



LECTIO DIVINA

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Friday, January 1, 2021

Solemnity of Mary

Visit of the Shepherds to Jesus and his Mother. The marginalized are God's favorites

Luke 2: 16-21

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 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 2:16-21) 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:

⁸ In the countryside close by there were shepherds out in the fields keeping guard over their sheep during the watches of the night. ⁹ An angel of the Lord stood over them and the glory of the Lord shone round them. They were terrified, ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. ¹² And here is a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.' ¹³ And all at once with the angel there was a great throng of the hosts of heaven, praising God with the words: ¹⁴ Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace for those he favors. ¹⁵ 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.' ¹⁶ So they hurried away and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger. ¹⁷ When they saw the Child, they repeated what they had been told about him, ¹⁸ and everyone who heard it was astonished at what the shepherds said to them. ¹⁹ As for Mary, she treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰ And the shepherds went back glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, just as they had been told. ²¹ 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?



For those who wish 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

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 of *Soter* 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 fulfil the promises made by God to his people. This means that newly born child, who lies in a manger, has come to fulfil 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!

- 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 *avored 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 fulfils 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.

- **Luke 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.

Concluding 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.



Saturday, January 2, 2021

Christmas Time

Opening Prayer

All-powerful Father, you sent your Son Jesus Christ to bring the new light of salvation to the world. May he enlighten us with his radiance, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading - John 1:19-28

This was the witness of John, when the Jews sent to him priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?"

He declared, he did not deny but declared, "I am not the Christ." So, they asked, "Then are you Elijah?" He replied, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" He answered, "No." So, they said to him, "Who are you? We must take back an answer to those who sent us. What have you to say about yourself?" So, he said, "I am, as Isaiah prophesied: A voice of one that cries in the desert: Prepare a way for the Lord. Make his paths straight!" Now those who had been sent were Pharisees, and they put this question to him, "Why are you baptizing if you are not the Christ, and not Elijah, and not the Prophet?"

John answered them, "I baptize with water; but standing among you - unknown to you - is the one who is coming after me; and I am not fit to undo the strap of his sandal." This happened at Bethany, on the far side of the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

Reflection

- Today's Gospel speaks about the witness of John the Baptist. The Jews sent "priests and Levites" to question him. In the same way, some years later, they sent persons to control the activity of Jesus (Mk 3:22). There is a very great resemblance between the responses of the people regarding Jesus and the questions which the authority addresses to John. Jesus asks the Disciples: "Whom do people say that I am?" They answered: "Elijah, John the Baptist, Jeremiah, one of the Prophets" (cf. Mk 8:27-28). The authority addresses the same questions to Jesus: "Are you the Messiah, or Elijah, the Prophet?" John responds by quoting the Prophet Isaiah: "I am a voice of one who cries in the desert: Prepare a way for the Lord." The other three Gospels contain the same affirmation concerning John: he is not the Messiah, but he has come to prepare the coming of the Messiah (cf. Mk 1:3; Mt 3:3; Lk 3:4). The four Gospels give great attention to the activity and the witness of John the Baptist. Which is the reason that they insist so much in saying that John is not the Messiah?
- John the Baptist was put to death by Herod around the year 30. But up to the end of the first century, the time when the Fourth Gospel was written, John continued to be considered a leader among the Jews. And also, after his death, the souvenir of John continued to have a strong influence in the living out of the faith of the people.



He was considered a prophet (Mk 11:32). He was the first great prophet who appeared after centuries of the absence of prophets. Many considered him as the Messiah. When in the year 50, Paul passed through Ephesus, in Asia Minor, he found a group of persons who had been baptized with the baptism of John (cf. Acts 19:1-4). Because of this, it was important to spread the witness of John the Baptist himself saying that he was not the Messiah and instead to indicate Jesus as the Messiah. And thus, John himself contributed to radiate better the Good News of Jesus.

- “How is it that you baptize if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?” The response of John is another affirmation with which he indicates that Jesus is the Messiah: “I baptize with water, but standing among you, unknown to you, is one who is coming after me; and I am not fit to undo the strap of his sandal.” And a bit ahead (Jn 1:33), John refers to the prophecies which announced the effusion of the Spirit in the Messianic times: “The one on whom you will see the Spirit descend and rest upon him, is the one who is to baptize with the Holy Spirit” (cf. Is 11:1-9; Ez 36:25-27; Joel 3:1-2).

Personal Questions

- In your life have you had a John Baptist who has prepared the way in you to receive Jesus?
- John was humble. He did not try to make himself greater than what he was. In reality: Have you been a Baptist for someone?

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)

Sunday, January 3, 2021

The Epiphany of the Lord: The Magi's journey of faith

The adoration of the child Jesus as King and Lord: Matthew 2:1-12

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.

Reading

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 heartbeats?
- "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 *caf*, 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, *caf* and *caf*, 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 recognizes 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 water-hole, 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 4, 2021

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 around 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 paralyzed, were all brought to him, and he cured them. Large crowds followed him, coming from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judaea and Transjordan.

Reflection

- A 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 in 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

- Sometimes, 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 5, 2021

Mark 6:34-44

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

When Jesus saw the vast crowd, his heart was moved with pity for them, for they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things. By now it was already late and his disciples approached him and said, "This is a deserted place and it is already very late. Dismiss them so that they can go to the surrounding farms and villages and buy themselves something to eat." He said to them in reply, "Give them some food yourselves." But they said to him, "Are we to buy two hundred days' wages worth of food and give it to them to eat?" He asked them, "How many loaves do you have? Go and see." And when they had found out they said, "Five loaves and two fish." So, he gave orders to have them sit down in groups on the green grass. The people took their places in rows by hundreds and by fifties. Then, taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he said the blessing, broke the loaves, and gave them to his disciples to set before the people; he also divided the two fish among them all. They all ate and were satisfied. And they picked up twelve wicker baskets full of fragments and what was left of the fish. Those who ate of the loaves were 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 to discover the meaning more fully. A bit before (Mk 6:17-19), Mark narrates the banquet of death, organized by Herod with the great people 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, so as to discover what exactly is the importance of the multiplication of the loaves.
- Jesus had invited the disciples to rest a bit in a place in the desert (Mk 6:31). The crowds noticed 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). Faced with these people without a shepherd, Jesus forgets to rest and begins to teach. He begins to be a shepherd. With His words, He 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, "Give them some food yourselves." But they were afraid: "Do you want us to go and buy bread for 200 denarii?" (that is, the salary of 200 days!). The disciples seek a solution outside the crowds, 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 illuminate the meaning of the facts. To feed the hungry crowds in the desert, Moses was the first one to do it (cf. 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 (cf. Num 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, a few words suffice. In this way they discovered the mystery which surrounded the person of Jesus.

Thoughts to put into practice

When we think of feeding the world, or of all the need in the world, it can be overwhelming and might either give us a reason to put it off until we have a solution or throw up our hands in the face of such an enormous task. Mother Teresa (St Teresa of Calcutta) offered advice throughout her life on this. It is necessary to first love those in your family. Love begins at home.

Some families have someone who is suffering or lonely, yet we don't even have time to smile at them. "If you really want to be God's love in the world of today, begin to be God's love in your own home first." You must be hope of eternal happiness to your husband, your wife, your child, your grandparents, parents, and whoever is connected to you. Even among co-workers in the office or at the job, can they see Jesus in you? So many people go to their office meetings to defend their interests, rather than serve for instance.

