that is not capable of welcoming the ancient Word fulfilled in the today, to a cult of following on the roads of the world. Jesus goes off, he follows his way that from Jerusalem will lead him to the ends of the earth through his followers

Detailed Analysis of the Text

A detailed analysis of the verses of this passage will reveal important peculiarities, which, within a historical framework, give in the scene of the synagogue a synthesis of the Gospel as to content and events.

- **v.16:** It seems that the synagogue was a place frequented by Jesus. It is here that since his early adulthood he has heard the Word of God and has interpreted it according to the living tradition of the people. It is significant that Jesus seeks out the centers of cult. Every adult Jew could read the word, generally the leaders of the synagogue entrusted this task to those who were experts in Scripture. The fact that Jesus gets up to read shows that it was customary for him to do so as it was customary for him to attend the synagogue. The words: "*as his custom was*" lends great force to the verse almost as though the one who reads and speaks is not just anyone, but a son of Israel expert in the reading and interpretation of the *Torah* and the *Prophets*. Christian faith then is born from faithful representatives of the people of Israel whose time of waiting has come to fulfillment. All the main characters in Luke are authentic Israelites: Zachary, Elisabeth and John, Mary, Joseph and Jesus, the apostles and later in Acts, Paul. This is "*a custom*" that carries with it something new. The synagogue is the place from where the proclamation begins and spreads to the cities of Judah and Galilee, and the whole of Israel even to the ends of the earth.
- **vv. 17-19:** Jesus finds the passage in Isaiah 61:1-2 which probably refers to the consecration of a prophet (cfr 1 Kg 19: 16). Luke leaves out from the citation from Isaiah the menacing end because it is of no interest to his purpose: he emphasizes that Jesus' teaching has its roots in Scripture (17-19; 25-27) and makes it present in his own Person. The words of Isaiah on his lips acquire their full meaning and summarize his mission (cfr 4: 1), full of the Spirit, anointed by the Lord, sent to proclaim the good news to the poor, freedom to prisoners and those oppressed, sight to the blind and to preach the time of grace of the Lord.
- **v. 20:** The detailed description of the gestures foreshadows what is to come. Jesus speaks while sitting, the typical position of one who teaches. The eyes of the people turned towards him prepare us for the importance of what he is about to say. His is a short but disturbing homily. The movements show the character of this passage

from Luke. Jesus came, he went in, he stood up, he sat down, he passed among them, he went away. The Nazarenes too rise but it is to throw him out. The contrast is clear. Jesus stands up to read, the men stand up to send him away. The waiting described in this verse: *"The eyes of all in the synagogue were gazing on him"* degenerates into a rejection. The problem is not the proclamation, already well known and source of hope for devout Israelites, but the one who proclaims it and makes it his own.

- **v. 21:** Jesus does not pass any comments on the words of Isaiah, but he makes them present. His is a word event - *rhêma* - (Acts 10: 37), a word that is salvation now. The prophecy comes alive and is taking place. Jesus' interpretation goes beyond every expectation. In the Word, the *today* is present, the *today* that is typical of the Evangelist and that is the *today* of salvation, the *today* of the fulfillment that comes from listening (cfr Rom 10: 17). What is essential for Luke is listening. The realization of the ancient promises repeated in the whole of Luke's works (Lk 9: 51; Acts 2: 1; 19: 21) is for those who listen: the *anawim*, the poor, the oppressed, those favored of *Jhwh* (Is 11: 4; 29: 19) and now those favored of Jesus (Mt 11: 28).

Reflection:

The exegesis made by Jesus himself on Isaiah 61 is an example of actualization that reveals the messianic present and recourse to passages of Scripture to shed light on the present situation. Christ's is a creative authority that demands of people to adapt their lives to the message, accepting the Anointed of God and renouncing the presumption of reducing him to their dimension. This pragmatic perspective is the key to actualization in every age: the *today* of salvation echoes wherever there is preaching, so also the welcoming and the commitment.

In the synagogue of Nazareth, we find the fundamental answers of human beings who live in expectation of meeting with salvation. Jesus is sent by God and is sustained by the Spirit. The anointing says that his is the Christ. In him Scripture is fulfilled. He is the *today* of God who fulfills past history now come to maturation in Jesus and will turn into the daily *today* of tomorrow that is the time of the Church, it too sent as prophetic Word, sustained by the Spirit.

The main message found in this passage of Luke is the Scripture. The Scripture contains the whole of God's secret who lives in eternity and who becomes one of us

Oratio

Psalm 2, 6-9

"I myself have installed my kingdom on Zion, my holy mountain."

I will proclaim the decree of the Lord, who said to me, "You are my son; today I am your father."

Only ask it of me, and I will make your inheritance the nations, your possession the ends of the earth. With an iron rod you shall shepherd them, like a clay pot you will shatter them."

Contemplatio

Today: this the key word in my daily life. In this *today* the Scripture is fulfilled. In this *today* Christ goes into the synagogue of my convictions to proclaim the good news to the poverty of my thought, to my feelings that are prisoners of that desire built on the

ruins of grey days stretched from hour to hour, to my vision obscured by my all too short-sightedness. A year of grace, of conversion, of blessing. Lord, may my today be yours so that not one of your words may fall in vain in my life, but that your words may be fulfilled as grains of wheat in the frozen furrow of the past, capable of budding at the first signs of spring.

Monday, January 24, 2022

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

All-powerful and ever-living God, direct your love that is within us, that our efforts in the name of your Son may bring mankind to unity and peace.

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

Gospel Reading - Mark 3: 22-30

The scribes who had come down from Jerusalem were saying, 'Beelzebul is in him,' and, 'It is through the prince of devils that he drives devils out.'

So he called them to him and spoke to them in parables, 'How can Satan drive out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot last. And if a household is divided against itself, that household can never last. Now if Satan has rebelled against himself and is divided, he cannot last either -- it is the end of him. But no one can make his way into a strong man's house and plunder his property unless he has first tied up the strong man. Only then can he plunder his house. 'In truth I tell you, all human sins will be forgiven, and all the blasphemies ever uttered; but anyone who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven but is guilty of an eternal sin.' This was because they were saying, 'There is an unclean spirit in him.'

