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# Lectio Divina

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# Tuesday, February 1, 2022

*Ordinary Time*

## Opening Prayer

Lord our God, help us to love You with all our hearts and to love all people as You love them.

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 5: 21-43

When Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a large crowd gathered around him, and he stayed close to the sea. One of the synagogue officials, named Jairus, came forward. Seeing him he fell at his feet and pleaded earnestly with him, saying, "My daughter is at the point of death. Please, come lay your hands on her that she may get well and live." He went off with him and a large crowd followed him. There was a woman afflicted with hemorrhages for twelve years. She had suffered greatly at the hands of many doctors and had spent all that she had. Yet she was not helped but only grew worse. She had heard about Jesus and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak. She said, "If I but touch his clothes, I shall be cured." Immediately her flow of blood dried up. She felt in her body that she was healed of her affliction.

Jesus, aware at once that power had gone out from him, turned around in the crowd and asked, "Who has touched my clothes?" But his disciples said to him, "You see how the crowd is pressing upon you, and yet you ask, Who touched me?" And he looked around to see who had done it. The woman, realizing what had happened to her, approached in fear and trembling. She fell before Jesus and told him the whole truth. He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has saved you. Go in peace and be cured of your affliction." While he was still speaking, people from the synagogue official's house arrived and said, "Your daughter has died; why trouble the teacher any longer?"

Disregarding the message that was reported, Jesus said to the synagogue official, "Do not be afraid; just have faith." He did not allow anyone to accompany him inside except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James. When they arrived at the house of the synagogue official, he caught sight of a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. So he went in and said to them, "Why this commotion and weeping? The child is not dead but asleep." And they ridiculed him. Then he put them all out. He took along the child's father and mother and those who were with him and entered the room where the child was. He took the child by the hand and said to her, "*Talitha koum*," which means, "Little girl, I say to you, arise!" The girl, a child of twelve, arose immediately and walked around. At that they were utterly astounded. He gave strict orders that no one should know this and said that she should be given something to eat.

## Reflection

In today's Gospel, we meditate on two miracles which Jesus worked in favor of two women: the first one for a woman who was considered impure because of the hemorrhage which she was suffering from for the past 12 years; the other one for a twelve-year-old girl, who had died a short time before. According to the mentality of the

time, anybody who would touch blood or a corpse was considered impure. Blood and death were factors for exclusion! Because of this, those two women were marginalized people and excluded from participation in the community.

- *The starting point. Jesus arrives in the boat.* The people join Him. Jairus, the head of the synagogue, asks help for his daughter, who is dying. Jesus goes with him and the people accompany Him, pushing on all sides. This is the starting point of the two cases of healing which follow: the cure of the woman and the resurrection of the twelve-year-old girl.
- *The situation of the woman.* Twelve years of suffering from hemorrhage! For this reason, she lived excluded, because at that time blood rendered people impure, and the one who touched them became impure also. Mark says that the woman had spent all she had with doctors. And instead of becoming better, she got worse. A situation without a solution!
- *The attitude of the woman.* She heard people speak about Jesus. Hope sprang up in her. She told herself, "If I can just touch His clothes, I will be saved". The catechism of the time said, "If I touch His cloak, He will become impure". The woman thinks exactly the contrary! This is a sign that women did not agree with all that religious authority taught. The woman gets in through the crowd, in the midst of the people, and without being noticed, she touches Jesus, because everybody was touching Him and pushing Him. At that same moment she noticed in her body that she had been cured.
- *The reaction of Jesus and that of the disciples.* Jesus, aware of the power that had gone out from Him, asked, "Who touched My clothes?" The disciples said to Him, "You see how the crowd is pressing round You; how can You ask, 'Who touched Me?'" So now comes the clash between Jesus and the disciples. Jesus had a sensitivity which the disciples did not perceive. The disciples reacted like everybody else; they did not understand the different reaction of Jesus. But Jesus did not pay attention and continued to investigate.
- *Healing through faith.* The woman became aware that she had been discovered. It was a difficult and dangerous moment for her, because according to the belief of the time, an impure person like herself got in among the people and contaminated everyone who touched her. All would become impure before God (Lev 15: 19-30). For this reason, the punishment could be stoning. But the woman had the courage to accept the consequences of what she had done. The woman "frightened and trembling" fell at Jesus' feet and told Him the whole truth. Jesus has the last word: "My daughter, your faith has restored you to health, go in peace and be free of your complaint."
  - (a) "Daughter", with this word Jesus accepts the woman into the new family, into the community which was gathering together around Him.
  - (b) What she thought through faith became a reality.
  - (c) Jesus acknowledges that, without that woman's faith, He would not have been able to work the miracle.
- *The news of the death of the little girl.* At that moment some people arrived from the house of Jairus to inform him that his daughter had died. It was no longer necessary to disturb Jesus. For them, death was the great barrier. Jesus will not be able to overcome death! Jesus listens, looks at Jairus, and applies what He had just seen, that faith can realize what the person believes. And He says, "Do not be afraid, only have faith!"

- *In Jairus' house.* Jesus allows only three of His disciples to go with Him. Seeing the commotion of the people weeping and wailing because of the death of the child, He said, "The child is not dead; she sleeps!" The people laughed. They know how to distinguish between a person who is sleeping and when the person is dead. It is the same laughter of Abraham and of Sarah, of those who are unable to believe that nothing is impossible for God (Gn 17: 17; 18: 12-14; Lk 1: 37). For them, death was a barrier which nobody could overcome or go beyond! The words of Jesus had a very profound meaning. The situation of the persecuted communities at the time of Mark seemed to be a situation of death. They needed to hear, "She is not dead! You are sleeping! Wake up!" Jesus does not pay attention to the laughter and enters the room where the child is, alone, and with the three disciples and the parents of the child.
- *The resurrection of the child.* Jesus takes the child by the hand and says: "*Talitha kum!*" She rises. There is a great commotion! Jesus keeps calm and asks that they give her something to eat. Two women are cured! One is twelve years old, the other one twelve years of hemorrhage, twelve years of exclusion! The exclusion of the child begins at twelve years of age, because her menstruation begins; she begins to die! Jesus has the greatest power and resurrects: "Get up!"

## Personal Questions

- What is the point in this text which pleased you or struck you the most? Why?
- One of the women was cured and once again integrated so that she could live in the community. A child was raised from her death bed. What does this action of Jesus teach us for our life in the family and for our community today?

## Concluding Prayer

From You comes my praise in the thronged assembly; I will perform my vows before all who fear Him.

The poor will eat and be filled; those who seek Yahweh will praise Him. May your heart live forever. (Ps 22: 25-26)

# Wednesday, February 2, 2022

*The Presentation of the Lord*

## Opening Prayer

O God, our Creator and Father, you willed that your Son, generated before the dawn of the world, should become a member of the human family. Rekindle in us an appreciation for the gift of life, so that parents may participate in the fruitfulness of your love, old people may pass on to young ones their mature wisdom, and children may grow in wisdom, piety and grace, all giving praise to your holy name. Through Christ our Lord.

## Gospel Reading: Luke 2: 22-40

When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought

him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every male that opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord") and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons." Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And inspired by the Spirit he came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the law, he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, "Lord, now let thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation which thou hast prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to thy people Israel."

And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him; and Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is spoken against (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed."

And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher; she was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years from her virginity, and as a widow till she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day. And coming up at that very hour she gave thanks to God and spoke of him to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

And when they had performed everything according to the law of the Lord, they returned in Galilee, to their own city, Nazareth. And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.

## A Moment of Prayerful Silence

*- that the Word of God may dwell in us and that we may allow it to enlighten our lives;  
- that before we pass any comments, the very light of the Word may shine and dominate with the mystery of the living presence of the Lord.*

## Some Questions

*to help us in our personal reflection.*

- Why should Jesus, Son of the Most High, and his mother Mary, conceived without sin, obey the prescriptions of Moses? Maybe because Mary was not yet aware of her innocence and holiness?
- Is there special significance in the words and attitudes of Simeon and the prophetess Anna? Do not their actions and joy perhaps recall the style of the ancient prophets?
- How can we explain this "sword" that pierces: is it a rending of the consciences before the challenges and richness of Jesus? Or is it only the inner pains of the Mother?
- Can this scene mean anything to parents today: for the religious formation of their children; for the plan that God has for each of their children; for the fears and sufferings that parents carry in their hearts when they think of the time when their children grow up?

## A Key to the Reading

for those who wish go deeper into the text.

- As laid down in the law of Moses/of the Lord. This is a kind of refrain repeated several times. Luke mixes two prescriptions without making any distinction. The purification of the mother was foreseen in Leviticus (12: 2-8) and was to take place forty days after the birth. Until then, the woman could not approach sacred places, and the ceremony was accompanied by the gift of a small animal. But the consecration of the first-born was prescribed in Exodus 13: 11-16 and was considered a kind of "ransom" in memory of the saving action of God when he liberated the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. For this also the offering was a small animal. In this scene, the parents seem to be in the process of presenting/offering their son as was done with sacrifices and Levites, while through the persons of Simeon and Anna it seems rather God who offers/presents the son for the salvation of people.
- Simeon and Anna: these are figures full of symbolical value. Their role is one of recognition, that comes from both the enlightenment and action of the Spirit and a life lived in expectation and faith. Simeon especially is defined as *prodekòmenos*, that is, one entirely absorbed in waiting, and one who goes forward to welcome. He, too, appears to be obedient to the law, the law of the Spirit, who leads him towards the child in the temple. The canticle he proclaims manifests his *pro-existentia*, he has lived to come to this moment and now he withdraws so that others may see the light and the salvation to come for Israel and the pagans. Anna completes the picture, by her very age (symbolical value: 84 equals 7x12, the twelve tribes of Israel; or  $84 - 7 = 77$ , double perfection), but above all by her way of living (fasting and praying) and by her proclamation to all who "looked forward". She is led by the Spirit of prophecy, docile and purified in her heart. Besides, she belongs to the smallest of the tribes, that of Aser, a sign that the small and fragile are those more disposed to recognize Jesus, the Savior. Both old persons – who look like an original couple – are symbols of the best of Judaism, of faithful and meek Jerusalem, that awaits and rejoices and that from now on allows the new light to shine.
- A sword will pierce: generally, these words are interpreted as meaning that Mary will suffer, a drama made visible of the Our Lady of Sorrows. Rather, we need to see the Mother as a symbol of Israel. Simeon feels the drama of his people who will be deeply torn by the living and sharp word of the redeemer (cf Lk 12: 51-53). Mary represents the path: she must trust, but will go through times of pain and darkness, struggles and painful silences. The story of the suffering Messiah will be painful for all, even for the Mother. One does not follow the new light of the whole world without paying the cost, without being provoked to make risky choices, without being always born again from on high and in newness. But these images of the "sword that pierces", of the child who will "trip" and shake hearts from their lethargy, are not to be separated from the meaningful action of the two old persons: the one, Simeon, takes the child in his arms to show that faith is a meeting and an embrace, not an idea of theorem; the other, Anna, takes on the role of proclaiming and enkindles a bright light in the hearts of all who "looked forward" to him.
- Daily life, an epiphany of God: finally, it is interesting to note that the whole episode emphasizes the situation of the most simple and homely: the young couple with the child in their arms; the old man who rejoices and embraces, the old lady who prays and proclaims, those listening who appear to be indirectly involved. At the end of the passage, we also get a glimpse of the village of Nazareth, of the growth of the child in a normal context, the impression of a child extraordinarily gifted with wisdom and goodness. The theme of wisdom woven into the fabric of normal life and growth in

a village context, leaves the story as if in suspense, and it will be taken up again precisely with the theme of the wisdom of the boy among the doctors in the temple. Indeed, this is the episode that follows immediately (Lk 2: 41-52).

## Psalm 122

I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go to the house of the Lord!"

Our feet have been standing within your gates, O Jerusalem!

Jerusalem, built as a city which is bound firmly together, to which the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord,

as was decreed for Israel,

to give thanks to the name of the Lord.

There thrones for judgment were set, the thrones of the house of David.

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem! "May they prosper who love you! Peace be within your walls,

and security within your towers!"

For my brethren and companions' sake I will say, "Peace be within you!"

For the sake of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek your good.

## Final Prayer

Father, we praise you and we bless you because through your Son, born of woman by the working of the Holy Spirit, born under the law, has ransomed us from the law and you have filled our life with light and new hope. May our families welcome and remain faithful to your designs, may they help and sustain in their children the new dreams and enthusiasm, wrap them in tenderness when they are fragile, educate them in love for you and for all creatures. All honor and glory to you, Father.

# Thursday, February 3, 2022

*Ordinary Time*

## Opening Prayer

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

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

## Gospel Reading - Mark 6: 7-13

Jesus summoned the Twelve and began to send them out in pairs, giving them authority over unclean spirits. And he instructed them to take nothing for the journey except a staff -- no bread, no haversack, no coppers for their purses. They were to wear sandals but, he added, 'Don't take a spare tunic.' And he said to them, 'If you enter a house anywhere, stay there until you leave the district. And if any place does not welcome you and people refuse to listen to you, as you walk away shake off the dust under your feet

as evidence to them.' So they set off to proclaim repentance; and they cast out many devils, and anointed many sick people with oil and cured them.

## Reflection

Today's Gospel continues what we have already seen in the Gospel yesterday. The passage through Nazareth was painful for Jesus. He was rejected by his own people (Mk 6: 1-5). The community which before had been his community, now, it is no longer such. Something has changed. Beginning at that moment, as today's Gospel says, Jesus began to go round the villages of Galilee to announce the Good News (Mk 6: 6) and to send the Twelve on mission. In the years 70's, the time when Mark wrote his Gospel, the Christian communities lived in a difficult situation, without any horizon. Humanly speaking, there was no future for them. In the year 64, Nero began to persecute the Christians. In the year 65, the revolt or uprising of the Jews in Palestine against Rome broke out. In the year 70, Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans. Therefore, the description of the sending out of the disciples, after the conflict in Nazareth, was a source of light and of courage for the Christians.