She once visited what would be a care home for the elderly. It had everything they needed and was quite beautiful, yet she noticed everybody was sad and looking towards the door. When she asked a sister why, she was told they spend their time expecting, hoping, that a son or daughter will come to visit them. They hurt because they are forgotten.

Another time, a rich man visited from another country and asked her if she wanted him to give up his big house and nice car. She said "no" - but go back and see some of the lonely people where you live. Take them in your nice car and invite them in and entertain them in your big house for a short time. Make your house a center for love! "And when you buy some clothes, buy one for a little less and use the extra money to buy something for someone else."

These are ways to start.

Personal Questions

- Jesus forgets to rest in order to serve the people. What example does this set for myself?
- If we shared what we have today, there would be no hunger in the world. What can I do?
- Am I personally involved in serving and loving others, or is my effort just symbolic gesture from me?



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 6, 2021

Christmas Time

Opening Prayer

God, light of all nations, give us the joy of lasting peace, and fill us with your radiances 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, 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) Remember also 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 7, 2021

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)

Friday, January 8, 2021

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)

Saturday, January 9, 2021

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 or 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 10, 2021

Baptism of the Lord

Immersed in Christ, aware of the gift received, sent into the world

Opening Prayer

Holy Spirit, you who breathed on the waters of creation and guided the steps of Moses in the desert, come today upon us and immerse us in you, so that our every step and thought may be directed towards Christ as we listen to his Word.

Dwell within us, Spirit of the Father, and guide us to the truth of ourselves and to the knowledge of the Son of God who redeems us and makes us one with him, so that the Father may be well pleased with us too. Amen.

The Gospel: Mark 1:7-11

A key to the reading:

Even Christ, in his human journey, had to gradually grow in the knowledge of his identity and of the task, in human history, entrusted to him by the Father.

The baptism in the Jordan marks this growing in awareness and launches Jesus beyond the borders of his land, Galilee, into a universal mission and into a dimension where he shares the human condition, until then unimaginable for him and for his prophets: it is God himself who "descends" to be by the side of human beings, even though aware of their weaknesses, to allow them to "climb" to the Father and give them access to communion with Him. The "pleasure" of the Father that Jesus hears in the Spirit will go with him always on his earthly journey, making him constantly aware of the joyful love of Him who sent him into the world.



The text:

⁷ In the course of his preaching John said, 'After me is coming someone who is more powerful than me, and I am not fit to kneel down and undo the strap of his sandals. ⁸ I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.'

⁹ It was at this time that Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized in the Jordan by John. ¹⁰ And at once, as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit, like a dove, descending on him. ¹¹ And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; my favor rests on you.'

A Time of Silence

interior as well as exterior, to open our hearts and allow space for the Word of God to enter into us.

The Word Given to Us:

- **The Baptism:** purification rites by means of bathing or ablutions were quite common as a daily practice among the Jews at the time of Jesus (cf Mk 7:1-4), also among the Essenes of Qumran. The word *baptism* indicates a bath, a complete immersion in water, and comes from the verb *baptizo*, rarely used in the Greek Old Testament because of a negative nuance in its meaning: *immerse*, *submerge*, *annihilate* (by drowning or sinking in water). The only time we do not find this negative note is in 2 Kings 5:14: the healing of Naaman, which comes about by means of a series of baths in the Jordan at the command of Elisha. It is from this event that the positive use of the word comes in later times.
- **The Baptism of John:** is characteristic of the practice (so much so that it becomes known by his name (cf Mk 1:4). It takes up existing practices and adds some new ones. John works in an unnamed place along the Jordan and baptizes in the flowing water of the river, not in specified places and in waters prepared for the rite. The conversion and penance demanded by him (Mk 1:4) are more on the moral than on the ritual level (cf Lk 3:8) and the rite, which signified such an existential change (bath and confession of sins), took place only once in a lifetime. Moreover, John clearly says that his baptism is only the preparation for a more radical purifying event, directly connected with the final judgment of God: "baptism in the spirit" and "in fire" (cf Mk 1:7-8, Mt 1:2-3).

The people of Judea and Jerusalem greatly welcomed John's preaching, so much so that large crowds went to him to be baptized (Mk 1:5), as Joseph Flavius also narrates: it is the evident realization of the prophetic word recalled by Mark in 1:2-3.

- **Jesus and John at the Jordan:** John knows quite well that he is not the Messiah and to be very inferior in dignity to him, and yet he is called to prepare for his now imminent coming (Mk 1:7-8). All the Gospels speak of this awareness, emphasized by the use of the verb in the past for his baptism and in the future for the baptism of



the Messiah. This reflects the care that the first Christian communities took to show that Christian baptism was superior to John's baptism, as also Jesus, the Christ, was superior to John the Baptist (cf Mk 3:14; Jn 1:26-34).

- **Baptism in the Spirit:** it is the eschatological baptism promised by the prophets (cf Joel 3:1- 5), connected with the fire of the judgment or also under the form of sprinkling (cf Ez 36:25). Jesus receives this baptism soon after and his baptism will be the source and model of the baptism of the Christians. Thus, the Christian community is founded on the gift of the Holy Spirit.
- **Jesus came from Nazareth:** Jesus stands out among the great crowd of Jewish penitents (cf Mk 1:5), because he comes from an area where only echoes of the penitential preaching of the Baptist had reached, Galilee (Mk 1:9). For Mark this is an important place: Jesus begins his activities there and is well received; after Easter, it is there that the disciples meet him (16:7) and understand him fully and it is from there that they will leave for their mission (16:20). In the light of what Mark says immediately after the voice from heaven, Jesus is not only "stronger" than John, but has a nature far superior to that of John. And yet he went down among those who admitted being sinners, without being afraid of suffering any diminution of his dignity (cf Phil 2:6-7); he is "the light that shines in the darkness" (cf Jn 1:5).

The second Gospel does not report the reasons for which Jesus goes to receive the baptism of penance, even though the event is one of the most historically reliable among those narrated in the Gospels. What primarily interests the Evangelist is the divine revelation that comes after the baptism of Jesus.

- **He saw the heavens torn apart:** this is not a kind of special revelation for Jesus alone. The heavens, literally, "rip themselves open," in answer to Isaiah's invocation: "If you would tear the heavens open and come down" (Is 63:19b). Thus, after a time of separation, a completely new phase begins in the communication between God and humankind: this new relationship is confirmed and becomes definitive with the redemptive death of Jesus, when the veil of the Temple was "torn" (cf Mk 15:38) as though a hand from heaven had struck it. Besides, the Easter of the death and resurrection is the "baptism wished for" by Jesus (cf Lk 12:50).
- **The Spirit descending on him:** Jesus "ascends" from the water of the river and immediately after, the heavens open and the Spirit "descends" and rests on him. While from now on the period of waiting for the Spirit is over and the direct way that unites God and humankind is reopened, Mark shows that Jesus is the only possessor of the Spirit who consecrates him Messiah, makes him fully aware of being God-Son, dwells in him and sustains him in the mission willed by the Father.
- According to Mark, the Spirit glides over Jesus like a dove. We meet the dove in the story of Noah and the dove is also connected to the waters and the work of God in the world (cf Gen 8:8-12). Elsewhere, the dove is used as a reminder of fidelity and thus of the permanence of the gift, for its faithfulness in returning to the place from which it departed (cf Ct 2:14; Jn 1:33-34). The Spirit rests permanently on Jesus and takes possession of him. In this passage of Mark we could also see a reference to the



"breathing of the spirit of God over the waters" of creation (Gen 1:2). With Jesus, a "new creation" really begins (cf Mt 19:38; 2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15).