Reflection

- *The conflict grows.* In the Gospel of Mark there is a progressive sequence. In the measure in which the Good News advances and people accept it, in the same measure grows also the resistance on the part of the religious authority. The conflict began to grow and to influence all the groups of persons. For example, the relatives of Jesus thought that he was out of his mind. (Mk 3: 20-21), and the Scribes who had come from Jerusalem thought that he was possessed, that Beelzebul was in him (Mk 3: 22).
- *The conflict with the authority.* The Scribes slandered against him. They said that Beelzebul was in him and that it was through the prince of devils that he drove out the devils. They had come from Jerusalem, about 120 kilometres distance, to keep an eye on or watch Jesus' behavior. They wanted to defend tradition against the novelty that Jesus taught to the people (Mk 7: 1). They thought that his teaching was against the good doctrine. The response given by Jesus had three parts.
 - *First Part: The comparison with a divided family.* Jesus uses the comparison of the divided family and of the divided kingdom to denounce the absurdity of the slander. To say that Jesus casts out or drives out the devils with the help of the prince of the devils is to deny the evidence, what is evident. It is

like saying that water is dry, and that the sun is darkness. The doctors of Jerusalem slandered, because they did not know how to explain the benefits worked by Jesus in behalf of the people. They were afraid to lose their leadership.

- *Second Part: The comparison of the strong man.* Jesus compares the devil to a strong man. Nobody, unless he is a strong person, will be able to take away the house from a strong man, to rob it. Jesus is the strongest of all. And this is why he succeeds to enter the house and to dominate and overcome the strong man. He succeeds in driving out the devils. Jesus wins over the strong man and robs his house, that is, he liberates the persons who were under the power of the evil one. The Prophet Isaiah had already used the same comparison to describe the coming of the Messiah (Is 49: 24-25). Luke adds that the expulsion of the devil is an evident sign of the coming of the Kingdom (Lk 11: 20).
- *Third part: The sin against the Holy Spirit.* All sins are forgiven, except the sin against the Holy Spirit. Which is the sin against the Holy Spirit? It is to say: "The spirit which impels Jesus to cast out or drive out the devil, comes precisely from the devil!" The one who speaks in this way is incapable to receive pardon. Why? Can the one who covers his eyes guess? He cannot! The one who closes his mouth, can he eat? He cannot. The one who does not close the umbrella of slander, can he receive the rain of pardon? He cannot! Pardon would pass by his side but would not reach him. It is not that God does not want to forgive. God always wants to forgive. But it is the sinner who refuses to receive pardon!

Personal Questions

- The religious authorities close themselves up in themselves and deny the evidence. Has this ever happened to me, that I close myself in self before the evidence of facts?
- Slander is the arm or weapon of the weak. Have you had experience on this point?

Concluding Prayer

The whole wide world has seen the saving power of our God.

Acclaim Yahweh, all the earth, burst into shouts of joy! (Ps 98: 3-4)

Tuesday, January 25, 2022

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father of heaven and earth, hear our prayers, and show us the way to your peace in the world.

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

Gospel Reading - Mark 16: 15-18

And he said to them, 'Go out to the whole world; proclaim the gospel to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved; whoever does not believe will be condemned. These are the signs that will be associated with believers: in my name they will cast out devils; they will have the gift of tongues; they will pick up snakes in their hands and be unharmed should they drink deadly poison; they will lay their hands on the sick, who will recover.'

Reflection

- *The signs which accompany the proclamation or announcement of the Good News.* And finally, Jesus appears to the eleven disciples and reproached them because they had not believed the persons who had seen him Risen. Once again, Mark refers to the resistance of the disciples to believe in the witness of those, men and women, who had made an experience of the Resurrection of Jesus. Why would this be so? Probably, in order to teach two things. *In the first place*, that faith in Jesus goes through the faith in persons who give witness. *Second*, that nobody should get discouraged, when incredulity comes from the heart. Finally, the eleven disciples had doubts!
- Then Jesus gives them the mission of announcing the Good News to all creatures. The requirement which he indicates is the following: *to believe and to be baptized*. To those who had the courage to believe in the Good News and who are baptized, he promises them the following signs: they will cast out devils, they will have the gift of tongues, they will pick up snakes in their hands and be unharmed should they drink deadly poison, they will lay their hands on the sick who will recover. This happens up until now:
 - To cast out devils; is to fight against the force of evil which destroys life. The life of many persons has improved for having entered a community and for having begun to live the Good News of the presence of God in their life.
 - To have the gift of tongues: is to begin to communicate with the others in a new form. Sometimes, we find a person whom we never have seen before, but it seems to us that we have known her for a long time. This happens because we speak the same language, the language of love.
 - They will be unharmed if they take deadly poison: there are many things which poison living together. Much gossip which destroys the relationship between persons. The one who lives in the presence of God goes beyond this and succeeds in not being bothered by this terrible poison.
 - Cures the sick: wherever there is a clearer and more dynamic conscience of the presence of God, there is also a special attention toward oppressed and marginalized persons, especially sick persons. What helps the person more to heal, is to feel accepted and loved.
 - Through the community, Jesus continues his mission: Jesus himself who lived in Palestine, where he accepted the poor of his time, revealing in this way, the love of the Father, this same Jesus continues alive in our midst, in our communities. And through us he continues his mission, revealing the Good News of the Love of God for the poor. Up until today, the Resurrection takes place, which urges us to sing: "Who will separate us, who will separate us from the love of Christ, who will separate us?" (cf. Rm 8: 38-39). No power of this world is capable to counteract the force which comes from faith in the Resurrection (Rm 8: 35-39). A community which wants to be witness of the Resurrection has to be a sign of life, should fight against the forces of

death, in a way that the world may be a favorable place for life, and should believe that a different world is possible. Above all in Latin America, where the life of the people is in danger because of the system of death which has been imposed; the communities have to be a living proof of the hope which overcomes the world, without fear of being happy!

Personal questions

- To cast out devils, to have the gift of new tongues, to be unharmed by deadly poison and by the snakes, to impose the hands on the sick: Have you fulfilled any of these signs?
- Does Jesus continue his mission through us and through our community? Is he able to fulfil this mission in our community? How and in which way?