- Mark 6: 7. The objective of the Mission. The conflict grew and closely affected Jesus. How does he react? In two ways:
  - Before the mental obstinacy of the people of his community, Jesus leaves Nazareth and began to go round the neighboring villages (Mk 6: 6).
  - He extends the mission and intensifies the announcement of the Good News calling other persons to involve them in the mission. "He summoned the Twelve, and began to send them out in pairs, giving them authority over unclean spirits". The objective of the mission is simple and profound. The disciples participate in the mission of Jesus. They cannot go alone, they must go in pairs, two by two, because two persons represent the community better than one alone and they can mutually help one another. They receive authority over unclean spirits, that is, they must be a help for others in suffering and, through purification, and they must open the door for direct access to God.
- Mark 6: 8-11. The attitudes which they should have in the Mission. The recommendations are simple: "And he instructed them to take nothing for the journey except a staff; no bread, no haversack, no coppers for their purses; they were to wear sandals and not to take a spare tunic. And he told them: If you enter a house anywhere, stay there until you leave the district. And if any place does not welcome you and people refuse to listen to you, as you walk away, shake off the dust under your feet, as evidence to them." So they set off. It is the beginning of a new stage. Now, not only Jesus, but the whole group will announce the Good News of God to the people. If the preaching of Jesus caused conflict, much more now, there will be conflict with the preaching of the whole group. If the mystery was already great, now it will be greater since the mission has been intensified.
- Mark 6: 12-13. The result of the mission. "So they set off to proclaim repentance, and they cast out many devils, and anointed many sick people with oil and cured them." To announce the Good News, produces conversion or a change in persons, it alleviates persons in their suffering; it cures illnesses and casts out devils.

The sending out of the disciples on Mission. At the time of Jesus there were several other movements of renewal. For example, the Essenes and the Pharisees. They also sought a new way of living in community and they had their own missionaries (cf. Mt 23: 15). But these, when they went on mission, they had prejudices. They took with them a haversack and money to take care of their own meals, because they did not trust the

food that people would give them, which was not always ritually “pure.” On the contrary to other missionaries, the disciples of Jesus received diverse recommendations which helped to understand the fundamental points of the mission of announcing the Good News, which they received from Jesus and which is also our mission:

- They should go without taking anything. They should take nothing, no haversack, no money, no staff, no bread, no sandals, not two tunics. That meant that Jesus obliged them to trust in hospitality. Because one who goes without taking anything, goes because he trusts people and thinks that he will be well received. With this attitude they criticized the laws of exclusion, taught by the official religion, and showed, by means of the new practice, that they in the community had other criteria.
- They should eat what people ate or what the people gave them. They could not live separated providing their own food, but they should accept to sit at the same table (Lk 10: 8). This means that in contact with the people, they should not be afraid of losing the purity as it was taught at that time. With this attitude they criticized the laws of purity which were in force and showed, by means of the new practice, that they had another type of access to purity, that is, intimacy with God.
- They should remain in the first house that welcomed them. They should live together in a stable way and not go from house to house. They should work like everybody else and live from what they received in exchange, “because the laborer deserves his wages” (Lk 10: 7). In other words, they should participate in the life and in the work of the people, and the people would have accepted them in the community and would have shared the food with them. This means that they had to have trust in sharing.
- They should take care of the sick, cure the lepers and cast out devils (Lk 10: 9; Mc 6: 7, 13; Mt 10: 8). They had to carry out the function of “Defender” (*goé!*) and accept within the clan, in the community, those who were excluded. With this attitude they criticized the situation of disintegration of the community life of the clan and they aimed at concrete ways of getting out. These were the four fundamental points which had to give impulse to the attitude of the missionaries who announced the Good News of God, in the name of Jesus: hospitality, communion, sharing and acceptance of the excluded (defender, *goé!*). If these four requirements were respected, they could and should cry out to the four ends of the world: “The Kingdom of God has come!” (cf. Lk 10: 1-12; 9: 1-6; Mk 6: 7-13; Mt 10: 6-16). Because the Kingdom of God revealed by Jesus is not a doctrine, nor a catechism, nor a law. The Kingdom of God comes and becomes present when persons, motivated by their faith in Jesus, decide to live in community to give witness and to manifest to all that God is Father and Mother and that, therefore, we human beings are brothers and sisters among us. Jesus wanted that the local community would again be an expression of the Covenant, of the Kingdom, of the love of God the Father, who makes all of us brothers and sisters.

## Personal Questions

- Do you participate in the mission as a disciple of Jesus?
- Which point of the mission of the apostles is more important for us today? Why?

## Concluding Prayer

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

## Friday, February 4, 2022

*Ordinary Time*

### Opening Prayer

Lord our God,

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

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

### Gospel Reading - Mark 6: 14-29

King Herod had heard about him, since by now his name was well known. Some were saying, 'John the Baptist has risen from the dead, and that is why miraculous powers are at work in him.' Others said, 'He is Elijah,' others again, 'He is a prophet, like the prophets we used to have.' But when Herod heard this, he said, 'It is John whose head I cut off; he has risen from the dead.'

Now it was this same Herod who had sent to have John arrested and had had him chained up in prison because of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife whom he had married. For John had told Herod, 'It is against the law for you to have your brother's wife.'

As for Herodias, she was furious with him and wanted to kill him, but she was not able to do so, because Herod was in awe of John, knowing him to be a good and upright man, and gave him his protection. When he had heard him speak, he was greatly perplexed, and yet he liked to listen to him.

An opportunity came on Herod's birthday when he gave a banquet for the nobles of his court, for his army officers and for the leading figures in Galilee. When the daughter of this same Herodias came in and danced, she delighted Herod and his guests; so, the king said to the girl, 'Ask me anything you like and I will give it you.' And he swore her an oath, 'I will give you anything you ask, even half my kingdom.'

She went out and said to her mother, 'What shall I ask for?' She replied, 'The head of John the Baptist.' The girl at once rushed back to the king and made her request, 'I want you to give me John the Baptist's head, immediately, on a dish.'

The king was deeply distressed but, thinking of the oaths he had sworn and of his guests, he was reluctant to break his word to her. At once the king sent one of the bodyguards with orders to bring John's head.

The man went off and beheaded him in the prison; then he brought the head on a dish and gave it to the girl, and the girl gave it to her mother.

When John's disciples heard about this, they came and took his body and laid it in a tomb.

### Reflection

The Gospel today describes how John the Baptist was victim of the corruption and of the

arrogance of the government of Herod. He died without being judged by a tribunal, during a banquet given by Herod with the great men of the kingdom. The text gives much information about the time of the life of Jesus and on the way in which the powerful of the time exercised power. From the beginning of the Gospel of Mark we perceive or see a situation of suspense. He had said: "After John had been arrested, Jesus went into Galilee proclaiming the Gospel of God!" (Mk 1: 14). In today's Gospel, almost suddenly, we know that Herod had already killed John the Baptist. Therefore, the reader asks himself: "What will he do now with Jesus? Will he suffer the same destiny? Rather than drawing up a balance of the opinions of the people and of Herod on Jesus, Mark asks another question: "Who is Jesus?" This last question grows throughout the Gospel until it receives the definitive response from the centurion at the foot of the Cross: "Truly, this man was the Son of God!" (Mk 15: 39)

- Mark 6: 14-16. Who is Jesus? The text begins with a balance on the opinions of the people and of Herod on Jesus. Some associated Jesus to John the Baptist and to Elijah. Others identified him with a Prophet, that is, with someone who spoke in the name of God, who had the courage to denounce the injustices of the powerful and who knew how to animate the hope of the little ones. Persons tried to understand Jesus starting from the things that they themselves knew, believed, and hoped. They tried to make him fit into familiar criteria of the Old Testament with its prophecies and its hopes, and of the Tradition of the Ancient, with their laws. But these criteria were not sufficient. Jesus could not fit in those criteria. He was much greater!
- Mark 6: 17-20. The cause for the killing of John. Galilee, the land of Jesus, was governed by Herod Antipas, the son of King Herod, the Great, from the year 4 BC up to the year 39 after Christ. In all, 43 years! During the whole lifetime of Jesus, there had been no changes in the government of Galilee! Herod Antipas was the absolute Lord of everything; he listened to no one and did whatever he pleased! But the one, who really commanded in Palestine, from the year 63 BC, was the Roman Empire. Herod, in order not to be removed from office, tried to please Rome in everything. He insisted above all, in an efficient administration which would provide income for the Roman Empire. The only thing that concerned or worried him was his security and promotion. Therefore, he repressed any type of subversion. Flavio Giuseppe, a writer of that time, says that the reason for the imprisonment of John the Baptist was the fear that Herod had of a popular revolt. Herod liked to be called benefactor of the people, but in reality, he was a tyrant (Lk 22: 25). The denouncement of John against him (Mk 6: 18), was the drop which filled up the cup, and John was thrown into prison.
- Mark 6, 21-29: The plot of the murdering. The anniversary and the banquet of the feast, with dancing and orgies! This was an environment in which the alliances were plotted. To the feast attended and were present "the great of the court, the officials and important persons from Galilee". In this environment the murdering of John the Baptist was plotted. John, the prophet, was a living denouncement in this corrupt system. This is why he was eliminated under the pretext of a problem of personal vengeance. All this reveals the moral weakness of Herod. So much power accumulated in the hands of a man who did not control himself!

Under the enthusiasm of the feast and of the wine, Herod swore lightly to give something to the young dancer. And superstitious as he was, he thought that he had to maintain his oath. For Herod, the life of his subjects counted nothing had no value. He used them as he wanted and decided what to do with them just as he decided where to place the chairs in his house. Mark gives an account of how things happened and lets the community draw the conclusions.

## Personal Questions

- Do you know the case of persons who have died victims of corruption and of the dominion of the powerful? And do you know persons in our community and in our Church victims of authoritarianism and of an excess of power?
- Herod, the powerful who thought to be the owner of life and death of the people, was a great superstitious person, and feared John the Baptist. He was a coward before the great, a corrupt man before the girl. Superstition, cowardice, and corruption distinguished the exercise of the power of Herod. Compare this with the religious and civil power today in the various levels of society and of the Church.

## Concluding Prayer

This God, his way is blameless;  
the word of Yahweh is refined in the furnace,  
for he alone is the shield of all who take refuge in him. (Ps 18: 30)

# Saturday, February 5, 2022

*Ordinary Time*

## Opening Prayer

Lord our God, help us to love you with all our hearts and to love all men as you love them. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

## Gospel Reading - Mark 6: 30-34

The apostles rejoined Jesus and told him all they had done and taught.

And he said to them, 'Come away to some lonely place all by yourselves and rest for a while'; for there were so many coming and going that there was no time for them even to eat.

So they went off in the boat to a lonely place where they could be by themselves.

But people saw them going, and many recognized them; and from every town they all hurried to the place on foot and reached it before them.

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

## Reflection

The Gospel today is in great contrast with that of yesterday. On one side, the banquet of death, wanted by Herod with the great of his kingdom in the Palace of the Capital, during which John the Baptist was murdered, (Mk 6: 17-29); on the other side, the banquet of life promoted by Jesus with the hungry people of Galilee, in the desert (Mk 6: 30-44). The Gospel today presents only the introduction of the multiplication of the

loaves and describes the teaching of Jesus.

- Mark 6: 30-32. The welcome given to the disciples. "At that time, the Apostles rejoined Jesus and told him all they had done and taught. And he said to them: "Come away to some lonely place all by yourselves and rest for a while." These verses show how Jesus formed his disciples. He was not concerned only about the content of the preaching, but also of rest for the disciples. He invited them to go to a lonely place to be able to rest and review what they had done.
- Mark 6: 33-34. The welcome given to the people. The people perceive that Jesus had gone to the other side of the lake, and they followed him trying to go to him by foot, to the other shore. "So as he stepped ashore he saw a large crowd, and he took pity on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd and he set himself to teach them at some length." Seeing that crowd Jesus was sad, "because they were like sheep without a shepherd." He forgets his rest and begins to teach them. In becoming aware that the people have no shepherd, Jesus began to be their shepherd. He begins to teach them. As the Psalm says: "The Lord 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" (Ps 23: 1, 3-5). Jesus wanted to rest together with his disciples, but the desire to respond to the needs of the people impels him to leave rest aside. Something similar happens when he meets the Samaritan woman. The disciples went to get some food. When they returned, they said to Jesus: "Master, eat something!" (Jn 4: 31), but he answers: "I have food to eat that you do not know about" (Jn 4: 32). The desire to respond to the needs of the Samaritan people leads him to forget his hunger. "My food is to do the will of the one who sent me and to complete his work" (Jn 6: 34). The first thing is to respond to the people who look for him. Then he can eat.
- Then Jesus began to teach them many things. The Gospel of Mark tells us many things that Jesus taught. The people were impressed: "A new teaching! He taught them with authority! It was unlike that of the Scribes!" (Mk 1: 22, 27). Teaching was what Jesus did the most (Mk 2: 13; 4: 1-2; 6: 34). This is what he usually did (Mk 10: 1). For other fifteen times Mark says that Jesus taught. Was it perhaps because Mark was not interested in the content? It depends on what people understand when they speak about content! To teach is not only a question of teaching new truths to say something. The content which Jesus gave did not only appear in his words, but also in his gestures and in his way of relating with persons. The content is never separated from the person who communicates it. Jesus was a welcoming person (Mk 6: 34). He wanted the good of the people. The goodness and the love which came from his words formed part of the content. They were his temperament. A good content, without goodness and kindness would be like milk poured on the floor. This new way which Jesus had of teaching manifested itself in a thousand ways. Jesus accepts as disciples not only men, but also women. He does not only teach in the synagogue, but also in any place where there were people to listen to him: in the synagogue, in the house, on the shore, on the mountain, on the plain, in the boat, in the desert. It was not the relationship of pupil-teacher, but of disciple to Master. The professor teaches and the pupil is with him during the time of the class. The Master gives witness and the disciple lives with him 24 hours a day. It is more difficult to be a Master than a teacher! We are not pupils of Jesus, we are his disciples! The teaching of Jesus was a communication that came from the

abundance of his Heart in the most varied forms: like a conversation by which he tries to clarify the facts (Mk 9: 9-13), like a comparison or parable that invites people to think and to participate (Mk 4: 33), like an explanation of what he himself thought and did (Mk 7: 17-23), like a discussion which does not necessarily avoid polemics (Mk 2: 6-12), like a criticism that denounces what is false and mistaken (Mk 1: 38-40). It was always a witness of what he himself lived, an expression of his love! (Mt 11: 28-30).