- **A voice came from heaven:** with the coming of Jesus, communication between God and humankind is restored. It is not a matter of what the rabbis called "the daughter of the voice," an incomplete substitution of the prophetic word, but a matter of direct communication between Father and Son.
- **Came...saw descending...was heard:** we must admire the condescension of the Trinity that "stoops down" towards humankind, *descends* to the Jordan in Jesus to be baptized like so many sinners, *descends* upon Jesus in the Spirit for the sake of his self-awareness and his mission and *descends* in the voice of the Father to confirm his sonship.
- **You are my Son, the Beloved; my favor rests on you:** Mark may have deliberately wanted to recall several passages of the Old Testament in order to emphasize, at least by allusion, the importance of the many nuances of the divine words.
- First of all, we recall Isaiah 42: 1 " Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom my soul delights. I have endowed him with my spirit that he may bring true justice to the nations". It is JHWH whom introduces his faithful servant. Here, however, the title of "servant" is not used but that of "son", weaving the prophetic text with a psalm of royal and messianic investiture: "He has told me, „You are my son, today I have become your father"" (Ps 2:7). The Evangelist (as also the other synoptic) thus allows the nature of the human- divine identity of Jesus to appear – and his mission.
- **You are my Son, the Beloved:** In the light of the Paschal faith, Mark could certainly not have meant this revelation as that God was adopting the man Jesus. The voice from heaven is a confirmation of a special relationship already in existence between Jesus and the Father. The title Son of God is attributed to Jesus in the very first verse of Mark and again at the end of the passion when the centurion says, "In truth this man was a son of God" (Mk 1:1; 15:39). However, this title recurs in various forms and frequently (cf 3:11; 5:7; 9:7; 14:61). For Mark, the title "Son of God" is specially relevant for an understanding of the person of Jesus and for a full profession of faith; it is so important, that eventually it was the proper name given to Jesus by Christians, by which they meant to proclaim the essential elements of their own faith in Him (cf Rom 1:4): the Messiah king, the eschatological savior, the man who had a special relationship with the divine, the one risen from the dead, the second Person of the Trinity.
- The fact that the voice from heaven calls him "chosen," "beloved" (as will be repeated at the Transfiguration in 5:7 and 12:6) emphasizes the completely unique relationship of the Father with Jesus, so special that it overshadows the other relationships between human beings and God, even the privileged ones. Jacob too, like Jesus, is the "only and chosen" son (cf Gen 22:2) and he is not spared the agony of a violent death (cf Heb 5:7).



- **My favor rests on you:** these words emphasize yet once more the messianic election of Jesus, fruit of the Father's benevolence that thus shows his absolute preference for the Son in whom he finds joy and satisfaction (cf Is 42:1), while Jesus, obedient to the Father, begins his mission of bringing humanity back to the Father (cf Mk 1:38).

A Few Questions

to give our reflection and actions direction:

- Like us, Jesus lives a stage in life, he goes from the "hidden life" to his "public life". We are passing from the Christmas season to "ordinary" time. These are the times for us to realize our mission, which consists in our daily commitment (often hard and usually dry) to express in life our awareness that *God the Son is with us as our brother and savior*, by using the gifts received in baptism. *Am I aware of the mission entrusted to me by the Father? Am I able to express this mission in my everyday life or do I limit myself to special occasions?*
- Our baptism made us "children of God in the Son". God is also well pleased with us and we too are his "chosen" (cf 1 Jn 2:7, 3:2-21, etc.). *Am I aware of the love with which the Father looks at me and relates to me? Am I able to respond to this love with the simplicity and docility of Jesus?*
- Our passage contains a manifestation of the Trinity in action. The Spirit descends upon Jesus, the Father speaks to his Son and thus opens a new way of communicating with us human beings. *How is my prayer? To whom do I usually pray? Do I remember that I too am "immersed" in the Trinity and that for me too "the heavens tear themselves open"?*

Psalm 20

Let us pray this Psalm, aware of being chosen by the Father and that the Father is by our side always with great tenderness of heart.

The Lord answer you in the day of trouble! The name of the God of Jacob protect you!

May he send you help from the sanctuary, and give you support from Zion!

May he remember all your offerings, and regard with favor your burnt sacrifices! May he grant you your heart's desire, and fulfil all your plans!

May we shout for joy over your victory, and in the name of our God set up our banners! May the Lord fulfil all your petitions!

Now I know that the Lord will help his anointed; he will answer him from his holy heaven with mighty victories by his right hand. Some boast of chariots, and some of horses; but we boast of the name of the Lord our God. They will collapse and fall; but we shall rise and stand upright. Give victory to the king, O Lord; answer us when we call.



Closing Prayer

The liturgical context is excellent for an understanding and for praying this Gospel. We, therefore, take up the preface to convey our prayer to God:

Father, in Christ's baptism in the Jordan, you worked signs and wonders to manifest the mystery of the new washing (our baptism).

Your voice was heard from heaven to awaken faith in the presence among us of the Word made man.

Your Spirit was seen as a dove resting upon him and consecrated your Servant

with priestly, prophetic and royal anointing, so that all would recognize him as the Messiah, sent to bring to the poor the good news of salvation.

Grant that we may thank and glorify you for this priceless gift, for having sent to us your Son, our brother and teacher.

Let your kind gaze rest upon us and grant that we may bring you joy in all our actions, forever and ever.

Monday, January 11, 2021

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 1:14-20

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 12, 2021

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 13, 2021

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. 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 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 14, 2021

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 in order 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, in order 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, in order to enter into contact with Jesus, had transgressed the norms of the Law. Jesus also, in order 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 disciples

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

To overcome the force of evil

Mark 1:29-31

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
To integrate anew the excluded

Personal Questions

- 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 15, 2021

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 around 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 and 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 16, 2021

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, a number of 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 70s, 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 difficult 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 17, 2021

Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

Come and you will see. The call of the first Disciples

John 1:35-42

Opening Prayer

Good Shepherd, my Father, today you also come down from the eternal mountains and bring with you your flock and lead it towards green pastures, of fresh grass, of good water. Today you send ahead of you your dearest or favorite lamb, the Lamb whom you love with an incommensurable love; You give us your Son Jesus, the Messiah. Behold, he is here! I beg you, help me to recognize him, to fix my gaze on him, my desire, my expectation. Make me follow him, that I do not separate myself from him, that I enter his house and remain there always. His house, oh Father, are you, yourself. I want to enter in you, I want to live. May the breath of your Holy Spirit attract me, support me and unite me in love to You and to your Son, my Lord, today and forever and ever. Amen.



Reading

To place this passage in its context:

This passage introduces us at the beginning of the evangelical account of John, clearly showing the succession of one day after another of a whole week. Here we are already on the third day since John the Baptist began to give his witness of Jesus, which had reached plenitude, with the invitation to the disciples to follow the Lord, the Lamb of God. The ministry of Jesus begins during these days, the Word of the Father, who descends in the midst of men to meet them and to speak with them and dwell among them.

This place is Bethany, beyond the Jordan, where John baptized: here the encounter with the Word of God takes place and the new life begins.

To help in the reading of the passage:

vv. 35-36: John the Baptist lives a very strong experience of encounter with Jesus, in fact it is precisely here, on the third day, that he recognizes him fully, that he proclaims him with his whole strength and indicates him as the true way to follow, as the life to be lived. Here John diminishes himself to the point of disappearing and grows as witness of the light.

vv. 37-39: Having accepted the witness of their master, the disciples of John begin to follow Jesus; after having listened to his voice, they meet the Word and allow themselves to be challenged by it. Jesus looks at them, he knows them and begins his dialogue with them. He takes them with him, introduces them into the place of his dwelling and makes them remain with him. The Evangelist indicates the exact hour of this face to face encounter, of this exchange of life between Jesus and the first disciples.

vv. 40-42: Immediately the witness flares up and spreads; Andrew cannot keep silence what he has seen and heard, what he has experienced and lived and immediately becomes a missionary, calling his brother Peter to come to encounter Jesus. He, fixing his look on that man, calls him and transforms his life: he was Simon, now he becomes Peter.