Concluding Prayer

Praise Yahweh, all nations, extol him, all peoples, for his faithful love is strong and his constancy never-ending. (Ps 117: 1-2)

Wednesday, January 26, 2022

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

All-powerful and ever-living God, direct your love that is within us, that our efforts in the name of your Son may bring mankind to unity and peace.

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

Gospel Reading - Mark 4: 1-20

Again he began to teach them by the lakeside, but such a huge crowd gathered round him that he got into a boat on the water and sat there. The whole crowd were at the lakeside on land. He taught them many things in parables, and in the course of his teaching he said to them, 'Listen! Imagine a sower going out to sow. Now it happened that, as he sowed, some of the seed fell on the edge of the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some seed fell on rocky ground where it found little soil and at once sprang up, because there was no depth of earth; and when the sun came up it was scorched and, not having any roots, it withered away. Some seed fell into thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it produced no crop. And some seeds fell into rich soil, grew tall and strong, and produced a good crop; the yield was thirty, sixty, even a hundredfold.' And he said, 'Anyone who has ears for listening should listen!'

When he was alone, the Twelve, together with the others who formed his company, asked what the parables meant. He told them, 'To you is granted the secret of the kingdom of God, but to those who are outside everything comes in parables, so that they may look and look, but never perceive; listen and listen, but never understand; to avoid changing their ways and being healed.'

He said to them, 'Do you not understand this parable? Then how will you understand

any of the parables? What the sower is sowing is the word. Those on the edge of the path where the word is sown are people who have no sooner heard it than Satan at once comes and carries away the word that was sown in them.

Similarly, those who are sown on patches of rock are people who, when first they hear the word, welcome it at once with joy. But they have no root deep down and do not last; should some trial come, or some persecution on account of the word, at once they fall away.

Then there are others who are sown in thorns. These have heard the word, but the worries of the world, the lure of riches and all the other passions come in to choke the word, and so it produces nothing.

And there are those who have been sown in rich soil; they hear the word and accept it and yield a harvest, thirty and sixty and a hundredfold.'

Reflection

- Sitting in the boat, Jesus taught the crowds. In these verses, Mark describes the way in which Jesus teaches the crowd: on the seaside, sitting in the boat, many people around to listen to him. Jesus was not a cultured person (Jn 7, 15). He had not frequented the Superior School of Jerusalem. He had come from inside, from the countryside, from Nazareth. He was someone who was unknown, in part, he was a craftsman, in part a country man. Without asking permission from the authority, he began to teach the people. He spoke in a very different way. People liked to listen to him.
- By means of the parables, Jesus helped people to perceive the mysterious presence of the Kingdom in the things of life. A parable is a comparison. He uses the known and visible things of life to explain the invisible and unknown things of the Kingdom of God. For example, the people from Galilee understood when he spoke of seeds, of soil, of rain, of the sun, of the salt, of flowers, of fish, of the harvest, etc. And Jesus, precisely, uses in his parable, these things which were known to the people, to explain the mystery of the Kingdom.
- The parable of the sower is a picture of the life of the farmers. At that time, it was not easy to get a livelihood from agriculture. The land was full of stones. There were many bushes, little rain, much sun. Besides, many times, people in order to shorten the distance passed through the fields and stepped on the plants. (Mk 2: 23). But in spite of that, every year, the farmer sowed and planted, trustful in the force of the seed, in the generosity of nature.
- He who has ears to listen, let him listen! Jesus begins the parable saying: "Listen! (Mk 4, 3). Now, at the end, he says: "He who has ears to listen, let him listen!" The way to understand the parable is research, seeking, "Trying to understand!" The parable does not give us everything ready-made, but induces those who listen to think and discover, basing themselves on the lived experience which they have of the seed. It induces to creativity and to participation. It is not a doctrine that arrives ready-made to be taught and decorated. The Parable does not give bottled water, but rather leads one to the fountain or source. The farmer who listens, says: Seed in the ground, I know what that is!" But Jesus says that this has something to do with the Kingdom of God. What would this be? And one can already guess the long conversations of the crowd. The parable affects the people, moves them and impels them to listen to nature and to think about life.

- Jesus explains the parable to his disciples. At home, alone with Jesus, the disciples want to know the meaning of the parable. They do not understand it. Jesus was surprised before their ignorance (Mk 4: 13) and responds with a difficult and mysterious phrase. He tells his disciples: “To you is granted the secret of the Kingdom of God; but to those who are outside everything comes in parables, so that they may look and look and never perceive, listen and listen but never understand, to avoid changing their ways and being healed!”. This phrase leads people to ask themselves. But, then for what good is the parable? To clarify or to hide? Perhaps Jesus uses parables in order that people may continue to live in ignorance and does not reach conversion? Certainly not! Because in another point Mark says that Jesus used parables “according to what they could understand” (Mk 4: 33).
- The parable reveals and hides at the same time! It reveals to “those who are inside”, who accept Jesus, the Messiah, the Servant. It hides for those who insist in considering him the Messiah, the glorious King. They understand the images of the parable, but they do not succeed to get the significance.
- The explanation of the parable in its different parts. One after another, Jesus explains the parts of the parable, the seed, the soil up to the harvest time. Some scholars hold that this explanation was added later and would have been given by some communities. This is well possible! Because in the bud of the parable there is already the flower of the explanation. Bud and flower, both have the same origin which is Jesus. For this reason, we also can continue to reflect and discover other beautiful things in the parable. Once, a person asked in community: “Jesus has said that we should be salt. For what does salt serve?” This was discussed and at the end there were discovered more than ten diverse purposes that salt can have! Then these significances were applied to the life of the community, and it was discovered that to be salt is something difficult and demanding. The parable functioned! The same for what concerns the seed. Everybody has some experience of the seed.

Personal Questions

- What experience do you have with seeds? How does this help you to understand the Good News better?
- What type of soil are you?

Concluding Prayer

Fix your gaze on Yahweh
and your face will grow bright,
you will never hang your head in shame. (Ps 34: 5)

Thursday, January 27, 2022

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

All-powerful and ever-living God, direct your love that is within us, that our efforts in the

name of your Son may bring mankind to unity and peace.