## Personal Questions

- What do you do when you want to teach others something about your faith and of your religion? Do you imitate Jesus?
- Jesus is concerned not only about the content, but also about rest. How was the teaching of religion that you received as a child? Did the catechists imitate Jesus?

## Concluding Prayer

How can a young man keep his way spotless? By keeping your words.

With all my heart I seek you,

do not let me stray from your commandments. (Ps 119: 9-10)

# Sunday, February 6, 2022

*Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time*

## Opening Prayer

Father, now your Word has come! It has appeared like the sun after a dark night, empty and solitary. When your Word is not present, it is always thus, I know. Grant me the soft breeze from the sea of your Holy Spirit and may it gather me, walk with me towards Christ, your living Word to whom I wish to listen. I shall not move from this shore, where he teaches and speaks, but I shall stay here until such time as he takes me with him. Then I shall follow him wherever he takes me.

## Gospel Reading

- Placing the passage in its context:

This passage, full of great theological intensity, comes at the center of a journey of faith and of meeting with the Lord Jesus, who leads us from deafness to being able to hear, from the most paralyzing sickness to the saving healing that makes us capable of helping our brothers and sisters to be reborn with us. Jesus has begun his preaching in the synagogue of Nazareth, giving sense and light to the words in the scroll of the Torah (4: 16 ss.). He has defeated sin (4: 31-37) and sickness (4: 38-41), driving them away from the heart of human beings and he has announced the mysterious force that sent him to us and by which he moves, running like a giant who reaches every corner of the earth. It is at this point that we hear the answer that is the beginning of what follows, that is, the obedience of faith. It is at this point that the Church and a new people are born, those able to hear and respond with a yes.

- To help us with the reading of the passage:
  - vv. 1-3: Jesus is on the shore of lake Genesareth and before him is a large crowd of people, eager to listen to the Word of God. He goes into a boat and pushes off a little. As teacher and guide, he sits on the waters and rules them, and from there he offers salvation to those who listen to and welcome the Word of God
  - vv. 4-6: Jesus invites some to go fishing and Peter trusts him, believes in the Word of the Master. In faith he launches into the deep and casts his nets. Because of his faith, the catch is over-abundant, it is miraculous.
  - v.7: Meeting Jesus is never a closed matter. The meeting always leads to communication, sharing. Indeed, the gift is too great and cannot be held by one person. Peter calls his mates in another boat and the gift is doubled and grows continually.
  - Vv. 8-11: Peter kneels before Jesus, adores him and recognizes his sinfulness, his nothingness, but Jesus calls him with the same authority that made so many seas obey him throughout Scripture: "Fear not!" God reveals himself and becomes the companion of men and women. Peter accepts the mission of delivering men and women, his brothers and sisters, from the waters of the world and of sin, just as he was delivered. He leaves his boat, his nets, the fish and follows Jesus, he and his mates.
- The Gospel Text:

<sup>1</sup>While the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God, he was standing by the lake of Gennesareth. <sup>2</sup>And he saw two boats by the lake; but the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. <sup>3</sup>Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon's, he asked him to put out a little from the land. And he sat down and taught the people from the boat. <sup>4</sup>And when he had ceased speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." <sup>5</sup>And Simon answered, "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing; but at your word I will let down the nets." <sup>6</sup>And when they had done this, they enclosed a great shoal of fish; and as their nets were breaking, <sup>7</sup>they beckoned to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. <sup>8</sup>But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." <sup>9</sup>For he was astonished, and all that were with him, at the catch of fish which they had taken; <sup>10</sup>and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; henceforth you will be catching men." <sup>11</sup>And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.

## A Moment of Prayerful Silence

During this time of silence and solitude accorded to me so that I can stay with Him, I go away from the shore a little way, take to the deep and, trusting in the Lord, I cast the net into the deep and I wait...

## Some Questions

- "*He sat down and taught the people from the boat.*" Jesus comes down, sits and takes up his abode among us, he bends down even to touching our earth and from this smallness he offers us his teaching, his Word of salvation. Jesus offers me time, space, full availability to meet him and know him, but do I know how

to pause, to stay, to take root in Him and before Him?

- *“He asked him to put out a little from the land.”* The Lord’s request is gradual, in fact, after this first putting out from the land, He asks him to launch into the deep. “Put out into the deep!”: an invitation addressed to every man and woman. Do I have faith, trust, and confidence in him to let go of my concerns? Do I look at myself sincerely and seriously? Where do the treasures of my life lie?
- *“I will let down the nets”.* Peter gives us a brilliant example of faith in the Word of Jesus. In this passage, the verb “let down” occurs twice: the first time it refers to the nets and the second to the person of Peter. The significance is clear: before the Lord we can let down our whole being. We let down, but He gathers, always and with an absolute and infallible faithfulness. Do I feel like taking my life, n is, and letting it down at the feet of Jesus, in Him, so that He, once more, may gather me, heal and save me, making of me a new person?
- *“They beckoned to their partners in the other boat.”* Again, Peter becomes a guide on my journey and shows me how to be open to others, to share, because it is not possible to remain isolated and closed in the Church. We are all sent: *“Go to my brethren and say to them”* (Jn 20: 17). Am I able to bring my boat close to that of others? Am I able to share with my brothers and sisters the gifts and riches the Lord has given me to hold in trust?

## A Key to the Reading

- The sea and the theme of the exodus:

Jesus is standing by the seashore. He stands above the dark, menacing, and unknown tides of the sea and of life. He stands before this crowd of people gathered, ready to listen to him and ready for the journey, He who is the good shepherd with the staff of his Word. He wishes to take us across the seas and oceans of this world on a journey of salvation that brings us before Him, as had already happened at the Red Sea (Ex 14: 21-23) and on the banks of the Jordan (Jn 3: 14-17). Even the sea of sand in the desert is overcome by the power of his Word and opens up, becoming a garden, a level and passable road (Is 43: 16-21) for those who decide to go on the return journey to God and allow themselves to be guided by Him. In these few verses of the Gospel, the Lord once more prepares for us the great miracle of the exodus, of the coming out of the darkness of death through the saving crossing to the green pastures of friendship with Him and the listening to his voice. All is ready: our name has been called with infinite love by the good shepherd, who knows us from all eternity and who guides us for all eternity, never allowing us to fall from his hand.

- Listening in faith that leads to obedience:

This passage from Luke is the second concerning the glorious journey that the Lord Jesus presents to us. The crowd gathers closely around Jesus, urged by the intimate desire to “hear the Word of God”; this is the answer to the constant invitation of the Father, which we find throughout the Scriptures: “Hear, O Israel!” (Dt 6: 4) e “If only my people would hear me!” (Ps 80: 14). It is as if the crowd were saying: “Yes, I will hear what God proclaims, the Lord” (Ps 85: 9). But the kind of hearing that is mentioned and suggested is complete, not superficial; it is alive and life-giving, not dead; it is the hearing of faith, not of incredulity and of hardness of heart. It is the hearing that says: “Yes, Lord, at your word I will let down my nets.” The call addressed to us just now is the call to faith, to trust in him and in every word that comes from his lips, certain that whatever he says will come true. As God said to Abraham: “Is

anything too wonderful for the Lord?” (Gen 18: 14) or to Jeremiah: “Is anything impossible to me?” (Jer 32: 27); cfr. also Zac 8: 6. Or as it was said to Mary: “Nothing is impossible for God” (Lk 1: 37) and she replied: “Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done to me according to your word”. That is the point we must reach, like Mary, like Peter. We cannot be just hearers, otherwise we would be deceiving ourselves, as James says (1: 19-25); we would continue to be deceived by forgetfulness and we would be lost. The Word must be realized, put into practice, fulfilled. Great is the ruin of the one who hears the Word but does not put it into practice; we must dig deep and lay foundations on the rock, that is, faith in practice (cfr. Lk 6: 46-49).

- Fishing as the mission of the Church:

Fidelity to hearing and the faith leads to mission, that is, to enter into that society that Jesus instituted for the spreading of the kingdom. It seems that Luke, in this passage, wishes to present the Church living the post-paschal experience of the encounter with the risen Jesus. We note, in fact, the many allusions to the passage in Jn 21: 1-8. Jesus chooses a boat and chooses Peter and, from the boat, he calls men and women, sons and daughters, to carry on his mission. We note that the verb “put out into the deep” is in the singular, referring to Peter who is given the task of guide, but the act of fishing is in the plural: “let down your nets”, referring to all those who wish to adhere to and participate in the mission. This one mission and common task of all is beautiful and sparkling, it is joyful! It is the apostolic mission, which begins now, in obedience to the Word of the Lord and that will reach the deep, even to the ends of the earth (cfr. Mt 28: 19; Acts 1: 8; Mk 16: 15; 13: 10; Lk 24: 45-48).

It is interesting to note the word that Luke uses to point out the mission given by Jesus to Peter, and to all of us, when he says: “Do not be afraid, henceforth you shall catch men”. Here we do not come across the term found in Mt 4: 18 ff., and in Mk 1: 16 or even in this passage in v. 2, which is simply fishing; here we find a new word, which appears only twice in the whole of the New Testament, and which derives from the verb “to capture,” in the sense of “taking alive and keeping alive”. Indeed, the fishing people of the Lord, let down their nets into the sea of the world to offer to people Life, to tear them from the abyss and make them come back to true life. Peter and the others, we and our sailing partners in this world, can continue, if we wish, wherever we are, his wonderful mission as sent by the Father “to save what was lost” (Lk 19: 10).

## A Time of Prayer: Psalm 66

**A hymn of praise to the Lord, who has opened our hearts to faith.**

Rit. My strength and my song is the Lord; he has saved me!  
Make a joyful noise to God, all the earth; sing the glory of his name;  
give to him glorious praise!  
Say to God, "How terrible are your deeds!  
All the earth worships you; they sing praises to you, sing praises to your name.  
Come and see what God has done:  
he is terrible in his deeds among men. He turned the sea into dry land;  
men passed through the river on foot. There did we rejoice in him.  
Bless our God, O peoples,

let the sound of his praise be heard, who has kept us among the living, and has not let our feet slip.

For you, O God, have tested us; You have tried us as silver is tried. You brought us into the net;

we went through fire and through water;

yet you have brought us forth to a spacious place. Come and hear, all you who fear God,

and I will tell what he has done for me. I cried aloud to him,

and he was extolled with my tongue. But truly God has listened;

he has given heed to the voice of my prayer. Blessed be God,

because he has not rejected my prayer or removed his steadfast love from me!

## Closing Prayer

Lord, you opened the sea and came to me; you split the night and began a new day in my life! You spoke your Word to me and touched my heart; you made me go with you into the boat and brought me to the deep. Lord, you have done great things! I praise you, I bless you and thank you, in your Word, in your Son Jesus and in the Holy Spirit. Always take me into the deep with you, in you and you in me, so that I may let down many nets of love, friendship, sharing and seeking your face and your kingdom here on earth. Lord, I am a sinner, I know! But for this too I thank you, because you did not come to call the just but sinners and I hear your voice and follow you. Behold, Father, I leave everything and come with you...

# Monday, February 7, 2022

*Ordinary Time*

## Opening Prayer

Father,

watch over your family

and keep us safe in your care, for all our hope is in you.

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: 53-56

Having made the crossing, Jesus and his disciples came to land at Gennesaret and moored there.

When they disembarked people at once recognized him and started hurrying all through the countryside and brought the sick on stretchers to wherever they heard he was.

And wherever he went, to village or town or farm, they laid down the sick in the open spaces, begging him to let them touch even the fringe of his cloak. And all those who touched him were saved.

## Reflection

The text of today's Gospel is the final part of the whole passage of Mark 6: 45-56 which presents three different themes: a) Jesus goes to the mountain alone to pray (Mk 6: 45-46). b) Immediately after, he walks on the water, goes toward the disciples who are struggling against the waves of the sea (Mk 6: 47-52). c) Now, in today's Gospel, when they were already on the shore, the people look for Jesus so that he can cure their sick (Mk 6: 53-56).

- Mark 6: 53-56. The search of the people. "At that time, Jesus and his disciples having made the crossing, they came to land at Gennesaret. When they disembarked, the people at once recognized him." The people were numerous looking for Jesus. They came from all parts, bringing their sick. The enthusiasm of the people who look for Jesus and recognizing him follow him is surprising. What impels people to search for Jesus is not only the desire to encounter him, to be with him, but rather the desire to be cured of the sicknesses. "And hurrying all through the countryside they brought the sick on stretchers to wherever they heard he went."
- And wherever he went to village or town or farm, they laid down the sick in the open spaces, begging him to let them touch even the fringe of his cloak, and all those who touched him were saved". The Gospel of Matthew comments and enlightens this fact quoting the figure of the Servant of Yahweh, of whom Isaiah says: "Yet ours were the sufferings he was bearing, ours the sorrows he was carrying." (Is 53: 4 and Mt 8: 16-17)
- To teach and to cure, to cure and to teach. Right from the beginning of his apostolic activity, Jesus goes through all the villages of Galilee, to speak to the people about the imminent coming of the Kingdom of God (Mk 1: 14-15). There, wherever he finds people to listen to him, he speaks and transmits the Good News of God, he accepts the sick, in all places: in the Synagogues during the celebration of the Word, on Saturday (Mk 1: 21; 3: 1; 6: 2); in the informal meetings in the house of friends (Mk 2: 1, 15; 7: 17; 9: 28; 10: 10); walking on the street with the disciples (Mk 2: 23); along the beach, sitting in a boat (Mk 4: 1); in the desert where he took refuge and where people looked for him (Mk 1: 45; 6: 32-34); on the mountain from where he proclaimed the Beatitudes (Mt 5: 1); in the squares of the villages and of the cities, where the people took their sick (Mk 6: 55-56); in the Temple of Jerusalem, on the occasion of pilgrimages, every day without fear (Mk 14: 49)! To cure and to teach, to teach and to cure that is what Jesus did the most (Mk 2: 13; 4: 1-2; 6: 34). This is what he used to do (Mk 10: 1). The people were amazed (Mk 12: 37; 1: 22, 27; 11: 18) and they looked for him, as a crowd.
- In the origin of this great enthusiasm of the people was, on the one hand, the person of Jesus who called and attracted and, on the other side, the abandonment in which people lived, they were like sheep without a shepherd (cf. Mk 6: 34). In Jesus, everything was revelation of what impelled him from within! He not only spoke of God, but he also revealed him. He communicated something of what he himself lived and experienced. He not only announced the Good News. He himself was a proof, a living witness of the Kingdom. In him was manifested what happens when a human being allows God to reign in his life. What has value, what is important, is not only the words, but also and above all the witness, the concrete gesture. This is the Good News which attracts!