Text:

³⁵ The next day as John stood there again with two of his disciples, Jesus went past, ³⁶ and John looked towards him and said, "Look, there is the lamb of God." ³⁷ And the two disciples heard what he said and followed Jesus. ³⁸ Jesus turned around, saw them following and said, "What do you want?" They answered, "Rabbi" -- which means Teacher-'where do you live?' ³⁹ He replied, "Come and see;" so they went and saw where he lived and stayed with him that day. It was about the tenth hour. ⁴⁰ One of these two who became followers of Jesus after hearing what John had said was Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter. ⁴¹ The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother and say to him, "We have found the Messiah" -- which means the Christ -- ⁴² and he took Simon to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John; you are to be called Cephas" -- which means Rock.



A Moment of Prayerful Silence

I remain in silence and allow that these simple, but powerful words, envelope me, take possession of my life. I allow Jesus, who is coming, to fix his look on me, I allow him to ask me, like he asked them: “What are you looking for?” and I allow him to take me with him, to his house. Because, yes, I want to dwell near Him.

Some Questions

Now, I try to listen more attentively to this passage, taking every word, every verb, being attentive to the movements, to the looks. I really try to encounter the Lord in this page, allowing myself to be searched and known by Him.

“The next day John stood there again”

In these words, I feel the insistence of the search, of the waiting; I feel the faith of John the Baptist which grows. The days are going by, the experience of the encounter with Jesus is intensified; John does not give up, does not get tired, rather, he always becomes more certain, more convinced, enlightened. He is there, he remains. I place myself in confrontation with the person of the Baptist: Am I one who is there, who remains? Or rather I withdraw, I get tired, I become weak and allow my faith to die out? I stand there, or do I sit down, I wait or I do not wait any longer?

“Fixing his look on Jesus”

Here there is a beautiful verb which signifies “to look intensely”, to penetrate with the look” and this is repeated also in verse 42, referring to Jesus, who looks at Peter to change his life. Many times, in the Gospels, it is said that Jesus fixes his look on his disciples (Mt 19:26), or on a particular person (Mk 10:21); yes, He fixes His look to love, to call, to enlighten. His look never leaves us, never leaves me. I know that I can find peace only in exchanging this look. How can I pretend not to see? Why continue to turn my look from here to there, fleeing from the Lord’s love, which has been given to me and has chosen me?

“They followed Jesus”

This expression, referred to the disciples, does not only mean that they began to walk in the same direction of Christ, but much more: that they consecrated themselves to Him, that they committed their life with Him and for Him. He is the one who takes the initiative, I know it and that he tells me: “You, follow me”, like to the rich young man (Mt 19:21), like to Peter (Jn 21: 22); but, in truth, how do I respond? Do I have the courage, the love, the ardor, to tell him: “Master, I will follow you wherever you go!” (Mt 8:19b), confirming these words with the facts? Or rather, do I also say, like that one in the Gospel: “I will follow you, but first allow me to.” (Lk 9: 61)?

“What do you search?”

Behold, the Lord Jesus pronounces the first words in John’s Gospel and, they are a very concrete question, addressed to the disciples who are following him, addressed to us,



to me personally. The Lord fixes his look on me and asks me: "What are you searching?" It is not easy to respond to this question; I must go deep into my heart and listen to myself, measure myself, verify myself. What am I really searching for? My energy, my desires, my dreams, my investments, to what purpose are they aimed?

"They remained with him"

The disciples remain with Jesus, they begin to live with him, to have the house in common with Him. Thus, perhaps, they began to feel and to experience that the Lord himself is their new house. The verb which John uses here, can simply signify to dwell, to stay, but also to dwell, in the intense sense of indwelling one in the other. Jesus indwells in the womb of the Father and also offers to us the possibility of indwelling in Him and in all the Trinity. Today, he offers himself, here, to me, to live together this indescribable, splendid experience of love. Therefore, what do I decide? Do I also stop, like the disciples and remain with Him, in Him? Or rather do I leave, I withdraw from the love and run to seek something else?

"And leads them to Jesus"

Andrew runs to call his brother Simon, because he wants to share with him the infinite gift which he has received. He announces, proclaims the Messiah, the Savior and has the strength to take his brother with him. He becomes a guide, becomes light, sure way. This is a very important passage: I do not know if I am sufficiently open and enlightened to witness to Him, who reveals Himself to me so clearly. Perhaps I am afraid, I am embarrassed, I do not have the strength, I am lazy, I am indifferent?

A Key for the Reading

The Lamb of God:

In v. 36 John announces Jesus as the Lamb of God, repeating the cry which he had already given previously, the day before: "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world".

The identification of Jesus with the Lamb is overflowing with Biblical references, both from the Old and the New Testament.

The Lamb already is mentioned in the Book of Genesis, in chapter 22, at the moment of the sacrifice of Isaac; God provides a lamb, to be offered as holocaust instead of the son. The lamb descends from heaven and takes upon himself the death of man; the lamb is immolated, so that the son may live.

In the Book of Exodus, in chapter 12, the Pascal Lamb is offered, a lamb without blemish, perfect; his blood which will be poured will save the sons from the exterminator, who goes from house to house, during the night. From that moment every son of God will remain signed, sealed, by that blood of salvation. Thus, the way is opened to freedom, the way of exodus, to go to God, to enter in the land promised by Him. Here begins the following, which leads up to the Apocalypses, up to the reality of heaven.



The element of sacrifice, of the slaughter, of the total gift accompanies constantly the figure of the lamb; the books of Leviticus and of Numbers continually place before us this holy presence of the lamb: he is offered every day in the daily holocaust; he is immolated in all the sacrifices of expiation, of reparation, of sanctification.

The Prophets also speak about a lamb prepared for the sacrifice: a mute sheep, sheared without opening his mouth, like a tame and meek lamb led to the slaughter (Is 53:7; Jer 11:19). The Lamb sacrificed on the altar every day.

In the Gospel, it is John the Baptist who announces and manifests Jesus as the true Lamb of God, who takes upon himself the sin of man and cancels it by the shedding of his precious and pure Blood. In fact, He is the Lamb immolated in the place of Isaac; He is the Lamb roasted in the fire on the Pascal night. The Lamb of liberation; He is the perennial sacrifice to the Father, offered for us; He is the suffering servant, who does not rebel himself, does not recriminate but surrenders himself, silently, out of love for us.

Saint Peter says this openly: "You have been liberated from the futile way of your life thanks to the precious blood of Christ, like the lamb, without blemish and spotless". (I Pt 1:19).

The Apocalypses reveals openly all things concerning the Lamb: He is the one who can open the seals of history, of the life of every man, of the hidden heart, of truth (Rev. 7:1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 12; 8:1); He is the one who obtained victory, the one sitting on the throne (Rev. 5:6), He is the king, worthy of honor, praise, glory, adoration (Rev. 5:12); He is the Spouse, who invites to his Wedding Banquet (Rev. 19:7); He is the lamp (Rev. 21:23), the temple (Rev. 21:22), the place of our eternal dwelling; He is the Shepherd (Rev. 7:17), whom we shall follow wherever he goes (Rev. 14:4).