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

Gospel Reading - Mark 4: 21-25

He also said to them, 'Is a lamp brought in to be put under a tub or under the bed? Surely to be put on the lamp-stand? For there is nothing hidden, but it must be disclosed, nothing kept secret except to be brought to light. Anyone who has ears for listening should listen!'

He also said to them, 'Take notice of what you are hearing. The standard you use will be used for you -- and you will receive more; besides, anyone who has, will be given more; anyone who has not, will be deprived even of what he has.'

Reflection

- The lamp which gives light. At that time, there was no electric light. Imagine all that follows. The family is at home. It begins to get dark. The father lifts up the small lamp, he lights it and places under the tub or under the bed. What will the others say? They will begin to scream: "Father, place it on the table!" This is the story that Jesus tells. He does not explain. He only says: Anyone who has ears to listen, should listen! The Word of God is the lamp which should be lit in the darkness of the night. If it remains closed in the closed Book of the Bible, it is like a small lamp under the tub. When it is united to the life in community, there it is placed on the table, and it gives light!
- Be attentive to preconceptions. Jesus asks the disciples to become aware of the preconceptions with which they listen to the teaching which he offers. We should be attentive to the ideas which we have when we look at Jesus! If the colour of the eyes is green, everything seems to be green. If they are blue, everything will be blue! If the idea with which we look at Jesus were mistaken, everything which I think about Jesus will be threatened of being an error. If I think that the Messiah has to be a glorious King, I will understand nothing of what the Lord teaches, and I will see that everything is mistaken.
- Parable: a new way of teaching and of speaking of Jesus. Jesus used parables, above all, to teach: this was his way. He had an enormous capacity to find very simple images to compare the things of God with the things of the life which people knew and experienced in the daily struggle to survive. This presupposes two things: to be inside, involved in the things of life, and to be inside, involved in the things of the Kingdom of God.
- The teaching of Jesus was diverse from the teaching of the Scribes. It was Good News for the poor, because Jesus revealed a new face of God, in which people could recognize themselves and rejoice. "I bless you, Father, Lord of Heaven and of earth, for hiding these things from the learned and the clever and revealing them to little children. Yes, Father, for that is what it pleased you to do!" (Mt 11: 25-28).

Personal Questions

- The Word of God, a lamp which gives light. What place does the Bible have in my life? What light do I receive?

- Which is the image of Jesus that I have within me? Who is Jesus for me and who am I for Jesus?

Concluding Prayer

Taste and see that Yahweh is good.

How blessed are those who take refuge in him. (Ps 34: 8)

Friday, January 28, 2022

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

All-powerful and ever-living God, direct your love that is within us, that our efforts in the name of your Son may bring mankind to unity and peace.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, on God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading - Mark 4: 26-34

Jesus said, 'This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the land. Night and day, while he sleeps, when he is awake, the seed is sprouting and growing; how, he does not know. Of its own accord the land produces first the shoot, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. And when the crop is ready, at once he starts to reap because the harvest has come.'

He also said, 'What can we say that the kingdom is like? What parable can we find for it? It is like a mustard seed which, at the time of its sowing, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth. Yet once it is sown it grows into the biggest shrub of them all and puts out big branches so that the birds of the air can shelter in its shade.' Using many parables like these, he spoke the word to them, so far as they could understand it. He would not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything to his disciples when they were by themselves.

Reflection

- It is always beautiful to see Jesus, who sought in life and in events, new elements and images which could help people to perceive and experience the presence of the Kingdom. In today's Gospel, once again, he narrates two brief stories which take place every day in the life of all of us: "The story of the seed that grows by itself" and "the story of the small mustard seed which grows into the biggest shrub".
- The story of the seed which grows alone. The farmer who plants knows the process: seed, the green sprout, leaf, spike, grain. The farmer knows how to wait, he does not cut down the grain before it is time. But he does not know how the soil, the rain, the sun and the seed have this force or strength to make the plant grow from nothing until it bears fruit. This is how the Kingdom of God is. It is a process, there are stages and moments of growth. It takes place in time. It produces fruit at the just moment,

but nobody knows how to explain its mysterious force. Nobody, not even the landlord. Only God!

- The story of the small mustard seed which grows and becomes big. The mustard seed is small, but it grows and at the end, the birds make their nests in its branches. This is how the Kingdom is. It begins very small, it grows, and it extends its branches. The parable leaves an open question which will receive a response later on in the Gospel: Who are the birds? The text suggests that it is a question of the Pagans who will not be able to enter into the community and participate in the Kingdom.
- Because Jesus teaches by means of the Parables. Jesus tells many parables. All are taken from the life of the people! In this way he helped persons to discover the things of God in daily life, a life which becomes transparent. Because what is extraordinary of God is hidden in the ordinary and common things of daily life. People understood the things of life. In the parables they received the key to open it and to find in it the signs of God.

Personal Questions

- Jesus does not explain the Parables. He tells the stories and awakens in others the imagination and the reflection of the discovery. What have you discovered in these two Parables?
- The objective of the words is to render life transparent. Has your life become more transparent throughout the years, or has the contrary taken place?

Concluding Prayer

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

Saturday, January 29, 2022

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

All-powerful and ever-living God, direct your love that is within us, that our efforts in the name of your Son may bring mankind to unity and peace.

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

Gospel Reading - Mark 4: 35-41

With the coming of evening that same day, Jesus said to his disciples, 'Let us cross over to the other side.' And leaving the crowd behind they took him, just as he was, in the boat; and there were other boats with him. Then it began to blow a great gale and the waves were breaking into the boat so that it was almost swamped. But he was in the stern, his head on the cushion, asleep. They woke him and said to him, 'Master, do you not care? We are lost!' And he woke up and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, 'Quiet now! Be calm!' And the wind dropped, and there followed a great calm. Then

he said to them, 'Why are you so frightened? Have you still no faith?' They were overcome with awe and said to one another, 'Who can this be? Even the wind and the sea obey him.'