## Personal Questions

- The enthusiasm of the people of Jesus, looking for the sense of life and a solution for their ills. Where does this exist today? Does it exist in you, does it exist in others?
- What attracts is the loving attitude of Jesus toward the poor and the abandoned. And I, how do I deal with the persons excluded by society?

## Concluding Prayer

How countless are your works, Yahweh, all of them made so wisely!

The earth is full of your creatures. Bless Yahweh, my soul. (Ps 104: 24.35)

# Tuesday, February 8, 2022

*Ordinary Time*

## Opening Prayer

Father, watch over your family and keep us safe in your care, for all our hope is in you.

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 7: 1-13

The Pharisees and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered round Jesus, and they noticed that some of his disciples were eating with unclean hands, that is, without washing them. For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, keep the tradition of the elders and never eat without washing their arms as far as the elbow; and on returning from the marketplace, they never eat without first sprinkling themselves. There are also many other observances which have been handed down to them to keep, concerning the washing of cups and pots and bronze dishes. So the Pharisees and scribes asked him, 'Why do your disciples not respect the tradition of the elders but eat their food with unclean hands?'

He answered, 'How rightly Isaiah prophesied about you hypocrites in the passage of scripture: This people honor me only with lip-service, while their hearts are far from me. Their reverence of me is worthless; the lessons they teach are nothing but human commandments. You put aside the commandment of God to observe human traditions.' And he said to them, 'How ingeniously you get round the commandment of God to preserve your own tradition! For Moses said: Honor your father and your mother, and anyone who curses father or mother must be put to death. But you say, "If a man says to his father or mother: Anything I have that I might have used to help you is *Korban* (that is, dedicated to God)," then he is forbidden from that moment to do anything for his father or mother. In this way you make God's word ineffective for the sake of your tradition which you have handed down. And you do many other things like this.'

## Reflection

The Gospel today speaks about the religious traditions of that time and of the Pharisees who taught this tradition to the people. For example, to eat without washing the hands, as they said, to eat with impure hands. Many of these traditions were separated from life and had lost their significance. But even if this was the state of things, these were

traditions kept and taught, either because of fear or because of superstition. The Gospel presents some instructions of Jesus concerning these traditions.

- Mark 7: 1-2: Control of the Pharisees and liberty of the disciples. The Pharisees and some Scribes, who had come from Jerusalem, observed how the disciples of Jesus ate the bread with impure hands. Here there are three points which deserve to be made evident: a) The Scribes were from Jerusalem, from the capital city! This means that they had come to observe and to control what Jesus did. b) The disciples do not wash the hands before eating! This means that being with Jesus impels them to have the courage to transgress the norms which tradition imposed on the people, but that no longer had any sense, any meaning for life. c) The fact of washing the hands, which up until now continues to be an important norm of hygiene, had assumed for them a religious significance which served to control and discriminate persons.
- Mark 7: 3-4: The Tradition of the Ancients. "The Tradition of the Ancients" transmitted norms which had to be observed by the people to have the purity asked by the Law. The observance of the law was a very serious aspect for the people of that time. They thought that an impure person could not receive the blessings promised by God to Abraham. The norms on purity were taught to open the way to God, source of peace. Instead of being a source of peace, the norms constituted a prison, slavery. For the poor, it was practically impossible to observe the hundreds of norms, of traditions and of laws. For this reason, they were considered ignorant and damned persons who did not know the law (Jn 7: 49).
- Mark 7: 5: The Scribes and the Pharisees criticize the behavior of the disciples of Jesus. The Scribes and Pharisees ask Jesus: Why do your disciples not behave according to the tradition of the Ancients and eat the bread with impure hands? They think that they are interested in knowing the reason for the behavior of the disciples. In reality, they criticize Jesus because he allows the disciples to transgress the norms of purity. The Pharisees formed a type of confraternity, the principal concern of which was to observe all the laws of purity. The Scribes were responsible for the doctrine. They taught the laws relative to the observance of purity.
- Mark 7: 6-13 Jesus criticizes the incoherence of the Pharisees. Jesus answers quoting Isaiah: This people approach me only in words, honors me only with lip service, while their hearts are far from me (cf. Is 29: 13). Insisting on the norms of purity, the Pharisees emptied the content of the commandments of God's Law. Jesus quotes a concrete example. They said: the person, who offers his goods to the Temple, cannot use these goods to help those in greater need. Thus, in the name of tradition they emptied the fourth commandment from its content, which commands to love father and mother. These persons seem to be very observant, but they are so only externally. In their heart, they remain far away from God; as the hymn says: "His name is Jesus Christ and is hungry and lives out on the sidewalk. And people when they pass by, sometimes do not stop, because they are afraid to arrive late to church!" At the time of Jesus, people, in their wisdom, were not in agreement with everything they were taught. They were hoping that one day the Messiah would come to indicate another way to attain purity. In Jesus this hope becomes a reality.

## Personal Questions

- Do you know any religious tradition today which does not have too much sense, but which continues to be taught?

- The Pharisees were practicing Jews, but their faith was divided, separated from the life of the people. This is why Jesus criticizes them. And today, would Jesus criticize us? In what things?

## Concluding Prayer

Our Lord, how majestic is your name throughout the world! I look up at your heavens, shaped by your fingers,

at the moon and the stars you set firm-

what are human beings that you spare a thought for them, or the child of Adam that you care for him? (Ps 8: 1, 3-4)

# Wednesday, February 9, 2022

*Ordinary Time*

## Opening Prayer

Father,

watch over your family and keep us safe in your care, for all our hope is in you.

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 7: 14-23

Jesus called the people to him again and said, 'Listen to me, all of you, and understand. Nothing that goes into someone from outside can make that person unclean; it is the things that come out of someone that make that person unclean. Anyone who has ears for listening should listen!'

When he had gone into the house, away from the crowd, his disciples questioned him about the parable. He said to them, 'Even you -- don't you understand? Can't you see that nothing that goes into someone from outside can make that person unclean, because it goes not into the heart but into the stomach and passes into the sewer?' (Thus he pronounced all foods clean.)

And he went on, 'It is what comes out of someone that makes that person unclean. For it is from within, from the heart, that evil intentions emerge: fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, malice, deceit, indecency, envy, slander, pride, folly. All these evil things come from within and make a person unclean.'

## Reflection

The Gospel today is the continuation of the themes on which we meditated yesterday. Jesus helps the people and the disciples to understand better the significance of purity before God. For centuries, the Jews, in order not to contract impurity, observed many norms and customs bound to food, to drink, to the dress, to hygiene of the body, to contact with persons of other races and religions, etc. (Mk 7: 3-4), for them it was forbidden to have contact with pagans and to eat with them. In the years 70s the time of Mark, some converted Jews said: "Now that we are Christians we have to abandon

these ancient customs which separate us from converted pagans!" But others thought that they had to continue with the observance of these laws of purity (cf. Col 2: 16, 20-22). The attitude of Jesus, described in today's Gospel, helps us to overcome this problem.

- Mark 7: 14-16: Jesus opens a new way to try to get people closer to God. He says to the crowds: "Nothing that goes into someone from outside can make that person unclean; it is the things that come out of someone that make that person unclean" (Mk 7: 15). Jesus overturns things: what is impure does not come from outside to the inside, as the Doctors of the law taught, but what comes from inside to the outside. Thus, nobody ever needed to ask himself if this or that food is pure or impure. Jesus places what is pure and impure on another level, not on the level of ethical behavior. He opens a new way to reach God, and in this way realizes the most profound design of the people.
- Mark 7: 17-23: In the house, the disciples asked for an explanation. The disciples did not understand well what Jesus wanted to say with that affirmation. When they reached the house, they ask for an explanation. The question of the disciples surprises Jesus. He thought that they had understood the parable. In the explanation to the disciples, he goes to the very bottom of the question of impurity. He declares that all food is pure! That is, no food which from outside enters the human being can make him become impure, because it does not go to the heart, but to the stomach and ends in the septic tank. But what makes one become impure, says Jesus, is what comes out from within the heart to poison human relationships. And then he enumerates some: prostitution, murder, adultery, ambition, theft, etc. Thus, in many ways, by means of the word, of the life together, of living close by; Jesus helps persons to attain purity in another way. By means of the word he purified the lepers (Mk 1: 40-44), cast out unclean spirits (Mk 1: 26, 39; 3: 15, 22, etc), and overcame death which was the source of all impurity. But thanks to Jesus who touches her, the woman excluded and considered impure is cured (Mk 5: 25-34). Without fear of being contaminated, Jesus eats together with persons who were considered impure (Mk 2: 15-17).

The laws of purity at the time of Jesus. The people of that time were concerned very much about purity. The laws and the norms of purity indicated the necessary conditions to be able to place oneself before God and to feel well in his presence. One could not get before God just in any way, because God is holy. The Law said: "Be holy because I am holy!" (Lv 19: 2). One who was not pure could not get close to God to receive the blessings promised to Abraham. The laws of what was pure and impure (Lv 11 to 16) were written after the time of slavery in Babylonia, toward the year 800 after the Exodus, but had its origin in the ancient mentality and customs of the people of the Bible. A religious and mystical vision of the world led people to appreciate things, the persons and the animals, beginning from the category of purity (Gn 7: 2; Dt 14: 13-21; Nm 12: 10-15; Dt 24: 8-9).

In the context of the Persian domination, the V and IV centuries before Christ, before the difficulties to reconstruct the Temple of Jerusalem and for the survival of the clergy, the priests who governed the people of the Bible increased the laws relative to poverty and obliged the people to offer sacrifices of purification for sin. Thus after child birth (Lv 12: 1-8), menstruation (Lv 15: 19-24) the cure of a hemorrhage (Lv 15: 25-30), women had to offer sacrifices to recover purity. Lepers (Lv 13) or people who had contact with impure things or animals (Lv 5: 1-13) they also had to offer sacrifices. Part of this offering remained for the priests (Lv 5: 13).

At the time of Jesus, to touch a leper, to eat with a tax collector or publican, to eat without washing the hands, and so many other activities, etc. everything rendered the person impure, and any contact with this person contaminated the others. For this reason, it

was necessary to avoid “impure” persons. People lived with fear, always threatened by so many impure things which threatened life. They were obliged to live without trust, not trusting anything or anybody. Now, all of a sudden, everything changes! Through faith in Jesus, it was possible to have purity and to feel well before God without being it necessary to observe all those laws and those norms of the “Ancient Tradition.” It was liberation! The Good News announced by Jesus took away all fear from the people, and they no longer had to be all the time in a defensive situation, and he gives them back the desire to live, and the joy of being children of God, without the fear of being happy!

## Personal Questions

- In your life, are there any traditions which you consider sacred and others which you do not? Which ones? Why?
- In the name of the Tradition of the Ancients, the Pharisees forgot the Commandment of Jesus. Does this also happen today? Where and when? Does it also happen in my life?

## Concluding Prayer

The upright have Yahweh for their Savior, their refuge in times of trouble;  
Yahweh helps them and rescues them, he will rescue them from the wicked,  
and save them because they take refuge in him. (Ps 37: 39-40)

# Thursday, February 10, 2022

*Ordinary Time*

## Opening Prayer

Father,  
watch over your family  
and keep us safe in your care, for all our hope is in you.

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 7: 24-30

Jesus left that place and set out for the territory of Tyre. There he went into a house and did not want anyone to know he was there; but he could not pass unrecognized. At once a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit heard about him and came and fell at his feet.

Now this woman was a gentile, by birth a Syro-Phoenician, and she begged him to drive the devil out of her daughter. And he said to her, 'The children should be fed first, because it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to little dogs.' But she spoke up, 'Ah yes, sir,' she replied, 'but little dogs under the table eat the scraps from the children.' And he said to her, 'For saying this you may go home happy; the devil has gone out of your daughter.'

So she went off home and found the child lying on the bed and the devil gone.

## Reflection

In today's Gospel we see how Jesus is attentive to a foreign woman, belonging to another race and to another religion, even though this was forbidden by the religious law of that time. At the beginning Jesus did not want to help her, but the woman insists and obtains what she wanted: the cure of her daughter.

Jesus is trying to open the mentality of the disciples and of the people beyond the traditional vision. In the multiplication of the loaves, he had insisted on sharing (Mk 6: 30-44), he had declared all food pure (Mk 7: 1-23). In this episode of the Canaanite woman, he exceeds, goes beyond the frontiers of the national territory, and accepts a foreign woman who did not belong to the people and with whom it was forbidden to speak. These initiatives of Jesus, which come from his experience of God the Father, were foreign to the mentality of the people of that time; Jesus helps the people to get out of their way of experiencing God in life.