To see:

In this passage are repeated five times, expressions concerning seeing, the encounter of the looks. The first one is John, who already has the eye accustomed to see at depth and to recognize the Lord who comes and passes by; he had to render witness to the light and for this reason has the eyes enlightened from within. In fact, near the Jordan River, he sees the Spirit coming down on Jesus (Mt 3:16); he recognizes him as the Lamb of God (Jn 1:29) and continued to fix his look (v. 36) on Him to indicate Him to his disciples. And if John sees in this way, if he is capable of penetrating into the appearances, it means that already before he had been joined by the loving look of Jesus, he had been enlightened before. In the same way as we are. As soon as the witness of the look dies out, the light of the eyes of Christ is attained. In v. 38 it is said that Jesus sees the disciples who follow him and the Evangelist uses a very beautiful verb, which means "to fix the look on someone, to look penetratingly and intensely". The Lord truly does this with us: He turns toward us, gets close to us, takes to heart our presence, our life, our path following Him and looks at us, for a long time, above all, with love, but also intensely, involving himself, with deep attention. His look never leaves us alone. His eyes are fixed within us; they are designed within us, as Saint John of the Cross sings in his Spiritual Canticle.

And then the Lord invites us, in turn, to open the eyes, to begin to see in a true way; He



says: “Come and see.” Every day He repeats this to us, without getting tired of addressing this tender and strong invitation, overflowing with promises and with gifts. “They saw where he was dwelling”, John, points out, using a different verb, very strong, which indicates to see profoundly, which goes beyond superficiality and contacts, which enters in understanding, in knowledge and in the faith of what one sees. The disciples – and we with them – saw, that afternoon, where Jesus dwelt, that is, they understood and knew which is his true dwelling place, not a place, not a space.

Lastly, once again we have the same verb as in the beginning. Jesus fixes his look on Simon (v. 42) and with that light, with that encounter of eyes, of souls, he calls him by name and changes his life, makes him a new man. The eyes of the Lord are open also in this same way on us and they wash us from the ugliness of our darkness, enlightening us with love; with those eyes He is calling us, is making a new creation of us, is saying: “May there be light,” and there was light.

To remain – to dwell

This is another very important verb, very strong, another precious pearl of the Gospel of John. In our passage it is repeated three times, with two different meanings; to dwell and to remain. The disciples immediately ask Jesus where He dwells, where is his house and he invites them to go, to enter, to remain: “They remained with him that day” (v. 39). It is not a physical remaining, temporary; the disciples are not only guests passing by, who will leave soon. No, the Lord makes space for us in his interior place, in his relationship with the Father and there he accepts us for always; in fact, he says: “Like, you Father, are in me and I in you, may these also be in us... I in them and you in me...” (Jn 17:21-23). He allows us to enter and he also enters; he allows to knock and He himself knocks; he makes us dwell in Him and puts his dwelling place in us together with the Father (Jn 14:23). Our call to be disciples of Christ and to announce him to our brothers and sisters, has its origin, its foundation, its vitality, precisely here, in this reality of the reciprocal dwelling of the Lord in us and we in Him. Our true and lasting happiness springs from the realization of our remaining in Him. We have seen where He dwells, we have known the place of his presence and we have decided to remain with Him, today and always.

“Remain in me and I in you. The one who remains in me and I in him bears much fruit. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask for anything that you want and it will be given to you. Remain in my love” (Jn 15).

No, I will not go with anybody else, I will not go anywhere else but only with you, Oh Lord, my dwelling, my place of salvation! Allow me, I pray, that I may remain here, near you, always, Amen

A Moment of Prayer: Psalm 34

Refrain: Your face, Lord, I seek, do not hide your face from me.

I seek Yahweh and he answers me, frees me from all my fears.

Fix your gaze on Yahweh and your face will grow bright, you will never hang your head in shame.



A pauper calls out and Yahweh hears, saves him from all his troubles. The angel of Yahweh encamps around those who fear him and rescues them.

Taste and see that Yahweh is good.

How blessed are those who take refuge in him. Fear Yahweh, you his holy ones; those who fear him lack for nothing. Young lions may go needy and hungry, but those who seek Yahweh lack nothing good. Come, my children, listen to me, I will teach you the fear of Yahweh. The eyes of Yahweh are on the upright, his ear turned to their cry. They cry in anguish and Yahweh hears, and rescues them from all their troubles. Yahweh is near to the broken-hearted, he helps those whose spirit is crushed.

Though hardships without number beset the upright, Yahweh brings rescue from them all.

Final Prayer

Father, I thank you for having given me the presence of your Son Jesus in the luminous words of this Gospel; thank you for having made me listen to his voice, for having opened my eyes to recognize him; thank you for having placed me on the way to follow him and to enter into his house, Thank you because I can dwell with Him, in Him and because He dwells in you, you are in me. Thank you for having, once more, called me, making my life new. Make of me, I beg you, an instrument of your love; that I may never stop announcing Christ who comes; that I may not be embarrassed, that I do not close myself, do not give up, but always become happier, to lead to Him, to You, the brothers and sisters whom you, every day, make me encounter. Amen.

Monday, January 18, 2021

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 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 19, 2021

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 2:23-28

It happened that one 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 (I 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 one 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 (I Macc 2:32-38). Reflecting on the massacre the Maccabee leaders concluded that they should resist and defend their own life, even on the Sabbath (I Macc 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. If 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 have to 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 20, 2021

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 21, 2021

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 2:1 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 22, 2021

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 23, 2021

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 at 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. 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 24, 2021

Third Sunday of Ordinary Time

The beginning and the call of the first apostles: Mark 1:14-20

Opening Prayer

Shaddai, God of the mountain, who make of our fragile life the rock of your dwelling, lead our minds to strike the rock of the desert, so that water may gush out to quench our thirst.

May our poor feelings cover us as with a mantle in the darkness of the night and open our hearts to hear the echo of the Silence, so that the dawn, which enfolds us with the light of a new day, may lead us to taste the holy memory, together with the remnant ashes of the fire of the pastors of the Absolute who on our behalf have kept watch near the divine Master.

Lectio

¹⁴ After John had been arrested, Jesus went into Galilee. There he proclaimed the gospel from God saying, ¹⁵ 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent, and believe the gospel.'



¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ And Jesus said to them, 'Come after me and I will make you into fishers of people.' ¹⁸ And at once they left their nets and followed him. ¹⁹ Going on a little further, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John; they too were in their boat, mending the nets. ²⁰ At once he called them and, leaving their father Zebedee in the boat with the men he employed, they went after him.

A Moment of Silent Prayer

so that the voice of the Word may echo in our hearts.

Meditatio

Some questions to assist us in our meditation and prayer.

- The time has come, the Realm is close at hand: do we believe that we are in Galilee and that the Gospel of God is being preached to us?
- Jesus walks along: in which sea are we casting our nets?
- Follow me ... and immediately they followed him: is there urgency in our daily life or do we go on saying: wait a minute?
- In their boat, they were mending their nets: how many rips are there in our nets? In which boat are we dwelling? Is it our boat or is it that of our roots of the past?
- He called them: our name is on the lips of our Lord Jesus. Does his voice echo as the voice of one who leads us away from our sea?

A Key to the Reading

for those who wish to go deeper into the text.