Reflection

- The Gospel today describes the storm in the lake and Jesus who sleeps in the boat. Sometimes our communities feel like a small boat lost in the sea of life, without much hope of arriving to the port. Jesus seems to be sleeping in our boat, since no divine power seems to appear to save us from the difficulties and the persecution. In view of this desperate situation, Mark puts together several episodes which reveal how Jesus is present in the midst of the community. In the parables the mystery of the Kingdom is revealed which is present in the things of daily life (Mk 4: 1-34). Now he begins to reveal the Mystery of the Kingdom present in the power which Jesus exercises in favor of the disciples, in favor of the people and, above all, in favor of the excluded and marginalized. Jesus overcomes, dominates the sea, a symbol of chaos (Mk 4: 35-41). A creating power acts in him! Jesus conquers and drives out the devil (Mk 5: 1-20). The power of life acts in him! He is the victorious Jesus! There is no reason for the communities to be afraid (Mk 5: 21-43). This is the reason for this passage of the storm calmed by Jesus on which we are meditating today in the Gospel.
- Mark 4: 35-36: The starting point: "Let us cross over to the other side". It had been a heavy day, with much work. Once the discourse on the parables was finished (Mk 4: 1-34), Jesus said: "Let us cross over to the other side!" They take him on the boat just as he was, the boat from which he had made the discourse of the Parables. Because he was extremely tired, he went to sleep on the stern, his head on the cushion! This is the first picture or image which Mark presents. A beautiful painting, but very human!
- Mark 4: 37-38: The desperate situation: "Do you not care? We are lost!" The Lake of Galilee is surrounded by mountains. Sometimes, through the cracks in the rocks, the wind blows on top of the lake and provokes sudden storms. A very strong wind, the agitated sea, the boat full of water! The disciples were experienced fishermen. If they think that they are going to sink then the situation is really dangerous. Jesus does not even wake up, he continues to sleep. This profound sleep is not only a sign of great fatigue; it is also the expression of a calm peaceful trust which he has in God. The contrast between the attitude of Jesus and that of the disciples is very great!
- Mark 4: 39-40: The reaction of Jesus: "Have you still no faith?" Jesus wakes up, not because of the waves, but because of the desperate cry of the disciples. First, he addresses himself to the sea and says: "Quiet now!" And the wind dropped and there followed great calm. Then he spoke to the disciples and said: "Why are you so frightened? Have you still no faith?" The impression that one has is that it is not necessary to calm down the sea, since there was no danger. It is like when you go to a house and the dog, at the side of his master, begins to bark. One should not be afraid because the dog is with the master who controls the situation. The episode of the storm, which was calmed recalls Exodus, when the people, without fear, passed through the water of the sea (Ex 14: 22). It recalls the Prophet Isaiah who told the people: "If you go across the water, I will be with you!" (Is 43: 2) Jesus does the exodus again and carries out the prophecy announced by Psalm 107 (106): 25-30.

- Mark 4: 41: The disciples did not know: “Who can this be?” Jesus calms the sea and says: “Have you still no faith?” The disciples did not know what to respond and they ask themselves: “Who can this be? Even the wind and the sea obey him”. Jesus appears as a stranger to them! Despite the fact of having been with him for such a long time, they do not know well who he is. Who can this be? With this question in mid, the communities follow the reading of the Gospel. And even today, this is the same question which leads us to continue reading the Gospel. It is the desire to know always better the significance of Jesus for our life.
- Who is Jesus? Mark begins his Gospel saying: “The beginning of the Gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (Mk 1: 1). At the end, at the moment of his death, the soldier declared: “Truly this man was the Son of God!” (Mk 15: 39). At the beginning and at the end of the Gospel, Jesus is called the Son of God. Between the beginning and the end, there are many other names of Jesus which appear. The following is the list: Messiah or Christ (Mk 1: 1; 8: 29; 14: 61; 15: 32); Lord (Mk 1: 3; 5: 19; 11: 3); Beloved Son (Mk 1: 11; 9: 7); the Holy One of God (Mk 1: 24); Nazarene (Mk 1: 24; 10: 47; 14: 67; 16: 6); Son of Man (Mk 2: 10, 28; 8: 31, 38; 9: 9, 12, 31; 10: 33, 45; 13: 26; 14: 21, 21:41, 62); Bridegroom (Mk 2: 19); Son of God (Mk 3: 11); Son of the Highest God (Mk 5: 7); Carpenter (Mk 6: 3); Son of Mary (Mk 6: 3); Prophet (Mk 6: 4, 15; 8: 28); Teacher (frequent); Son of David (Mk 10: 47, 48; 12: 35-37); Blessed (Mk 11: 9); Son (Mk 13: 32); Shepherd (Mk 14: 27); Son of the Blessed One (Mk 14: 61); King of the Jews (Mk 15: 2, 9, 18, 26); King of Israel (Mk 15: 32),
- Each name, title or attribute is an attempt to express what Jesus signifies for persons. But a name, no matter how beautiful it is, never reveals the mystery of a person, much less of the person of Jesus. Besides this, some of these names given to Jesus, including the more important ones and the more traditional, are questioned, doubted by Mark the Evangelist. Thus, as we advance in the reading of the Gospel, Mark obliges us to revise our ideas and to ask ourselves, once again: “In last instance, who is Jesus for me, for us?” The more we advance in the reading of the Gospel of Mark, the more these titles and criteria fall. Jesus does not fit into anyone of these names, in no schema, in no title. He is the greatest! Little by little, the reader gives up and ceases to want to frame up Jesus in a known concept or in an idea made up beforehand and accepts him as he is presented. Love seduces, but not the head, NO!

Personal Questions

- The waters of the sea of life, have they threatened you sometimes? Who saved you?
- Which was the agitated sea at the time of Jesus? Which was the agitated sea at the time when Mark wrote his Gospel? Which is, today, the agitated sea for us?

Concluding Prayer

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

Sunday, January 30, 2022

Fourth Sunday of Ordinary Time

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 in us silence 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 from 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 to us the Father and sent us your Spirit. Amen.