- Mark 7: 24: Jesus gets out of that territory. In the Gospel yesterday (Mk 7: 14-23) and of the day before (Mc Mk 7: 1-13), Jesus had criticized the incoherence of the "Tradition of the Ancients" and had helped the people and the disciples to get out of the prison of the laws of purity. Here, in Mark 7: 24, he leaves Galilee. He seems to want to get out from the prison of the territory and of the race. Finding himself outside, he does not want to be recognized. But his fame had reached there before. People had recourse to Jesus.
- Mark 7: 25-26: The situation. A woman arrives close to Jesus and begins to ask for help for her daughter who is sick. Mark says explicitly that she belongs to another race and to another religion. That means that she was a pagan. She throws herself at the feet of Jesus and begins to plead for the cure of her daughter who was possessed by an unclean spirit. For the pagans it was not a problem to go to Jesus. But for the Jews to live with pagans was a problem!
- Mark 7: 27: The response of Jesus. Faithful to the norms of his religion, Jesus says that it is not convenient to take the bread of the children and give it to little dogs! This was a hard phrase. The comparison came from the life in the family. Up until now, children and dogs are numerous especially in poor neighborhoods. Jesus affirms one thing: no mother takes away the bread from the mouth of her children to give it to the dogs. In this case the children were the Hebrew people and the little dogs, the pagans. At the time of the Old Testament, because of rivalry among the people, the people used to call other people "dogs" (1 S 17: 43). In the other Gospels, Jesus explains the reason for his refusal: "I have been sent only for the lost sheep of the house of Israel!" (Mt 15: 24). That is: "The Father does not want me to take care of this woman!"
- Mark 7: 28: The reaction of the woman. She agrees with Jesus, but she extends the comparison and applies it to her case: "Jesus, it is true, but the little dogs also eat the crumbs that fall from the table of the children!" It is as if she said: "If I am a little dog, then I have the right of little dogs, that is: the crumbs that fall from the table belong to me!" She simply draws conclusions from the parable that Jesus had told and shows that even in the house of Jesus, the little dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the table of the children. And in the "house of Jesus", that is, in the Christian community, the multiplication of the bread for the children was so abundant that there were twelve baskets full left over (Mk 6: 42) for the "little dogs," that is, for her, for the pagans!

- Mark 7: 29-30: The reaction of Jesus: "Because of what you have said, go. The devil has gone out of your daughter!" In the other Gospels it is made more explicit: "Great is your faith! May it be done as you wish!" (Mt 15: 28). If Jesus accepts the request of the woman, it is because he understands that now the Father wanted him to accept her request. This episode helps to understand something of the mystery which envelopes the person of Jesus and his life with the Father. Observing the reactions and the attitudes of the persons, Jesus discovers the will of the Father in the events of life. The attitude of the woman opens a new horizon in the life of Jesus. Thanks to her, he discovers better the project of the Father for all those who seek life and to liberate themselves from the chains which imprison their energy. Thus, throughout the pages of the Gospel of Mark, there is a growing opening toward the people. In this way, Mark leads the readers to open themselves before the reality of the world which surrounds them, and to overcome the preconceptions which prevented a peaceful living together among the people. This opening toward pagans appears very clearly in the final order given by Jesus to the disciples, after his Resurrection: "Go out to the whole world, proclaim the Gospel to all creation" (Mk 16: 15).

## Personal Questions

- Concretely, what do you do to live peacefully with persons of other Christian Churches? In the neighborhood where you live, are there persons of other religions? Which? Do you normally speak with persons of other religions?
- Which is the opening that this text demands from us today, in the family and in the community?

## Concluding Prayer

Blessed are those who keep to what is just, whose conduct is always upright!

Remember me, Yahweh, in your love for your people. Come near to me with your saving power. (Ps 106: 3-4)

# Friday, February 11, 2022

*Ordinary Time*

## Opening Prayer

Father, watch over your family and keep us safe in your care, for all our hope is in you.

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 7: 31-37

Returning from the territory of Tyre, Jesus went by way of Sidon towards the Lake of Galilee, right through the Decapolis territory. And they brought him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech; and they asked him to lay his hand on him. He took him aside to be by themselves, away from the crowd, put his fingers into the man's ears and touched his tongue with spittle. Then looking up to heaven he sighed; and he said to

him, '*Ephphatha*,' that is, 'Be opened.'

And his ears were opened, and at once the impediment of his tongue was loosened and he spoke clearly. And Jesus ordered them to tell no one about it, but the more he insisted, the more widely they proclaimed it. Their admiration was unbounded, and they said, 'Everything he does is good, he makes the deaf hear and the dumb speak.'

## Reflection

In today's Gospel, Jesus cures a deaf-mute. This episode is not known very much. In the episode of the Canaanite woman, Jesus goes beyond the frontiers of the national territory and accepts a foreign woman who did not belong to the people and with whom it was forbidden to speak. In today's Gospel we notice this same opening.

- Mark 7: 31. The region of the Decapolis. "At that time, returning from the territory of Tyre, Jesus went to Sidon toward the Lake of Galilee, right through the Decapolis territory". Decapolis literally means: Ten cities. This was a region of ten cities in the southeast part of Galilee, and its population was pagan.
- Mark 7: 31-35. To open the ears and to loosen the tongue. A deaf-mute man was brought before Jesus. People wanted Jesus to place his hands on him. But Jesus goes far beyond this request. He leads the man aside from the crowd, put his finger into the man's ears and touched his tongue with spittle, looking up to Heaven, he sighed deeply and said: "*Éffata!*", that is, "Be opened!" At that same moment, his ears were opened, and at once the impediment of his tongue was loosened and he spoke clearly. Jesus wants the people to open the ears and to loosen the tongue!
- Mark 7: 36-37: Jesus wants no publicity. "And he ordered them not to tell anyone about it, but the more he insisted, the more widely they proclaimed it. Their admiration was unbounded, and they said: "Everything he does is good, he makes the deaf hear and the dumb speak". He prohibits that the cure be diffused, but in fact that does not happen. Those who have experienced what Jesus has done, go and tell others, whether Jesus wants it or not! The persons who were present at the cure began to proclaim what they have seen and summarize the Good News as follows: "Everything he does is good; he makes the deaf hear and the dumb speak!" This affirmation of the people makes us remember creation, when it was said: God saw that everything was good!" (Gn 1: 31) And this also recalls the prophecy of Isaiah, where he says that in the future the deaf will hear and the dumb will speak (Is 29: 28; 35: 5. cf. Mt 11: 5).
- The recommendation not to tell anybody. Sometimes, the attention which Mark's Gospel attributes to the prohibition of Jesus to diffuse the cure is exaggerated, as if Jesus had some secret that he wants to keep. In most cases in which Jesus works a miracle, he does not ask for silence. Rather, once he even asked for publicity (Mk 5: 19). Sometimes, he orders not to diffuse the cure (Mk 1: 44; 5: 43; 7: 36; 8: 26) but obtains the contrary result. The more he prohibits it, the more the Good News is diffused (Mk 1: 28, 45; 3: 7-8; 7: 36-37). It serves nothing to prohibit! The interior force of the Good News is so great that it diffuses by itself.
- Growing openness in the Gospel of Mark. Throughout the pages of Mark's Gospel, there is a growing openness toward the other populations. Thus, Mark leads the readers to open themselves toward the reality of the world around and to overcome the preconceptions which prevent the peaceful living together among the different populations. When he passed through the Decapolis, a pagan region, Jesus responded to the request of the people of the place and cured a deaf-mute man. He

is not afraid to be contaminated with the impurity of a pagan, because in curing him, he touches his ears and his tongue. In what regards the authority, two Jews and the disciples themselves have difficulty to hear and to understand that a pagan who was deaf and dumb can now hear and speak thanks to Jesus who touched him. It recalls the song of the servant "The Lord God has opened the ears, and I listen to him" (Is 50: 4-5). In driving the merchants out of the Temple, Jesus criticizes the unjust trade and affirms that the temple should be a house of prayer for all peoples (Mk 11: 17). In the parable of the wicked tenants, Mark refers to the fact that the message will be taken away from the chosen people, the Jews, and will be given to others, the pagans (Mk 12: 1-12). After the death of Jesus, Mark presents the profession of faith of a pagan at the foot of the Cross. In quoting the Roman centurion and how he recognizes the Son of God in Jesus, he is saying that the pagan is more faithful than the disciples and more faithful than the Jews (Mk 15: 39). The openness for the pagans appears very clearly in the final order given by Jesus to the disciples, after his Resurrection: "Go out to the whole world and proclaim the Gospel to all creation" (Mk 16: 15).

## Personal Questions

- Jesus shows a great openness toward persons of another race, another religion and of other customs. We Christians, today, do we have the same openness? Do I have this openness?
- Definition of the Good News: "Everything Jesus does is good!" Am I good News for others?

## Concluding Prayer

Sing a new song to Yahweh! Sing to Yahweh, all the earth!

Sing to Yahweh, bless his name! (Ps 96: 1-2)

# Saturday, February 12, 2022

*Ordinary Time*

## Opening Prayer

Father,

watch over your family and keep us safe in your care, for all our hope is in you.

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 8: 1-10

And now once again a great crowd had gathered, and they had nothing to eat. So Jesus called his disciples to him and said to them, 'I feel sorry for all these people; they have been with me for three days now and have nothing to eat. If I send them off home hungry, they will collapse on the way; some have come a great distance.'

His disciples replied, 'Where could anyone get these people enough bread to eat in a deserted place?' He asked them, 'How many loaves have you?' And they said to him,

'Seven.'

Then he instructed the crowd to sit down on the ground, and he took the seven loaves, and after giving thanks he broke them and began handing them to his disciples to distribute; and they distributed them among the crowd. They had a few small fishes as well, and over these he said a blessing and ordered them to be distributed too. They ate as much as they wanted, and they collected seven basketfuls of the scraps left over.

Now there had been about four thousand people. He sent them away and at once, getting into the boat with his disciples, went to the region of Dalmanutha.

## Reflection

The Gospel today speaks about the second multiplication of the loaves. The thread of union of several episodes in this part of the Gospel of Mark is the food, the bread. After the banquet of death (Mk 6: 17-29), comes the banquet of life (Mk 6: 30-44). During the crossing of the Lake the disciples are afraid because they have understood nothing of the bread multiplied in the desert (Mk 6: 51-52). Then Jesus declares that all food is pure (Mk 7: 1-23). In the conversation of Jesus with the Canaanite woman, the pagans ate the crumbs which fell from the table of the children (Mk 7: 24-30). And here, in today's Gospel, Mark speaks about the second multiplication of the loaves (Mk 8: 1-10).

- Mark 8: 1-3: The situation of the people and the reaction of Jesus. The crowds, which gathered around Jesus in the desert, had no food to eat. Jesus calls the disciples and presents the problem to them: "I feel pity for this people, because for three days they have been following me and have not eaten. If I send them away to their homes without eating, they will faint on the way; and some come from very far!" In this concern of Jesus there are two important things: a) People forget the house and the food and follow Jesus to the desert! This is a sign that Jesus aroused great sympathy, up to the point that people followed him in the desert and remain with him three days! b) Jesus does not ask them to solve the problem. He only expresses his concern to the disciples. It seems to be a problem without a solution.
- Mark 8: 4: The reaction of the disciples: the first misunderstanding. The disciples then think of a solution, according to which someone had to bring bread for the people. It does not even occur to them that the solution could come from the people themselves. They say: "And how could we feed all these people in the desert?" In other words, they think of a traditional solution. Someone must find the money, buy bread and distribute it to the people. They themselves perceive that, in that desert, to buy bread, this solution is not possible, but they see no other possibility to solve the problem. That is, if Jesus insists in not sending the people back to their homes, there will be no solution to feed them!
- Mark 8: 5-7: The solution found by Jesus. First, he asks how much bread they have: "Seven!" Then he orders the people to sit down. Then, he takes those seven loaves of bread, gives thanks, broke them, and gave them to the disciples to distribute them; and they distributed them to the crowds. And he did the same thing with the fish. Like in the first multiplication (Mk 6: 41), the way in which Mark describes the attitude of Jesus, recalls the Eucharist. The message is this: the participation in the Eucharist should lead to the gift and to the sharing of the bread with those who have no bread.
- Mark 8: 8-10: The result: Everyone ate, they were satisfied, and bread was left over! This was an unexpected solution, which began within the people, with the few loaves of bread that they had brought! In the first multiplication, twelve baskets of bread were left over. Here, seven. In the first one, they served five thousand persons. Here

four thousand. In the first one there were five loaves of bread and two fish. Here, seven loaves of bread and a few fish.

- The time of the dominant ideology. The disciples thought of one way, Jesus thinks in another way. In the way of thinking of the disciples there is the dominant ideology, the common way of thinking of persons. Jesus thinks in a different way. It is not by the fact of going with Jesus and of living in a community that a person is already a saint and renewed. Among the disciples, the old mentality always emerges again, because of the “leaven of Herod and of the Pharisees” (Mk 8: 15), that is, the dominant ideology, had profound roots in the life of those people. The conversion requested by Jesus is a deep conversion. He wants to uproot the various types of “leaven.”
  - the “leaven” of the community closed up in itself, without any openness. Jesus responds: “The one who is not against is in favor!” (Mk 9: 39-40). For Jesus, what is important is not if the person forms part or not of the community, but if he/she is generous, available or not to do the good which the community has to do.
  - the “leaven” of the group which considers itself superior to others. Jesus responds: “You do not know what spirit animates you” (Lc 9: 55).
  - the “leaven” of the mentality of class and of competition, which characterizes the society of the Roman Empire, and which permeated the small community which was just beginning. Jesus Responds: “Let the first one be the last one” (Mk 9: 35). This is the point on which he insists the most and it is the strongest point of his witness: “I have not come to be served, but to serve” (Mc 10: 45; Mt 20: 28; Jo 13: 1-16).
  - the “leaven” of the mentality of the culture of the time Jesus responds: “Allow the little ones to come to me!” which marginalized the little ones, the children. (Mk 10: 14). He indicates that the little ones are the professors of adults: “anyone who does not accept the Kingdom of God as a child, will not enter in” (Lk 18: 17).

As it happened in the time of Jesus, also today, the Neo-liberal mentality is reviving and arises in the life of the communities and of the families. The reading of the Gospel, made in community, can help us to change life, and the vision and to continue to convert ourselves and to be faithful to the project of Jesus.

## Personal Questions

We can always meet misunderstandings with friends and enemies. Which is the misunderstanding between Jesus and the disciples on the occasion of the multiplication of the loaves? How does Jesus face this misunderstanding? In your house, with your neighbors or in the community, have there been misunderstandings? How have you reacted? Has your community had misunderstandings or conflicts with the civil or ecclesiastical authority? How did this happen?

Which is the leaven which today prevents the realization of the Gospel and should be eliminated?