We have here a literary genre of vocation stories where the condition of life of the person addressed by God is first described, then follows the call expressed in symbolic words or actions, and finally comes the following which involves the abandoning of the activity first described. The call in our text reminds us of the call of Elisha by Elijah (1 Kings, 19:19-21) and that of Amos (Am 7:15). The dependence on a typical biblical model does not exclude the substantial historical reality of the Gospel story. The similarity of the calls underscores a clear theological meaning in Mark's Gospel, that is, the missionary practice of the disciples who will be sent in pairs (Mk 6:7). The dynamics of the Realm are in line with the original project of the creation when the Lord, thinking of Adam, said, "It is not good that man should be alone. I will make him a helpmate" (Gen 2:18). In their preaching mission, one will witness to the other, as Scripture says, "... the evidence of two or three witnesses is required" (cf Mt 18:16; Dt 19:15).

- **Jesus went to Galilee. There he proclaimed the Gospel from God.** Jesus' preaching begins in Galilee and has for aim the Gospel, "the Good News" of God's initiative towards his people, the establishment of the Realm. The Apostles' preaching will go from Galilee to the ends of the earth and will have for aim the Gospel, "the Good News" of the Christ Word who has conquered death in order to make God's glory shine.
- **The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is close at hand.** Repent, and believe the Gospel. The time of waiting (*kairòs*) is over, the decisive moment has come: God is about to begin his reign. John the Baptist belonged to the time of preparation and completed his mission, he was apprehended and put to silence. Jesus belongs to the time of the establishment of the reign. Indeed, it is the present that demands from human beings their collaboration: Repent. The coming of the reign points to this space of freedom where whoever listens to the proclamation can come to this space by turning to Christ or turn from it by ignoring or refusing the good news. A realm that is close to all, present to all who desire it. Conversion, faith and following are three aspects of the same thing, that is, the call to all to follow Jesus who is the of time, reign of God, Good News.
- **As he was walking along by the Lake of Galilee, he saw Simon and Simon's brother Andrew...** The Lake of Galilee is the background of the first phase of Jesus' ministry. A lake that is surrounded by mountains, 208 meters above sea level, 21 km long and 11 km wide. This body of water, in the shape of a cither, was a source of living because of the abundance of fish in it. On the shore of this lake Jesus saw: this look involves and determines a choice of life different from the daily life seen on these shores made up of fishermen, boats, nets and fish. Simon and Andrew, two brothers. The solidarity of this affective bond serves as a basis for the new bond of faith that makes brothers of them beyond the ties of family. Two brothers who bear one name. God calls by name in virtue of that identity of similarity with the eternal Name that renders each person a mirror of similarity.
- **Come after me and I will make you into fishers of people.** This following is determined by a clear order. It is not an invitation; it is a command. The creative Word of God, that called the light and the other creatures into being, now calls his image to take part in the new creation. The following does not come from an autonomous and personal decision, but from a meeting with the person of Jesus who calls. It is an action of grace, not a human choice. Jesus does not wait for a free decision but calls with divine authority as God called the prophets in the Old Testament. It is not the disciples who choose their master as was the custom with rabbis in those days, but the master who chooses his disciples as repositories, not of a doctrine or teaching, but of God's inheritance. The call means abandoning one's family, profession, a complete change of life in order to adhere to a life that does not allow for personal space. The disciples are men of the Realm. The call to become disciples of Jesus is an "eschatological call."
- **And at once they left their nets and followed him.** The response is immediate. A response that tears even the strongest ties. The verb used to indicate the following



is *akolouthèin*, a biblical term to indicate the action of a servant who goes with his master to render him a service. It is a material following, a literal "going after." When it refers to the disciples, it expresses full participation in the life of Jesus and his cause.

- **Going on a little further, he saw James the son of Zebedee and his brother John...**He called them. The verb to call, *kalein*, is another term typical of following. There is an added element compared to the call of the first two: the figure of the father and of the workers. The father also has a name. The fact that he is deprived of his two sons gives him a unique dignity. He remains alone with the workers who will take the place of the sons. The solitude of those left behind is never a senseless solitude.

Reflection:

John had been apprehended and Jesus walks in Galilee. Two paths at the service of the one Lord. The time has come. That time that humankind cannot seize and possess is fulfilled and demands a change of direction. The time for a sea and nets to fish elsewhere. Men and women are called so that nothing of who they are may be lost. Their identity remains, what changes is only the aim of their actions. No more fish, but men. No more relationship with inferior creatures, but a relationship of equality with creatures of equal dignity. New nets to be mended, the nets of a demanding kind of fishing: they are the nets of preaching that will be cast into the hearts of people during the night of pain and lack of feeling. The words "Follow me", like a key, open up new horizons. One does not venture alone on this adventure. Bonds are not broken. The brothers become more so, they still share the bitter experience of earning a living, not seeking for themselves but giving to others. The sea, symbol of everything that cannot be controlled, is there with the familiar and calm movement of the waters that break on the shore and say: Go. Jesus, a man among so many, is the God who approaches the shores of the sea, a God who walks into the life of human beings. A God who sees with human eyes, a God who speaks with new authority: Follow me. And those men who were fishermen, at once left and followed him. They leave for another sea, the sea of firm land, the sea of villages, the sea of the temple, the sea of the streets. They leave at the call of a gaze that beckons, a gaze capable of convincing them to leave everything, not just their boats, the sea, the nets, but even their father, their history, their affections, the very origin of their being. Friends who at night entrusted themselves to the waves of the Sea of Galilee, leave their zone of safety for far away seas. It is an old friendship that leaves, not knowing for where, but with hearts bearing the warmth of a voice and a look: Follow me.

Oratio – Psalm 86 (85)

All the nations you have made shall come to bow before you, Lord, and give honor to your name. For you are great and do wondrous deeds; and you alone are God. Teach me, Lord, your way that I may walk in your truth, single-hearted and revering your name. I will praise you with all my heart, glorify your name forever, Lord my God.



Concluding Prayer

Lord, my expectations are fulfilled in your temple. You, the Living One, who continue to go to the shores of human life, that like a lake in the shape of a cither silently marks the scanning of its hours, pass and see, call... I shall know you when you call me by name and I shall follow you like a wayfarer who picks up his walking stick to go to paths of friendship and of meeting, where the heart crosses into the Absolute of God, to be a living flame in the darkness of human desire, a warmth that spreads where the cold wind of evil destroys and diverts from the horizons of truth and beauty. I know that without you I shall catch nothing in the night of my solitude and delusion. My nets will rip when you tear me away from the bitter waters of my exertions and you will give me to myself, transformed with pardon, received and given with full hands. I shall then proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters. Amen.

Monday, January 25, 2021

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

Jesus appeared to the Eleven and said to them: "Go into the whole world and proclaim the Gospel to every creature. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved; whoever does not believe will be condemned. These signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will drive out demons, they will speak new languages. They will pick up serpents with their hands, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not harm them. They will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover."

Reflection

- The signs which accompany the proclamation or announcement of the Good News. Jesus appears to the eleven disciples and reproaches them because they had not believed the people 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 had an experience of the resurrection of Jesus. Why would this be? Probably to teach two things. In the first place, that faith in Jesus goes through the faith of people who give witness. Second, that nobody should get discouraged when incredulity comes from the heart. Even the eleven disciples had doubts!