Gospel Reading: Luke 4: 21-30

A Key to the Reading:

In the 4th Sunday of Ordinary Time, the Liturgy presents us with the conflict that arose between Jesus and the people of Nazareth. This happens on a Saturday during the celebration of the Word in the community hall, after Jesus reads a text from the prophet Isaiah. Jesus quotes the prophet Isaiah so as to present his program of action and immediately adds a very brief comment. At first, they are all amazed and happy. But when they realize the significance of Jesus' program concerning their lives, they rebel and want to kill him. These kinds of conflicts exist even today. We accept others so long as they act in conformity with our ideas, but when they decide to welcome into the community people whom we exclude, then we are in conflict. This is what happened in Nazareth.

This Sunday's Gospel begins with verse 21, a brief comment made by Jesus. We take the liberty to include in the comment the preceding verses 16-20. This allows us to read the text from Isaiah quoted by Jesus and to better understand the conflict, which is the result of the reading of this text together with the brief comment. As we read, it is good for us to note two things: "How does Jesus actualize the text of Isaiah? What reactions does this actualization of the text of Isaiah produce in the people?"

A Division of the Text to Help with the Reading:

- Luke 4: 16: Jesus arrives in Nazareth and takes part in the community meeting
- Luke 4: 17-19: Jesus reads from the prophet Isaiah
- Luke 4: 20-21: Jesus connects the Bible to life before an attentive public
- Luke 4: 22: The contradictory reactions of the public
- Luke 4: 23-24: Jesus criticizes the people's reaction
- Luke 4: 25-27: Jesus sheds light on the Bible, quoting Elijah and Elisha
- Luke 4: 28-30: The furious reaction of the people who want to kill Jesus

Text:

16 He came to Nazara, where he had been brought up, and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day as he usually did. He stood up to read, 17 and they handed him the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. Unrolling the scroll, he found the place where it is written: 18 The spirit of the Lord is on me, for he has anointed me to bring the good news to the afflicted. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives, sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, 19 to proclaim a year of favor from the Lord.

20 He then rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the assistant and sat down. And all eyes in the synagogue were fixed on him. 21 Then he began to speak to them, 'This text is being fulfilled today even while you are listening.' 22 And he won the approval of all, and they were astonished by the gracious words that came from his lips. They said, 'This is Joseph's son, surely?' 23 But he replied, 'No doubt you will quote me the saying, "Physician, heal yourself," and tell me, "We have heard all that happened in Capernaum, do the same here in your own country." ' 24 And he went on, 'In truth I tell you, no prophet is ever accepted in his own country. 25 'There were many widows in Israel, I can assure you, in Elijah's day, when heaven remained shut for three years and six months and a great famine raged throughout the land, 26 but Elijah was not sent to any one of these: he was sent to a widow at Zarephath, a town in Sidonia. 27 And in the prophet Elisha's time there were many suffering from virulent skin- diseases in Israel, but none of these was cured -- only Naaman the Syrian.'

28 When they heard this everyone in the synagogue was enraged. 29 They sprang to their feet and hustled him out of the town; and they took him up to the brow of the hill their town was built on, intending to throw him off the cliff, 30 but he passed straight through the crowd and walked away.

A Moment of Prayerful Silence

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

Some Questions

to help us in our personal reflection.

- What pleased or struck you most in the text? Why?
- On what day, where, through whom and how does Jesus present his program?
- What is the content of Jesus' program? Who are the excluded he wants to welcome?
- How does Jesus actualize Isaiah's text?
- How do the people react? Why?
- Could Jesus' program be ours also? Who are the excluded that we should welcome into our community today?

For Those Who Wish to Go Deeper Into the Text

The Historical Context so as to Locate the Text:

In ancient Israel, the large family or clan or **community**, was the basis of social life. It provided protection to families and persons, it guaranteed possession of the land, it was the principal vehicle of tradition and a defense of the people's identity. It was a

concrete way of incarnating the love of God in the love of neighbor. To defend the clan, the community, was equivalent to defending the Covenant with God.

In Jesus' days, a double slavery marked people's lives and contributed to the disintegration of the clan, the **community**: (i) the slavery of the politics of Herod Antipas' government (4 BC to 39 AD) and (ii) the slavery of the official religion. Because of the exploitation and repression of Herod Antipas' politics, supported by the Roman Empire, many people had no fixed home and were excluded and unemployed (Lk 14: 21; Mt 20: 3, 5-6). The clan, the **community**, was weakened. Families and persons had no help, no defense. The official religion, maintained by the religious authorities of the time, instead of strengthening the community so that it could welcome the excluded, added to this slavery. God's Law was used to legitimize the exclusion or marginalization of many persons: women, children, Samaritans, foreigners, lepers, the possessed, publicans, the sick, the mutilated, paraplegics. It was the opposite of the fraternity God dreamed of for all! Thus, the political and economic situation and the religious ideology all conspired to weaken the local community and prevented the manifestation of the Kingdom of God.

Jesus reacts to this situation of his people and presents a program that will change it. Jesus' experience of God as the Father of love, gives him the possibility of evaluating reality and to see what was wrong with the lives of his people.

A Commentary on the Text:

- Luke 4: 16: Jesus arrives in Nazareth and takes part in the community meeting

Moved by the Holy Spirit, Jesus goes to Galilee and begins to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom of God (Lk 4: 14). He goes to villages teaching in synagogues and finally arrives in Nazareth. He goes back to the community where, from his childhood for thirty years, he had taken part in the weekly meetings. On the Saturday after his arrival, Jesus, as usual, goes to the synagogue to take part in the celebration and gets up to read.

- Luke 4: 17-19: Jesus reads a passage from the prophet Isaiah

In those days, there were two readings during the Saturday celebrations. The first dealt with the Law of God, was taken from the Pentateuch and was fixed. The second was taken from the historical or prophetic books and was chosen by the reader. The reader could choose. Jesus chose the text from Isaiah that presents a summary of the mission of the Servant of God, and that reflected the situation of the people of Galilee then. In the name of God, Jesus takes up his position in defense of the life of his people, takes on his mission as Servant of God, and, using Isaiah's words, proclaims before all: "The spirit of the Lord is on me, for he has anointed me to bring the good news to the afflicted. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives, sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim a year of favor from the Lord" (Is 61: 1-2). He takes up an ancient tradition of the prophets and proclaims "a year of favor from the Lord". This expression was equivalent to proclaiming a jubilee year, or Jesus invites the people of his town to begin anew, to rewrite history at its very roots (Dt 15: 1-11; Lev 25: 8-17).