## Concluding Prayer

Lord, you have been our refuge from age to age. Before the mountains were born, before the earth and the world came to birth, from eternity to eternity you are God. (Ps 90: 1-2)

# Sunday, February 13, 2022

## Opening Prayer

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

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

## Gospel Reading – Luke 6: 17, 20-26

### **A key to the reading:**

In this Sunday's Gospel, Jesus declares blessed those who are poor, those who weep, those who are hungry and who are persecuted. And He declares bound to unhappiness the rich, those who laugh, who are satisfied, or who are praised by all. Of what does the happiness consist which Jesus attributes to the poor, to the hungry, to those who weep, to those who are persecuted? Is it happiness? The words of Jesus contrast with the daily experience of our life. The common ideal of happiness is quite different from the happiness that Jesus speaks about. And you, in your heart, do you think that a person who is poor and hungry is really happy?

Keeping in mind these questions, which result from our daily experience, read the text of this Sunday's Gospel. Read it attentively, perhaps without trying to understand it all. Allow the word of Jesus to enter into you. Keep silent. During the reading try to be attentive to two things: (i) to the social category of people who say they are happy, as well as those who are threatened by unhappiness; (ii) to people whom you know and who are part of the group of your friends and who could be part of one or another of these social categories.

The text of this Sunday's Gospel omits verses 18 and 19. We take the liberty to include them in the brief comment that follows, because they explain a bit better the public, those to whom the word of Jesus is addressed.

### **A division of the text to help in the reading:**

- Luke 6: 17: Places the action of Jesus in time
- Luke 6: 18-19: The crowd seeking Jesus
- Luke 6: 20-23: The four beatitudes
- Luke 6: 24-26: The four threats

### **Text:**

Jesus came down with the twelve and stood on a stretch of level ground with a great crowd of his disciples and a large number of the people from all Judea and Jerusalem and the coastal region of Tyre and Sidon came to hear him and to be healed of their

diseases; and even those who were tormented by unclean spirits were cured. Everyone in the crowd sought to touch him because power came forth from him and healed them all.

And raising his eyes toward his disciples he said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for the kingdom of God is yours. Blessed are you who are now hungry, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who are now weeping, for you will laugh. Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude and insult you, and denounce your name as evil on account of the

Son of Man. Rejoice and leap for joy on that day! Behold, your reward will be great in heaven. For their ancestors treated the prophets in the same way. But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. Woe to you who are filled now, for you will be hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will grieve and weep. Woe to you when all speak well of you, for their ancestors treated the false prophets in this way."

## A Moment of Prayerful Silence

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

## Some Questions

*to help us in our personal reflection.*

- Which is the point that you liked best or that struck you the most? Why?
- Who constituted the great crowd around Jesus? From where did they come and what were they seeking?
- What are the social categories of the people who are declared happy (Lk 6: 20-23)? What is the promise that each one of them receives from Jesus? How are these promises to be understood?
- When saying "Blessed are the poor," would Jesus be trying to say that the poor should continue to live in their poverty?
- What are the social categories of the people who are threatened by unhappiness? (Lk 6: 24-26)? What are the threats for each one of them? How is this threat to be understood?
- Do I look at life and at people as Jesus does?

## To Deepen the Theme

### **Context of the time and that of today:**

Luke presents the teaching of Jesus in a progressive revelation. First, up to verse 6: 16, Luke says many times that Jesus taught, but says nothing on the content of the teaching (Lk 4: 15, 31-32, 44; 5: 1, 3, 15, 17; 6: 6). Now, after informing us that Jesus saw a great multitude desirous of opening themselves to the Word of God, Luke presents the first sermon. The sermon is not long, but it is significant. The one who reads it unprepared will almost be afraid. It seems to be a sort of shock therapy!

The first part of the sermon (Lk 6: 20-38) begins with a provocative contrast: "Blessed you who are poor!" "Alas to you who are rich!" (Lk 6: 36-38). The second part (6: 39- 49) says

that nobody can consider himself superior to others (Lk 6: 39-42); the good tree bears good fruit, the bad tree bears bad fruit (Lk 6: 43-45). Certainly, a person is not helped by hiding behind beautiful words and prayers. What matters is to put the word into practice (Lk 6: 46-49).

### Commentary on the Text:

- Luke 6: 17: Places the action of Jesus in time and space.

Jesus has spent the night in prayer (Lk 6: 12) and has chosen the twelve to whom He has given the name of apostles (Lk 6: 13-16). Now He goes down from the mountain together with the twelve. Having reached level ground, He finds two groups of people: a numerous group of disciples and an immense crowd of people who had come there from all of Judea, Jerusalem, Tyre, and Sidon.

- Luke 6:18-19: The crowds who seek Jesus.

The crowds feel disoriented and abandoned and seek Jesus for two reasons: they want to listen to His word, and they want to be cured of their illnesses. Many people were cured, who had been possessed by the evil spirits. The people try to touch Jesus because they are aware that there is a force in Him which does good and cures people. Jesus accepts all those who seek Him. Among these crowds there are also some Jews and foreigners. This is one of the favorite themes of Luke!

- **Luke 6: 20-23 The four Beatitudes**

- Luke 6: 20: Blessed are you who are poor!

Fixing His eyes on His disciples, Jesus declared, "Blessed are you who are poor, because the Kingdom of God is yours!" This first Beatitude identifies the social category of the disciples of Jesus. They are poor! Jesus guarantees for them: "Yours is the Kingdom of Heaven!" It is not a promise concerning the future. The verb is in the present. The Kingdom is already theirs. Even being poor, they are already happy. The Kingdom is not a good future. It already exists in the midst of the poor.

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus makes the meaning clear and says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit!" (Mt 5: 3). The poor are those who have the Spirit of Jesus, because there are also the poor who have the spirit and the mentality of the rich. The disciples of Jesus are poor and have the mentality of the poor. They also, like Jesus, do not want to accumulate, but accept their poverty and like Jesus, struggle for a more just living together where there will be a fraternal spirit and the sharing of goods, without discrimination.

- Luke 6: 21: Blessed are you, who are now hungry, blessed are you who now weep!

In the second and third Beatitude Jesus says, "Blessed are you who are now hungry, because you shall have your fill! Blessed are you who now weep, because you shall laugh!" The first part of these declarations is in the present, the second part in the future. What we now live and suffer is not definitive. What is definitive will be the Kingdom which we are constructing today with the force of the Spirit of Jesus. To construct the Kingdom presupposes suffering and persecution, but one thing is certain: the Kingdom will arrive and "you shall have your fill and shall laugh!" The Kingdom is at the same time a present and a future reality. The second Beatitude evokes the Canticle of Mary: "He has filled the starving with good things" (Lk 1: 53). The third one evokes the prophet Ezekiel who speaks of those who "grieve and lament over all the loathsome practices" carried out in the city of Jerusalem (Ezek 9: 4; cf. Ps 119: 136).

- Luke 6: 23: Blessed are you, when people hate you...!

The fourth Beatitude refers to the future: "Blessed are you when people will hate you and will denounce your name as criminal, on account of the Son of Man! Rejoice when that day comes and dance for joy, for your reward will be great in Heaven. This was the way the prophets were treated!" With these words of Jesus, Luke points out that the future announced by Jesus is about to arrive, and these people are on the right path.

- **Luke 6:24-26: The four threats.**

After the four Beatitudes on behalf of the poor and the excluded, follow the four threats against the rich, those who are filled, those who laugh or who are praised by everyone. The four threats have the same literary form as the four Beatitudes. The first one is in the present. The second and third one have a part in the present and a part in the future. The fourth one refers completely to the future. These four threats are found in the Gospel of Luke and not in Matthew. Luke is more radical in denouncing injustice.

- Luke 6: 24: Alas for you who are rich!

Before Jesus, on that level ground, there are only poor and sick people who have come from all parts (Lk 6: 17, 19). But before them, Jesus says, "Alas for you who are rich!" In transmitting these words of Jesus, Luke is thinking of the communities of his time, toward the end of the first century. There were rich and poor, there was discrimination against the poor on the part of the rich, discrimination which also affected the structure of the Roman Empire (cf. Jas 2: 1-9; 5: 1-6; Rev 3: 15-17). Jesus harshly and directly criticizes the rich: "You rich, you have already had your consolation!" It is good to remember what Jesus says at another moment concerning the rich! He does not believe very much in their conversion (Lk 18: 24-25). But when the disciples are frightened, He says that nothing is impossible for God (Lk 18: 26-27).

- Luke 6: 25: Alas for you who now laugh because you will be afflicted and will weep! "Alas for you who have now been filled because you will be hungry! Alas for you who now laugh because you will be afflicted and will weep!" These two threats indicate that for Jesus poverty is nothing fatal, and much less the fruit of prejudices, but rather the fruit of an unjust enrichment on the part of others. Here also, it is good to recall the words of the Cantic of Mary: "You sent the rich away empty handed!" (Lk 1: 53)

Alas for you when everyone speaks well of you!

"Alas for you when everyone speaks well of you; in fact, their fathers did the same with the false prophets!" This fourth threat refers to the Jews, that is, the sons of those who in the past praised the false prophets. In quoting these words of Jesus, Luke thinks about some converted Jews of his time who used their prestige and their authority to criticize the openness toward the gentiles (cf. Acts 15: 1, 5).

## Extending the information:

### The Beatitudes in Luke

The two affirmations "Blessed are you who are poor!" and "Alas for you who are rich!" urge those who listen to make a choice, an option on behalf of the poor. In the Old Testament, several times God places the people before the choice of the blessing or the curse. The people are free to choose: "I place you before life and death, blessing and curse; choose, therefore, life so that you and your descendants may live" (Deut 30: 19). It is not God who condemns. It is the people who choose life or death, it depends on their position before

God and of others. These moments of choice are moments of the visit of God to His people (Gen 21: 1; 50: 24-25; Ex 3: 16; 32: 34; Jer 29: 10; Ps 59: 6; Ps 65: 10; Ps 80: 15; Ps 106: 4). Luke is the only evangelist who uses this image of God's visit (Lk 1: 68, 78; 7: 16; 19: 44). For Luke, Jesus is the visit of God who places the crowds before the choice of blessing or the curse: "Blessed are you who are poor!" and "Alas for you who are rich!" But the people do not recognize God's visit (Lk 19: 44).

### **The Message of Luke for the Converted Pagans**

The Beatitudes and the threats form part of a sermon. The first part of the sermon is addressed to the disciples (Lk 6: 20). The second part is addressed to "You who listen to Me" (Lk 1: 27), that is to those immense crowds of the poor and the sick, who had come from all parts (Lk 6: 17-19). The words which Jesus addressed to this crowd are demanding and difficult: "love your enemies" (Lk 6: 27), "blessed are those who curse you" (Lk 6: 28), "to those who slap you on one cheek, present the other cheek" (Lk 6: 29), to anyone who takes your cloak from you, do not refuse your tunic" (Lk 6: 29). Taken literally, these words may benefit the rich, because the harder choice is always for the poor. And these words seem to say the opposite of the message of the Beatitudes and of the threats which Jesus had communicated before to His disciples.

But they cannot be taken literally. Not even Jesus took them like that. When the soldier slaps Him in the face, He does not offer the other cheek; rather, He reacts firmly: "If there is some offense in what I said, point it out; but if not, why do you strike Me?" (Jn 18: 22-23). Then how can we understand these words? Two sentences help to understand what these words want to teach. The first sentence: "Treat others as you would like people to treat you!" (Lk 6: 31). The second sentence: "Be compassionate just as your Father is compassionate!" (Lk 6: 36). Jesus does not simply want to change something, because that would change nothing. He wants to change the system. The new way which Jesus wants to construct comes from the new experience that Jesus has: the Father full of tenderness who accepts everyone! The words of threat against the rich cannot be an occasion of revenge on the part of the poor. Jesus commands them to have the contrary attitude: "Love your enemies!" True love cannot depend on what I receive from the other. Love should want the good of the other independently from what the other does for me. God's love for us is like this.

### **The Sermon on the Mountain, the Sermon on the Level Ground**

In the Gospel of Luke Jesus comes down from the mountain and stops on level ground to give a sermon (Lk 6: 17). This is why some call it the "sermon on the plain". In the Gospel of Matthew, this same sermon is given on the mountain (Mt 5: 1) and is called the "sermon on the mount." Because Matthew seeks to present Jesus as the new legislator, the new Moses. It was on the mountain where Moses received the Law (Ex 19: 3-6; 31: 18; 34:1-2). And it is on the mountain that we receive the new law of Jesus.

## **Prayer of Psalm 34 (33)**

*"Gratitude which comes from a diverse way of looking at things"*

I will bless Yahweh at all times, His praise continually on my lips.

I will praise Yahweh from my heart; let the humble hear and rejoice.

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

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

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.

Who among you delights in life, longs for time to enjoy prosperity? Guard your tongue from evil,

your lips from any breath of deceit.

Turn away from evil and do good, seek peace, and pursue it.

The eyes of Yahweh are on the upright, His ear turned to their cry.

But Yahweh's face is set against those who do evil, to cut off the memory of them from the earth.

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.

Yahweh takes care of all their bones, not one of them will be broken.

But to the wicked evil brings death,

those who hate the upright will pay the penalty.

Yahweh ransoms the lives of those who serve Him,

and there will be no penalty for those who take refuge in Him.

## Final Prayer

Lord Jesus, we thank You for the Word that has enabled us to understand better the will of the Father. May Your Spirit enlighten our actions and grant us the strength to practice what Your Word has revealed to us. May we, like Mary, Your mother, not only listen to but also practice the Word. You who live and reign with the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit forever and ever. Amen.

## Monday, February 14, 2022

*Ordinary Time*

## Opening Prayer

Lord God,

forgive us that in our weak faith

we ask sometimes for signs and wonders. We know that you are our Father,  
but it is not always easy for us

to recognize your loving presence.

Give us eyes of faith to see the sign

that you are with us in Jesus and his message. We say so reluctantly, for it is painful:  
purify our trust in you and in Jesus

that we may become more mature Christians, who love you through Jesus Christ our  
Lord.

## Gospel Reading - Mark 8: 11-13

The Pharisees came up and started a discussion with him; they demanded of him a sign from heaven, to put him to the test. And with a profound sigh he said, 'Why does this generation demand a sign? In truth I tell you, no sign shall be given to this generation.' And, leaving them again, he re-embarked and went away to the other side.