- Then Jesus gives them the mission of announcing the Good News to all creatures. The requirement which He gives is the following: to believe and to be baptized. To those who have the courage to believe in the Good News and who are baptized, He promises the followings 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, and they will lay their hands on the sick who will recover. This happens even in our own day.
- To cast out devils is to fight against the force of evil which destroys life. The life of many people 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 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, e.g. gossip, which destroys the relationship between people. The one who lives in the presence of God goes beyond this and succeeds in not being bothered by this terrible poison.
- To cure the sick: wherever there is a clearer consciousness of the presence of God, there is also a special attention toward oppressed and marginalized people, especially the sick. What helps the person 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, revealed the love of the Father, this same Jesus continues alive in our midst, in the same way in our communities. Through us He continues His mission, revealing the Good News of the Love of God for the poor. Even 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 can counteract the force which comes from faith in the Resurrection (Rm 8:35-39). A community which wants to witness to the Resurrection has to be a sign of life, should fight against the forces of death in a way that the world will 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 the 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 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 fulfill this mission in our community? In what 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)

Tuesday, January 26, 2021

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 3:31-35

Now his mother and his brothers arrived and, standing outside, sent in a message asking for him.

A crowd was sitting round him at the time the message was passed to him, "Look, your mother and brothers and sisters are outside asking for you." He replied, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" And looking at those sitting in a circle round him, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers. Anyone who does the will of God, that person is my brother and sister and mother."

Reflection

The family of Jesus. The relatives reached the house where Jesus was. Probably they have come from Nazareth. From there up to Capernaum there is a distance of forty kilometers. His mother also comes together with them. They do not enter, but they send a messenger: "Look, your mother and brothers and sisters are outside asking for you! Jesus" reaction is clear: Who are my mother and my brothers? And he himself responds turning to look toward the crowd who is there around: Here are my mother and my brothers! Anyone who does the will of God, that person is my brother and sister and mother! To understand well the sense of this response it is convenient to look at



the situation of the family in the time of Jesus.

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

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

And thus, the concern with the problems of one's own family prevented the persons to meet in community. Now, in order that the Kingdom of God could manifest itself in community living of the people, the persons had to overcome the narrow limits of the small family and open themselves again to the large family, to the Community. Jesus gave the example. When his own family tries to take possession of him, he reacted and extended the family: "Who are my mother and my brothers?" And he himself gave the answer, turning his look toward the crowd: Here are my mother and my brothers! Anyone who does the will of God, that person is my brother, sister and mother! (Mk 3:33-35). He created a community.

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



Personal questions

- To live faith in the community. What place and what influence does the community have in my way of living faith?
- Today, in the large city, overcrowding promotes individualism which is contrary to life in community. What am I doing to counteract this evil?

Concluding Prayer

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

Wednesday, January 27, 2021

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 28, 2021

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 lampstand? 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 up 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 color 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 a 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 29, 2021

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 were capable of



understanding 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 30, 2021

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 fear (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! In spite of 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. 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 31, 2021

Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Jesus teaches and heals people

The first impression of the Good News of Jesus on the people: Mark 1:21-28

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 text of this fourth Sunday of ordinary time speaks of the amazement of the people who see Jesus passing on his teaching (Mt 1:21-22), then presents the first miracle of the casting out a devil (Mt 1:23-26) and finally speaks again of the amazement of the people who hear the teaching of Jesus of his power to cast out devils (Mk 1:27-28).

In the 70's, the time Mark is writing, the Community of Italy needed some guidance as to how to proclaim the Good News of God to people who lived under the oppression of the fear of evil spirits because of the arbitrary imposition of religious laws by the Roman Empire. In describing Jesus' activity, Mark showed how the communities were to proclaim the Good News. The Evangelists catechized by telling the facts and events of Jesus' life.

The text we are to meditate shows the impression of the Good News of Jesus on the people of his time. As we read, let us try to pay attention to the following:
Which activities of Jesus most gave rise to the amazement of the people?

A division of the text to help with the reading:

- Mark 1:21-22: The people in amazement at the teaching of Jesus begin to grow a critical awareness
- Mark 1:23-24: The reaction of a man possessed by the devil in the presence of Jesus in the Synagogue
- Mark 1:25-26: Jesus conquers and drives the devil away
- Mark 1:27-28: Again, the impression of the Good News of Jesus on the people

Text:

²¹ They went as far as Capernaum, and at once on the Sabbath he went into the synagogue and began to teach. ²² And his teaching made a deep impression on them because, unlike the scribes, he taught them with authority. ²³ And at once in their synagogue there was a man with an unclean spirit, and he shouted, ²⁴ "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." ²⁵ But Jesus rebuked it saying, "Be quiet! Come out of him!" ²⁶ And the unclean spirit threw the man into convulsions and with a loud cry went out of him. ²⁷ 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." ²⁸ And his reputation at once spread everywhere, through all the surrounding Galilean countryside.

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 part of the text did you like best?
- What caused most amazement on the part of the people in Jesus' time?
- What drove the people to see the difference between Jesus and the doctors of the time?
- Devils have no power over Jesus. What impression does this make on the people?
- Does the reality of our community produce amazement among people? How?

For those who wish to go deeper into the theme

The context of the times and of today:

This Sunday we meditate on the description in Mark's Gospel of the first miracle of Jesus. Not all the Evangelists tell the facts of Jesus' life in the same way. Each of them took into account the communities for whom he was writing, each stressed some points and aspects of the life, activities and teachings of Jesus that could help their readers more. Matthew's readers lived in the north of Palestine and in Syria; Luke's lived in Greece; John's in Asia Minor and Mark's probably in Italy. A concrete example of this diversity is the way each one of the four represents Jesus' first miracle. In John's Gospel the first miracle is that at the wedding feast in Cana of Galilee, where Jesus transforms the water into wine (Jn 2:1-11). For Luke, the first miracle is the tranquility with which Jesus frees himself from the threat of death on the part of the people of Nazareth (Lk 4:29-30). For Matthew, it is the healing of a large number of sick and possessed (Mt 4:23) or, more specifically, the healing of a leper (Mt 8:1-4). For Mark, the first miracle is the casting out of a devil (Mk 1:23-26). Thus, each Evangelist, in his own way of telling the facts, stresses what, according to him, are the most important points in the activities and teachings of Jesus. Each one of them has a concern that he tries to transmit to his readers and to the communities: today we live in a place and era quite different from those of Jesus and the Evangelists. What **for us** is the greatest concern today in relation to the living out of the Gospel? Is it worthwhile that each of us should ask him or herself: What, **for me** is the greatest concern?

A commentary on the text:

Mark 1:21-22: Amazed at Jesus' teaching, the people form a critical conscience in themselves.

The first thing that Jesus did at the beginning of his missionary activities was to call four persons to form a community together with him (Mk 1:16-20). The first thing the



people see in Jesus is the different way he teaches and speaks of the Kingdom of God. It is not so much the content, but rather his way of teaching that is striking. The effect of this different way of teaching was the critical conscience formed in the people in relation to the religious authorities of the time. The people saw, compared and said: He teaches with authority, unlike the Scribes. The Scribes taught the people by quoting from the doctors, the authorities. Jesus did not quote any doctor but spoke from his experience of God and of life. His authority came from inside of him. His word was rooted in the heart and in the witness of his life.

Mark 1:23-26: Jesus fights the power of evil

In Mark, the first miracle is the casting out of a devil. The power of evil took hold of people and alienated them from themselves. People were crushed by fear of devils and by the action of unclean spirits. Today, too, the fear of devils is great and on the increase. Suffice it to see the interest in films on the exorcism of devils. Not only this. As in the times of the Roman Empire, many people live alienated from themselves because of the power of the means of communication, of advertising and of commerce. People are slaves to consumerism, oppressed by bills to pay by a certain date and the threat of creditors. Many think that they are not worthy of respect if they do not buy that which advertisements tell them on television. In Mark, the first sign of Jesus is that of fighting evil. Jesus restores people to themselves. He restores their conscience and freedom. Could our faith in Jesus succeed in fighting these devils that alienate us from ourselves and from the reality of God?