- Luke 4: 20-21: Jesus connects the Bible to life before an attentive public

When he had finished reading, Jesus gives the book back to the servant and sits down. Jesus is not yet the co-ordinator of the community, he is a lay person and as such takes part in the celebration like all the others. He had been away from the community for many weeks, had then joined John the Baptist's movement and was

baptized by him in the Jordan (Lk 3: 21-22). Moreover, he had spent more than forty days in the desert, reflecting on his mission (Lk 4: 1-2). The Saturday after his return to the community, Jesus is invited to read. All are attentive and curious: "What will he say?" Jesus' comment is brief, very brief indeed. He actualizes the text, connects it with the people's lives saying: "This text is being fulfilled today even as you are listening."

- Luke 4: 22: The contradictory reactions of the people

The people's reaction is ambivalent. At first their attitude is one of attention, wonder and acclamation. Then, immediately, there is a negative reaction. They say: "This is Joseph's son, surely!" Why are they scandalized? Because Jesus speaks of welcoming the poor, the blind, prisoners and the oppressed. They do not accept his proposal. And so, just when Jesus presents his project to welcome the excluded, he himself is excluded!

But there is another motive too. It is important to note the details of the quotations that Jesus uses from the Old Testament. In the commentary on Luke 3: 4-6 on the second Sunday of Advent, Luke gives a longer quotation from Isaiah to show that the opening to pagans had already been foreseen by the prophets. Here we have something like this. Jesus quotes the text from Isaiah up to the point where it says: "to proclaim a year of favor from the Lord", and leaves out the rest of the sentence that says "and a day of vindication by our God, to comfort all who mourn" (Is 61,2b). The people of Nazareth challenge the fact that Jesus left out the part on vindication. They wanted the Day of the coming of the Kingdom to be a day of vindication against the oppressors of the people. Thus, those who mourned would have regained their rights. But were it so, the advent, the coming of the Kingdom would not have changed an unjust system, Jesus rejects this way of thinking, he rejects vengeance. His experience of God, Father, helped him better understand the exact meaning of the prophecies. His reaction, unlike that of the people of Nazareth, shows us that the old image of God as a severe and vengeful judge was stronger than the Good News of God, a loving Father who welcomes those excluded.

- Luke 4: 23-24: Jesus criticizes the people's reaction

Jesus interprets the people's reaction and considers it as a form of envy: "Physician, heal yourself. Whatever things we have heard of as done in Capharnaum, do here, also in your own country!" Jesus was well known throughout Galilee (Lk 4: 14) and the people of Nazareth were not pleased that Jesus, a son of their land, worked good things in other peoples' lands and not in his own. But there is a deeper reason for the reaction. Even if Jesus had worked in Nazareth the things he had worked in Capharnaum, they would still not have believed in him. They knew Jesus: "Who is he to teach us? Is he not Joseph's son?" (Lk 4: 22). "Is he not the carpenter?" (cfr Mk 6: 3-4) Today too this happens so often: when a lay person preaches in church, many will not accept that. They leave and say: "He or she is like us: he or she knows nothing!" They cannot believe that God can speak through the most ordinary persons. Mark adds that Jesus is hurt by his people's unbelief (Mk: 6).

- Luke 4: 23-27: Jesus sheds light on the Bible quoting Elijah and Elisha

In order to confirm that his mission is really that of welcoming the excluded, Jesus uses two well-known passages of the Bible, the story of Elijah and that of Elisha. Both show up the closed mentality of the people of Nazareth and criticize them. In Elijah's time there were many widows in Israel, but Elijah was sent to a foreign widow from Sarepta (1 Kings 17: 7-16). In Elisha's time there were many lepers in Israel, but Elisha was sent to a foreigner from Syria (2 Kings 5: 14). Again, we see Luke's concern to

show that openness towards pagans came from Jesus himself. Jesus faced the same difficulties that the communities in Luke's time faced.

- Luke 4: 28-30: The furious reaction of the people who want to kill Jesus

The mention of these two passages from the Bible produces greater anger in the people. The community of Nazareth even wants to kill Jesus. He remains calm. Other people's anger will not distract him from his purpose. Luke shows how difficult it is to overcome a mentality of privilege and of closure towards others. The same thing happens today. Many of us Catholics grow up with a mentality that leads us to believe that we are better than others and that the others must become like us to be saved. Jesus never thought this way.

Further information:

The Meaning of a Jubilee Year:

In 2000, Pope John Paul II invited Catholics to celebrate the jubilee. Celebrating important dates is part of life. This allows us to rediscover and revive our initial enthusiasm. In the Bible, "the Jubilee Year" was an important law. At first, it was decreed that every seventh year, sold or leased lands were to return to the clan of origin. Everyone was to be able to go back to his property. This prevented the formation of stagnant funds and guaranteed a living for families. During Jubilee Year, lands were to be sold back, slaves were to be redeemed and debts cancelled (cf. Dt 15: 1-18). The celebration of a Jubilee Year every seven years was not easy (cf. Jeremiah 34: 8-16). After the exile, began the custom of celebrating every fifty years, that is, every seven times seven years (Lev 25: 8-17). The purpose of a Jubilee Year was and still is to re-affirm the rights of the poor, welcome the excluded and reintegrate them into society. The jubilee was a legal instrument to go back to the deep sense of the Law of God. It was an occasion to take stock of the course travelled, to discover and correct errors and to begin everything anew. Jesus begins his preaching by proclaiming a new jubilee, a "year of favor from the Lord."

Praying with Psalm 72 (71)

"He will free the poor who cry!"

God, endow the king with your own fair judgement, the son of the king with your own saving justice, that he may rule your people with justice, and your poor with fair judgement. Mountains and hills, bring peace to the people!

With justice he will judge the poor of the people, he will save the children of the needy and crush their oppressors. In the sight of the sun and the moon he will endure, age after age. He will come down like rain on mown grass, like showers moistening the land.

In his days uprightness shall flourish, and peace in plenty till the moon is no more. His empire shall stretch from sea to sea, from the river to the limits of the earth.

The Beast will cower before him, his enemies lick the dust; the kings of Tarshish and the islands will pay him tribute.