## Reflection

- Mark 8: 11-13: The Pharisees ask for a sign from Heaven. Today's Gospel narrates a discussion of the Pharisees with Jesus. Jesus also, as it happened with Moses in the Old Testament, had fed the hungry people in the desert, by multiplying the bread (Mk 8: 1-10). This is a sign that he presented himself before the people as a new Moses. But the Pharisees were not capable to perceive the meaning of the multiplication of the loaves. They continued to discuss with Jesus, and ask for a sign, "from Heaven." They had understood nothing of all that Jesus had done. "Jesus sighed profoundly," probably feeling disgust and sadness before so much blindness. And he concludes saying: "No sign will be given to this generation". He left them and went toward the other side of the lake. It is not worthwhile to show a beautiful picture to one who does not want to open the eyes. Anyone who closes the eyes cannot see!
- The danger of dominating ideology. Here we can clearly perceive how the "yeast of Herod and the Pharisees" (Mk 8: 15), the dominating ideology of the time, made persons lose their capacity to analyze events objectively. This yeast came from far and had taken profound roots in the life of the people. It went so far as to contaminate the mentality of the disciples and manifested itself in many ways. With the formation which Jesus gave them, he tried to uproot this "yeast."
- The following are some examples of this fraternal help which Jesus gave to his disciples:
  - The mentality of a closed group. On a certain day a person not belonging to the

community used the name of Jesus to drive out devils. John saw it and forbade this fact: "We have forbidden this because he was not one of ours" (Mk 9: 38). John thought he had the monopoly on Jesus and wanted to prevent others to use the name of Jesus to do good. John wanted a community closed in itself. It was the yeast of the "Elected People, the separated People!" Jesus responds: "Do not stop him! Anyone who is not against us is for us!" (Mk 9: 39-40).

- The mentality of a group which considers itself superior to others. Certain times, the Samaritans did not want to offer hospitality to Jesus. The reaction of some of the disciples was immediate: "May fire descend from Heaven and burn them up!" (Lk 9: 54). They thought that because they were with Jesus, everyone had to welcome him, to accept him. They thought they had God on their side to defend him. It was the yeast of the "Chosen People, the Privileged People!" Jesus reproaches them: "Jesus turned and rebuked them" (Lk 9: 55).
- The competitive mentality of and of prestige. The disciples discussed among themselves about the first place (Mk 9: 33-34). It was the yeast of class and of competitiveness, which characterized the official religion and the society of the Roman Empire. It was already getting into the small community around Jesus. Jesus reacts and orders to have a contrary mentality: "If anyone wants to be first, he must make himself last" (Mk 9: 35).
- The mentality of those who marginalize the little ones. The disciples scolded little children. It was the yeast of the mentality of that time, according to which children did not count and should be disciplined by adults. Jesus rebukes the disciples: "Let the little children come to me!" (Mk 10: 14). The children become the teachers of the adults: "Anyone who does not welcome the Kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it". (Lk 18: 17).

As it happened in the time of Jesus, today also the Neo-liberal mentality of the dominating ideology arises once again and appears even in the life of the community and of the family. The prayerful reading of the Gospel, made in community, can help to change in us the vision of things and to deepen in us conversion and the fidelity which Jesus asks from us.

## For Personal Confrontation

- Before the alternative: to have faith in Jesus or to ask for a sign from heaven, the Pharisees want a sign from heaven. They were not capable to believe in Jesus. The same thing happens to me. What have I chosen?
- The yeast of the Pharisees prevented the disciples to perceive the presence of the Kingdom in Jesus. Have some remains of this yeast of the Pharisees remained in me?

## Concluding Prayer

Lord, you are generous and act generously, teach me your will. (Ps 119: 68)

# Tuesday, February 15, 2022

*Ordinary Time*

## Opening Prayer

Lord our God,

when we do not see clear in life, when suffering comes our way, we tend to blame you or people.

Help us to realize clearly how much of the evil around us comes from within ourselves, from our greed for riches and power, from our self-complacency and selfishness.

Speak to us your word of forgiveness and change us from a silent majority of evil into solidarity of love, by the grace of Jesus Christ our Lord.

## Gospel Reading - Mark 8: 14-21

The disciples had forgotten to take any bread and they had only one loaf with them in the boat. Then he gave them this warning, 'Keep your eyes open; look out for the yeast of the Pharisees and the yeast of Herod.'

And they said to one another, 'It is because we have no bread.' And Jesus knew it, and he said to them, 'Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not understand, still not realize? Are your minds closed? Have you eyes and do not see, ears and do not hear? Or do you not remember? When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of scraps did you collect?' They answered, 'Twelve.' 'And when I broke the seven loaves for the four thousand, how many baskets full of scraps did you collect?' And they answered, 'Seven.' Then he said to them, 'Do you still not realize?'

## Reflection

Yesterday's Gospel spoke of the misunderstanding between Jesus and the Pharisees. Today's Gospel speaks of the misunderstanding between Jesus and the disciples and shows that the "yeast of the Pharisees and of Herod" (religion and government), had, in such a way, taken possession of the mentality of the disciples to the point of hindering them from listening to the Good News.

- Mark 8, 14-16: Attention to the yeast of the Pharisees and of Herod. Jesus warns the disciples: "Look out for the yeast of the Pharisees and the yeast of Herod". But they did not understand the words of Jesus. They thought that he spoke like that because they had forgotten to buy bread. Jesus says one thing and they understood another. This „clash“ was the result of the insidious influence of the “yeast of the Pharisees” in the mentality and in the life of the disciples.
- 
- Mark 8, 17-18a: The question of Jesus. In the face of this almost total lack of perception in the disciples, Jesus rapidly asks them a series of questions, without waiting for an answer. Hard questions which express very serious things and reveal the total lack of understanding on the part of the disciples. Even if it seems unbelievable, the disciples reached the point in which there was no difference between them and the enemies of Jesus. First Jesus had become sad seeing the “hardness of heart” of the Pharisees and of the Herodians (Mk 3, 5). Now, the disciples themselves have “hardened their heart” (Mk 8, 17). First, “those outside” (Mk 4, 11) did not understand the parables because “they have eyes and do not see, listen but do not understand” (Mk 4, 12). Now, the disciples themselves understand nothing, because “they have eyes and do not see, listen, but do not understand” (Mk 8, 18). Besides, the image of the “hardened heart” evoked the hardness of heart of the people of the Old Testament who always drifted away from the path. It also evoked the hardened heart of Pharaoh who oppressed and persecuted the people (Ex 4, 21; 7, 13; 8, 11.15.28; 9, 7...).

The expression “they have eyes and do not see, listen but do not understand” evoked not only the people without faith criticized by Isaiah (Is 6, 9-10), but also the adorers of false gods, of whom the Psalm says: “they have eyes and see nothing, have ears and hear nothing” (Ps 115, 5-6).

- Mark 8, 18b-21: The two questions regarding the bread. The two final questions refer to the multiplication of the loaves: How many baskets did they gather the first time? Twelve! And the second? Seven! Like the Pharisees, the disciples also, in spite that they had collaborated actively in the multiplication of the loaves, did not succeed in understanding the meaning. Jesus ends by saying: “Do you still not understand?” The way in which Jesus asks these questions, one after the other, almost without waiting for an answer, seems to cut the conversation. It reveals a very big clash. Which is the cause for this clash?

The cause of the clash between Jesus and the disciples. The cause of the clash between Jesus and the disciples was not due to ill will on their part. The disciples were not like the Pharisees. They also did not understand, but in them there was malice. They used religion to criticize and to condemn Jesus (Mk 2: 7, 16, 18, 24; 3: 5, 22-30). The disciples were good people. Theirs was not ill will. Because even if they were victims of the “yeast of the Pharisees and of the Herodians,” they were not interested in defending the system of the Pharisees and the Herodians against Jesus.

Then, which was the cause? The cause of the clash between Jesus and the disciples had something to do with the Messianic hope. Among the Jews there was an enormous variety of Messianic expectations. Secondly, the diverse interpretations of the prophecies, there were people who expected a Messiah King (cfr. Mk 15: 9, 32). Others, a Messiah, Saint or Priest (cfr. Mk 1: 24). Others, a Messiah, a subversive Warrior (cfr. Lk 23: 5; Mk 15: 6; 13: 6-8). Others, a Messiah, Doctor (cfr. Jn 4: 25; Mk 1: 22- 27). Others, a Messiah, Judge (cfr. Lk 3: 5-9; Mk 1: 8). Others, a Messiah, Prophet (6: 4; 14: 65). It seems that nobody expected a Messiah, Servant, announced by the Prophet Isaiah (Is 42: 1; 49: 3; 52: 13). They did not expect to consider the messianic hope as a service of the people of God to humanity. Each one according to their own interests and according to their social class, expected the Messiah, but wanting to reduce him to their own hope.

This is why the title Messiah, according to the person or social position, could mean very different things. There was a great confusion of ideas! And precisely in this attitude of Servant is found the key which turns on a light in the darkness of the disciples and helps them to convert themselves. It is only in accepting the Messiah as the Suffering Servant of Isaiah, that they will be capable to open the eyes and to understand the Mystery of God in Jesus.

## For Personal Confrontation

- Which is for us today the yeast of the Pharisees and of Herod? What does it mean today for me to have a “hardened heart”?
- The yeast of Herod and the Pharisees prevents the disciples to understand the Good News. Perhaps, today the propaganda of the Television prevents us from understanding the Good News of Jesus?

## Concluding Prayer

I need only say, 'I am slipping,' for your faithful love, Yahweh, to support me; however great the anxiety of my heart, your consolations soothe me. (Ps 94: 18-19)

## Wednesday, February 16, 2022

*Ordinary Time*

### Opening Prayer

God our Father, You have promised to remain forever with those who do what is just and right. Help us to live in Your presence. 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 8: 22-26

When Jesus and his disciples arrived at Bethsaida, people brought to him a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him. He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. Putting spittle on his eyes he laid his hands on the man and asked, "Do you see anything?" Looking up the man replied, "I see people looking like trees and walking." Then he laid hands on the man's eyes a second time and he saw clearly; his sight was restored and he could see everything distinctly. Then he sent him home and said, "Do not even go into the village."

### Reflection

- The Gospel today gives an account of the cure of a blind man. This episode of a cure constitutes the beginning of a long instruction from Jesus to the disciples (Mk 8: 27 to 10: 45) and then ends with the cure of another blind man (Mk 10: 46-52). In this broader context, Mark suggests to the readers that those who are truly blind are Peter and the other disciples. All of us are blind! They do not understand the proposal of Jesus when He spoke about the suffering and the cross. Peter accepted Jesus as the Messiah, but not as a suffering Messiah (Mk 8: 27-33). He was also affected by the belief of the time which only spoke of a messiah as a glorious king. Peter seemed to be blind. He understood nothing but wanted Jesus to be as he imagined.
- The Gospel today indicates how difficult it was to cure the first blind man. Jesus had to cure this man in two different stages. The cure of the disciples was also difficult. Jesus had to give a long explanation concerning the significance of the cross to help them understand, because what really produced blindness in them was the cross.
- In the year 70, when Mark was writing, the situation of the communities was not easy. There was much suffering, many crosses. Six years before, in 64, the Emperor Nero had decreed the first great persecution, and many Christians were killed. In the year 70, in Palestine, the Romans were destroying Jerusalem. In the other countries, a great tension between the converted Jews and the non-converted Jews was beginning. The greatest difficulty was the cross of Jesus. The Jews thought that a crucified person could not be the Messiah who was so awaited by the people, because the law affirmed that all those crucified should be considered persons condemned by God (Deut 21: 22-23).

- Mark 8: 22-26: The cure of a blind man. They brought a blind man, asking Jesus to cure him. Jesus cured him, but in a different way. First, He took him outside the village. Then He put some spittle on the eyes, He placed His hands on him and asked, "Do you see something?" The man answered, "I see men; in fact, they seem like trees that walk!" He could see only in part. He exchanged trees for people, or people for trees! Only in a second moment does Jesus cure the blind man and forbids him to enter the village. Jesus did not want any easy advertising!

As it has been said, this description of the cure of the blind man acts as an introduction to the long instruction from Jesus to cure the blindness of the disciples, and at the end He finishes with the cure of another blind man, Bartimaeus. In reality the blind man was Peter. We are all blind. Peter did not want the commitment of the Cross! Do we understand the significance of suffering in life?

- Between the two cures of the blind men (Mk 8: 22-26 and Mk 10: 46-52), is found a long instruction on the Cross (Mk 8: 27 to 10:45). It seems a catechism, made of sayings from Jesus Himself. He speaks about the Cross in the life of the disciple. The long instruction consists of three announcements regarding the Passion. The first one is Mark 8: 27-38. The second is Mark 9:30-37. The third one is in Mark 10: 32-45. Between the first one and the second, there is a series of instructions which indicate the type of conversion that should take place in the life of those who accept Jesus, Messiah Servant (Mk 9: 38 to 10: 31):

- Mk 8: 22-26: the cure of a blind man.
- Mk 8: 27-38: first announcement of the cross.
- Mk 9: 1-29: instructions to the disciples on the Messiah Servant.
- Mk 9: 30-37: second announcement of the cross.
- Mk 9: 38 to 10: 31: instructions to the disciples on conversion.
- Mk 10: 32-45: third announcement of the cross.
- Mk 10: 46-52: the cure of the blind man Bartimaeus.

- The whole of this instruction has as a background the journey from Galilee to Jerusalem. From the beginning to the end of this long instruction, Mark tells us that Jesus is on the way to Jerusalem where He is going to suffer His death (Mk 8:27; 9: 30,33; 10:1,17,32). The full understanding of following Jesus is not achieved by theoretical ideas, but by practical commitment, walking like Him along the way of service, from Galilee up to Jerusalem. Any one who insists on keeping the idea of Peter, that is, of a glorious Messiah without the cross, will understand nothing and will never be able to have the attitude of a true disciple. He will continue to be blind, exchanging people for trees (Mk 8:24), because without the cross it is impossible to understand who Jesus is and what it means to follow Jesus.

The journey of following is a road of the gift of self, of abandonment, of service, of availability, of acceptance of conflict, knowing that there will be resurrection. The cross is not an accident on the way, but forms part of this road. Because in a world organized around egoism, love and service can exist only crucified! Anyone who makes his life a service to others, disturbs and bothers those who live attached to privileges, and therefore suffers.