Mark 1:27-28: People's reaction: the first impression

- The first two signs of the Good News of God that people see in Jesus are: His different way of teaching the things of God and his power over unclean spirits. Jesus opens a new way of purity for people. In those days anyone declared *impure*, could not come before God to pray or receive the blessing of God promised to Abraham. He had to purify himself first. Concerning the purification of people, there were many laws and ritual norms that made life difficult for people and that marginalized many people considered impure. For instance, washing one's arm to the elbow, sprinkling oneself, washing metal glasses, cups, jars, etc. (cfr Mk 7:1-5). Now purified by faith in Jesus, the impure could once more prostrate themselves in the presence of God and no longer needed to observe the ritual norms. The Good News of the Kingdom of God proclaimed by Jesus must have been a relief for people and a cause of great joy and tranquility.

Further information: casting out devils and the fear of a people

The magic explanation of the evils of life

- In Jesus' days, many people spoke of Satan and the casting out of devils. There was much fear and some took advantage of this fear in others. The power of evil had many names: demon, devil, Beelzebub, prince of devils, satan, dragon, dominations, powers, authority, sovereignty, etc. (cfr. Mk 3:22, 23; Mt 4:1; Rev 12:9; Rom 8:38; Eph 1:21).



- Today, when people cannot explain a phenomenon, problem or pain, sometimes they have recourse to explanations and remedies from tradition or ancient cultures and they say: It is the evil eye, it is the punishment of God, it is some evil spirit. And there are those who seek to silence these devils through magic and loud prayers. Others seek an exorcist to cast out the impure spirit. Others still, urged by the new and sadistic culture of today, fight the power of evil in other ways. They seek to understand the cause of evil. They seek a doctor, and alternative medicine, they help each other, call community meetings, fight the alienation of others, organize mothers' clubs, syndicates, parties and many other forms of associations to cast out the evil and improve people's lives.
- In Jesus' days, the manner of explaining and solving the evils in life were similar to the explanations given by our ancient traditions and culture. In those days, as we read in the Bible, the word devil or Satan often pointed to the power of evil that led people astray from the right path. For instance, during the forty days in the desert, Jesus was tempted by Satan who tried to lead him by a different path (1:12; cfr. Lk 4:1-13). On other occasions, the same word pointed to a person who led another by a wrong path. Thus, when Peter sought to divert Jesus' path, he was *Satan* for Jesus: "Get behind me Satan! Because the way you think is not God's way but man's" (8:33). At other times, these same words were used to indicate the political power of the Roman Empire that oppressed and exploited people. For instance, in the Apocalypse, the Roman Empire is identified with "the great dragon, the primeval serpent, known as the devil or Satan, who had deceived all the world" (Rev 12:9). In Mark's Gospel, this same Roman Empire is given the name of *Legion*, a name given to the devil who ill-treated people (Mk 5:9). At other times, the people used the words devil or spirit to indicate aches and pains. Thus, people talked about the devil of the dumb spirit (Mk 9:17), of the deaf spirit (Mk 9:25), the devil of the impure spirit (Mk 1:23; 3:11), etc. And there were exorcists who cast out these devils (cf. Mk 9:38; Mt 12:27).
- All this shows the great fear people had of the power of evil, which they called devil or Satan. When Mark was writing his Gospel, this fear was on the increase. Besides, some Eastern religions were spreading the cult of spirits, who acted as intermediaries between God and humanity, considered as devils, demiurges or demigods. These cults taught that some of our gestures could irritate the spirits, and they, to wreak vengeance, could prevent our access to God, and thus deprive us of divine benefits. So, through magic rites, loud prayers and complicated ceremonies, people tried to invoke and calm these spirits or demons, so that they would not bring harm to human life. This was the form that some religions had met in order to defend themselves from the influence of the spirits of evil. And this way of living one's relationship with God, rather than freeing people, bred in them fear and anxiety.

Faith in the resurrection and the victory over fear

- Now, one of the objectives of the Good News of Jesus was to help people free themselves of this fear. The coming of the Kingdom of God meant the coming of a *superior* power. Mark's Gospel says: "But no one can make his way into a strong man's house and burgle his property unless he has tied up the strong man first. Only



then can he burgle his house.” (Mk 3:27). The strong man is a figure of the power of evil that keeps people chained to fear. Jesus is *the stronger man* who comes to chain Satan, the power of evil, and to snatch from him this humanity chained to fear. “If it is through the finger of God that I cast out devils, then know that the kingdom of God has overtaken you!” (Lk 11:20) This is what the writings of the New Testament insist on, especially the Gospel of Mark, the victory of Jesus over the power of evil, over the demon, over Satan, over sin and death.

- As we have seen, in this Sunday’s reading in Mark’s Gospel, the first miracle of Jesus is that of the casting out the devil: “Be quiet! Come out of him!” (Mk 1:25). The first impression Jesus makes on the people is that caused by the casting out of the devils: “He gives orders even to unclean spirits and they obey him!” (Mk 1:27). One of the main reasons for the discussion between Jesus and the Scribes is the casting out of devils. They calumniated him saying: “Beelzebub is in him ... It is through the prince of devils that he casts devils out!” (Mk 3:22). The first power given to the apostles when they were sent on a mission was the power to cast out devils: “... giving them the authority over unclean spirits” (Mk 6:7). The first sign that goes with the proclamation of the resurrection is that of casting out devils: “These are the signs that will be associated with believers: in my name they will cast out devils (Mk 16:17).
- The casting out of devils was that which impressed people most (Mk 1:27). It went to the very heart of the Good News of the Kingdom. By means of it, Jesus restored people to themselves. He gave them back common sense and a conscience (M 5,15). From beginning to end, in almost the same words, the Gospel of Mark repeats unceasingly the same message: “Jesus cast out devils!” (Mk 1:26, 34, 39; 3:11-12, 22, 30; 5:1-20; 6:7, 13; 7:25-29; 9:25-27, 38; 16:17). It seems to be like an endless refrain. Today, however, rather than use the same words all the time, we use *different* words to send out the *same* message and we would say: “Jesus conquered, chained, dominated, destroyed, beat, eliminated, exterminated annihilated and killed the power of evil, Satan who frightens so many people!” What Mark wants to say to us is this: “Christians are not allowed to be afraid of Satan!” By his resurrection and by his liberating action present among us, Jesus chains the fear of Satan and gives birth to freedom of heart, determination in action and hope on the horizon! We must *walk along the Path of Jesus* with the taste of victory over the power of evil!

A Prayer with Psalm 46 (45)

God, revealed in Jesus, is our strength!

God is both refuge and strength for us, a help always ready in trouble; so we shall not be afraid though the earth be in turmoil, though mountains tumble into the depths of the sea, and its waters roar and seethe, and the mountains totter as it heaves.

There is a river whose streams bring joy to God's City, it sanctifies the dwelling of the Most High.

God is in the city, it cannot fall; at break of day God comes to its rescue. Nations are in uproar, kingdoms are tumbling, when he raises his voice the earth crumbles away.



Yahweh Sabaoth is with us, our citadel, the God of Jacob.

Come, consider the wonders of Yahweh, the astounding deeds he has done on the earth; he puts an end to wars over the whole wide world, he breaks the bow, he snaps the spear, shields he burns in the fire.

“Be still and acknowledge that I am God, supreme over nations, supreme over the world.” Yahweh Sabaoth is with us, our citadel, the God of Jacob.

Concluding 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.