The kings of Sheba and Saba will offer gifts; all kings will do him homage, all nations become his servants.

For he rescues the needy who calls to him, and the poor who has no one to help.

He has pity on the weak and the needy and saves the needy from death.

From oppression and violence, he redeems their lives, their blood is precious in his sight.

Long may he live; may the gold of Sheba be given him! Prayer will be offered for him constantly, and blessings invoked on him all day. May wheat abound in the land, waving on the heights of the hills, like Lebanon with its fruits and flowers at their best, like the grasses of the earth.

May his name be blessed forever and endure in the sight of the sun.

In him shall be blessed every race in the world, and all nations call him blessed.

Blessed be Yahweh, the God of Israel, who alone works wonders; blessed forever his glorious name.

May the whole world be filled with his glory! Amen! Amen!

Final Prayer

Lord Jesus, we thank 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.

Monday, January 31, 2022

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Lord our God, help us to love you with all our hearts and to love all men as you love them.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, on God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading - Mark 5: 1-20

They reached the territory of the Gerasenes on the other side of the lake, and when he disembarked, a man with an unclean spirit at once came out from the tombs towards him. The man lived in the tombs, and no one could secure him anymore, even with a chain, because he had often been secured with fetters and chains but had snapped the chains and broken the fetters, and no one had the strength to control him. All night and all day, among the tombs and in the mountains, he would howl and gash himself with stones.

Catching sight of Jesus from a distance, he ran up and fell at his feet and shouted at the top of his voice, 'What do you want with me, Jesus, son of the Most High God? In God's name do not torture me!' For Jesus had been saying to him, 'Come out of the man, unclean spirit.' Then he asked, 'What is your name?' He answered, 'My name is Legion, for there are many of us.' And he begged him earnestly not to send them out of the district.

Now on the mountainside there was a great herd of pigs feeding, and the unclean spirits begged him, 'Send us to the pigs, let us go into them.' So he gave them leave.

With that, the unclean spirits came out and went into the pigs, and the herd of about two thousand pigs charged down the cliff into the lake, and there they were drowned.

The men looking after them ran off and told their story in the city and in the country round about; and the people came to see what had really happened. They came to Jesus and saw the demoniac sitting there -- the man who had had the legion in him -- properly dressed and in his full senses, and they were afraid. And those who had witnessed it reported what had happened to the demoniac and what had become of the pigs. Then they began to implore Jesus to leave their neighborhood.

As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed begged to be allowed to stay with him. Jesus would not let him but said to him, 'Go home to your people and tell them all that the Lord in his mercy has done for you.' So the man went off and proceeded to proclaim in the Decapolis all that Jesus had done for him. And everyone was amazed.

Reflection

- In today's Gospel, we meditate on a long text on the expulsion of a devil which was called *Legion* and which oppressed and tortured a person. Today there are many people who use the texts of the Gospel which speak of the expulsion of the devils or impure spirits in order to frighten others. This is a sin! Mark does the opposite. As we will see, he associates the action of power of evil to four things: a) With the *cemetery*, the place of the dead. Death which kills life! b) With the *pork* which was considered an unclean animal. The impurity which separates from God! c) With the *sea*, which was considered as a symbol of the chaos which existed before creation. Chaos which destroys nature; d) with the word *Legion*, a name given to the army of the Roman Empire. The empire which oppresses and exploits people. Well, Jesus overcomes the power of evil in these four points. The victory of Jesus had a very great outreach for the community of the years '70's, the time in which Mark wrote his Gospel. These communities lived being persecuted by the *Roman Legions*, the ideology of which manipulated the popular beliefs concerning the devils in order to frighten people and to obtain submission from them.
- *The power of evil oppresses, ill-treats and alienates persons.* The initial verses describe the situation of the people before the arrival of Jesus. In the way of describing the behaviour of the possessed person, Mark associates the power of evil to the cemetery and to death. It is a power without any purpose, threatening, without control and destructor which makes everybody afraid. It deprives the person of conscience, of self-control and of autonomy.
- *In the presence of Jesus the power of evil disintegrates itself, and breaks into fragments.* In the way of describing the first contact between Jesus and the possessed man, Mark stresses the total lack of proportion that exists! The power which at the beginning seemed to be very strong, melts and is broken, fragmented before Jesus. The man falls on his knees, asks not to be expelled from that district and finally says its name is *Legion*. With this name, Mark associates the power of evil with the political and military power of the Roman Empire which dominated the world through its *Legions*.
- *The power of evil is impure and has no autonomy nor consistency.* The devil has no power in its movements. He only manages to enter into the pigs with the permission of Jesus! Once he has entered into the pigs, they charged down the cliff into the sea. There were 2000! According to the people the pig was a symbol of impurity, the impurity which prevented the human being to enter into relationship with God and

to feel accepted by Him. The sea was the symbol of chaos which existed before creation and which according to the belief of the time, threatened life. This episode of the pigs which threw themselves into the sea is strange and difficult to understand, but the message is sufficiently clear: before Jesus the power of evil has no autonomy nor consistency. The one who believes in Jesus has already overcome the power of evil and should not be afraid, should have no fear!

- *The reaction of the people of the place.* On the advice of the herdsmen who took care of the pigs, the people of the place ran to see the man who had been liberated from the power of evil, now *"in his full senses"*. But the Legion entered the pigs! And for this reason they ask Jesus to leave. For them, in fact, the pigs were more important than the human person who had just returned to be himself. The same thing happens today: the neo-liberal system gives very little importance to persons. What is important for it is gain!
- *To announce the Good News means to announce "what the Lord has done for you!"*. The man who was liberated wanted to "follow Jesus", but Jesus tells him: "Go home to your people and tell them all that the Lord in his mercy has done for you". Mark addressed this phrase of Jesus to the communities and to all of us. For the majority of us "to follow Jesus" means: "Go to your house, to your people, announce to them what the Lord has done for you!"

Personal Questions

- Which point of this text pleased or struck you the most? Why?
- The man who was cured wanted to follow Jesus. But he should remain at home and tell everybody what Jesus has done for him. What has Jesus done for you which can be told to others?

Concluding Prayer

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