## Personal Questions

- All believe in Jesus. But some understand Him in one way and others in another. Today, which is the most common Jesus according to the way people think? How does popular belief interfere in the way of seeing Jesus? What do I do so as not to be drawn by the deceit of these popular ideas?
- What does Jesus ask of people who want to follow Him? Today, what prevents you from recognizing and assuming the plans of Jesus?

## Concluding Prayer

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

# Thursday, February 17, 2022

*Ordinary Time*

## Opening Prayer

Lord God, merciful Father, your Son came to set all people free, to make the poor rich in faith and hope, to make the rich aware of their poverty. Unite us all in one trust in you and in one common concern for one another; give us all your attitude and that of Jesus, of not distinguishing between ranks and classes and sexes but of seeking together the freedom brought us by Jesus Christ our Lord.

## Gospel Reading - Mark 8: 27-33

Jesus and his disciples left for the villages round Caesarea Philippi. On the way he put this question to his disciples, 'Who do people say I am?' And they told him, 'John the Baptist, others Elijah, others again, one of the prophets.' 'But you,' he asked them, 'who do you say I am?' Peter spoke up and said to him, 'You are the Christ.' And he gave them strict orders not to tell anyone about him.

Then he began to teach them that the Son of man was destined to suffer grievously, and to be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and to be put to death, and after three days to rise again; and he said all this quite openly. Then, taking him aside, Peter tried to rebuke him.

But, turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said to him, 'Get behind me, Satan! You are thinking not as God thinks, but as human beings do.'

## Reflection

Today's Gospel speaks about Peter's blindness who does not understand the proposal of Jesus when he speaks about suffering and of the Cross. Peter accepts Jesus as Messiah, but not a suffering Messiah. He is influenced by the "yeast of Herod and the Pharisees", that is, by the propaganda of the government of that time in which the Messiah was a glorious Messiah. Peter seemed to be blind. He was not aware of anything, but wanted Jesus to be as he wished. To understand well the importance and weight of this blindness of Peter it is well to consider it in its literary context.

- Literary context: The Gospel of Mark transmits to us three announcements of the Passion and death of Jesus: the first one in Mark 8: 27-38; the second one in Mark 9: 30-37 and the third one in Mark 10: 32-45. This whole which goes up to Mark 10: 45, is a long instruction of Jesus to the disciples to help them to overcome the crisis produced by the Cross. The instruction is introduced by the healing of a blind man (Mk 8: 22-26) and at the end it is concluded with the healing of another blind man (Mk 10: 46-52). The two blind persons represent the blindness of the disciples. The healing of the first blind man was difficult. Jesus had to do it in two stages. The blindness of the disciples was also difficult. Jesus had to give a long explanation concerning the meaning of the Cross to help them understand why the cross was producing blindness in them. Let us consider closely the healing of the blind man:
- Mark 8: 22-26: *The first healing of a blind man.* They took a blind man before Jesus, asking Jesus to cure him. Jesus cures him, but in a different way. First, he takes him outside the village. Then he put some of his saliva on the eyes of the blind man and, laid his hands on him and asked him: Can you see anything? The man answered: I see persons; they look like trees that walk! He could only see one part. He exchanged trees for persons, or persons for trees! Jesus cures him only in the second time. This description of the cure of the blind man introduces the instruction to the disciples, in reality the blind man is Peter. He accepted Jesus as the Messiah, but a glorious Messiah. He saw only one part! He did not want the commitment of the Cross! The blindness of the disciples is also cured by Jesus, in different stages, not all at once.
- Mark 8: 27-30: *The discovery of reality.* Who do people say I am? Jesus asks: "Who do people say I am?" They answered expressing the different opinions: "John the Baptist." "Elijah or one of the Prophets." After having heard the opinions of others, Jesus asks: "And you who do you say I am?" Peter answers: "The Lord, the Christ, the Messiah!" That is, the Lord is the one whom the people are expecting! Jesus agrees with Peter but forbids him to speak about that with the people. Why? Because at that time all expected the coming of the Messiah, but each one in his own way: some expected the king, others the priest, doctor, warrior, judge, prophet! Nobody seemed to be expecting the Messiah, Servant and Suffering, announced by Isaiah (Is 42: 1-9).
- Mark 8: 31-33: *First announcement of the Passion.* Then Jesus began to teach saying that he is the Messiah Servant and affirms that, as Messiah Servant announced by Isaiah, he will soon be condemned to death in carrying out his mission of justice (Is 49: 4-9; 53: 1-12). Peter is horrified; he calls Jesus apart to rebuke him. And Jesus said to him: "Get behind me, Satan! You are thinking not as God thinks, but as human beings do." Peter thought he had given the right answer. In fact, he had said the correct word: "You are the Christ!" But he does not give it the correct sense. Peter does not understand Jesus. He was like the blind man. He exchanged people for trees! The response of Jesus was very hard: "Get behind me, Satan!" Satan is a Hebrew word which means *accuser*, the one who leads others away from the way to God. Jesus does not allow anyone to lead him away from his mission. Literally the text says: "Get behind me, Satan!" Peter has to follow Jesus. He must not change things and intend that Jesus follows Peter.

## For Personal Confrontation

- We all believe in Jesus. But some believe that Jesus is in one way, others in another way. Which is today the most common image that people have of Jesus? Which is the response which people today would give to Jesus' question? And I, what answer do I give?

- What prevents us today from recognizing the Messiah in Jesus?

## Concluding Prayer

I will praise Yahweh from my heart; let the humble hear and rejoice. Proclaim with me the greatness of Yahweh, let us acclaim his name together. (Ps 34: 2-3)

# Friday, February 18, 2022

*Ordinary Time*

## Opening Prayer

Lord our God, we believe in You with all our being. Let this faith never be a lifeless belief in abstract truths outside ourselves, but a deep personal commitment to Your Son Jesus Christ. Give us the courage, we pray You, to live for our brothers and sisters and if need be to lose our life for them and for our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who lives with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

## Gospel Reading - Mark 8: 34-9: 1

Jesus called the people and His disciples to Him and said, 'If anyone wants to be a follower of Mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross and follow Me. Anyone who wants to save his life will lose it; but anyone who loses his life for My sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.

What gain, then, is it for anyone to win the whole world and forfeit his life? And indeed what can anyone offer in exchange for his life?

For if anyone in this sinful and adulterous generation is ashamed of Me and of My words, the Son of man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.'

And He said to them, 'In truth I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power.'

## Reflection

Today's Gospel speaks about the conditions necessary to follow Jesus. Peter does not understand Jesus' proposal when He speaks about suffering and of the cross. Peter accepts Jesus as Messiah, but not a Suffering Messiah. Before this misunderstanding of Peter, Jesus describes the announcement of the Cross and explains the significance of the cross for the life of the disciples (Mk 8: 27 to 9: 1).

- Historical context of Mark: In the years '70's, when Mark writes, the situation of the communities was not easy. There was much suffering; there were many crosses. Six years before, in 64, the Emperor Nero had decreed the first great persecution, killing many Christians. In the year 70, in Palestine, the Romans were destroying Jerusalem. In the other countries an enormous tension between converted Jews and non-converted Jews was beginning to arise. The greatest difficulty was the Cross of Jesus. The Jews thought that a crucified person could not be the Messiah, because the law

affirmed that any crucified person should be considered a cursed person by God (Deut 21: 22-23).

- Mark 8: 34-37: Conditions to follow Jesus. Jesus draws the conclusions which are valid for the disciples, for the Christians of the time of Mark and for us who are living today: If anyone wants to follow Me let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow Me! At that time the cross was death penalty which the Roman Empire attributed to the marginalized. To take up the Cross and follow Him meant, definitively, to accept to be marginalized by the unjust system which legitimized injustice. The Cross was not the fruit of fatalism of history nor demanded by the Father. The Cross is the consequence of the freely assumed commitment by Jesus to reveal the Good News of the One who is Father and that, therefore, all must be accepted and treated as brothers and sisters. Because of this revolutionary announcement, He was persecuted, and He was not afraid to give His own life. There is no greater love than to give one's life for one's brother. Immediately, after Mark inserts two separate phrases of the text.
- Mark 8: 38-9:1: Two phrases: a requirement and an announcement. The first one (Mk 8: 38) is the requirement not to be ashamed of the Gospel, but to have the courage to profess it. The second one (Mk 9: 1), is an announcement about the coming or the presence of Jesus in the facts of life. Some thought that Jesus would come afterwards (1 Thess 4: 15-18). But in fact, Jesus had already come and was already present in the people, especially in the poor. But they were not aware of this. Jesus himself had said, "Every time that you helped the poor, the sick, the homeless, the imprisoned, the pilgrim it was me!" (Mt 25: 34-45).

## For Personal Confrontation

- What is the cross that weighs down on me and which makes my life heavy? How do I bear it?
- To gain or to lose life; to gain the whole world or to lose the soul; to be ashamed of the Gospel or to profess it publicly. How does this take place in my life?

## Concluding Prayer

How blessed is anyone who fears Yahweh, who delights in His commandments! His descendants shall be powerful on earth, the race of the honest shall receive blessings. (Ps 112: 1-2)

# Saturday, February 19, 2022

Ordinary Time

## Opening Prayer

Lord our God, when Your Son was transfigured You gave eyes of faith to the apostles to see beyond appearances and to recognize Jesus as Your beloved Son. This vision gave them courage for the hour of trial. When our faith and trust seem to desert us in dark moments, let Your Son take us up to the mountain and give us a glimpse of His light, that with fresh courage and generosity we may see where He wants us to

go. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

## Gospel Reading - Mark 9: 2-13

Jesus took Peter, James, and John and led them up a high mountain apart by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no fuller on earth could bleach them. Then Elijah appeared to them along with Moses, and they were conversing with Jesus.

Then Peter said to Jesus in reply, "Rabbi, it is good that we are here! Let us make three tents: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." He hardly knew what to say, they were so terrified.

Then a cloud came, casting a shadow over them; then from the cloud came a voice, "This is my beloved Son. Listen to him." Suddenly, looking around, the disciples no longer saw anyone but Jesus alone with them.

As they were coming down from the mountain, he charged them not to relate what they had seen to anyone, except when the Son of Man had risen from the dead. So they kept the matter to themselves, questioning what rising from the dead meant. Then they asked him, "Why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?" He told them, "Elijah will indeed come first and restore all things, yet how is it written regarding the Son of Man that he must suffer greatly and be treated with contempt? But I tell you that Elijah has come and they did to him whatever they pleased, as it is written of him."

## Reflection

Today's Gospel speaks about two facts linked together: the Transfiguration of Jesus and the question regarding the return of the prophet Elijah. At that time people were waiting for the return of the prophet Elijah. Today many people are waiting for the return of Jesus and write on the walls of the city: Jesus will return! They are not aware that Jesus has already returned and is present in our life. Sometimes, like a sudden lightening, this presence of Jesus bursts into our life and enlightens it, transfiguring it.

- The Transfiguration of Jesus takes place after the first announcement of the death of Jesus (Mk 8: 27-30). This announcement had disturbed or upset the minds of the disciples, especially Peter's (Mk 8: 31-33). They were among the poor, but their mind was lost in the ideology of the government and the religion of the time (Mk 8: 15). The cross was an obstacle to belief in Jesus. The Transfiguration of Jesus will help the disciples to overcome the trauma of the cross.
- In the year 70 when Mark was writing, the cross continued to be a great impediment for the Jews to accept Jesus as Messiah. They said, "The cross is a scandal!" (1 Cor 1: 23). One of the greatest efforts of the first Christians consisted in helping people perceive that the cross was neither a scandal, nor madness, but rather the expression of the power and the wisdom of God (1 Cor 1: 22-31). Mark contributes to this. He uses the texts and the figure of the Old Testament to describe the Transfiguration. In this way he indicates that Jesus sees the realization of the prophecies, and the cross was a way toward glory.
- Mark 9: 2-4: Jesus changes appearance. Jesus goes up a high mountain. Luke says that He goes up to pray (Lk 9: 28). Up there, Jesus appears in glory before Peter, James and John. Together with Him appear Moses and Elijah. The high mountain evokes Mount Sinai, where in the past, God had manifested His will to the people,

handing them the Law. The white clothes remind us of Moses with a radiant face when he spoke with God on the mountain and received the law (cf. Ex 43: 29-35) Elijah and Moses, the two greatest authorities of the Old Testament, speak with Jesus. Moses represents the law, Elijah, prophecy. Luke mentions the conversation concerning the “exodus of Jesus,” that is, the death of Jesus in Jerusalem (Lk 9: 31). It is then clear that the Old Testament, both the law as well as prophecy, already taught that for the Messiah Servant the way to glory had to go through the cross!

- Mark 9: 5-6: Peter is pleased, but he does not understand. Peter wants to keep this pleasant moment on the mountain. He offers to build three tents. Mark says that Peter was afraid, without knowing what he was saying, and Luke adds that the disciples were sleepy (Lk 9: 32). They were like us: they had difficulty understanding the cross!
- Mark 9: 7-9: The voice from Heaven clarifies the facts. When Jesus was covered by glory, a voice came from the cloud and said, “This is My Beloved Son! Listen to Him!” The expression “Beloved Son” reminds us of the figure of the Messiah Servant, announced by the prophet Isaiah (cf. Isa 42: 1). The expression: “Listen to Him!” reminds us of the prophecy which promised the coming of a new Moses (cf. Deut 18: 15). In Jesus, the prophecies of the Old Testament are being fulfilled. The disciples can no longer doubt. Jesus is truly the glorious Messiah whom they desired, but the way to glory passes through the cross, according to what was announced by the prophecy of the servant (Isa 53: 3-9). The glory of the Transfiguration proves this. Moses and Elijah confirm it. The Father guarantees it. Jesus accepts it. At the end, Mark says that after the vision, the disciples saw only Jesus and nobody else. From now on, Jesus is the only revelation of God for us! Jesus is alone, the key to understanding all the Old Testament.
- Mark 9: 9-10: To know how to keep silence. Jesus asked the disciples to tell no one what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead, but the disciples did not understand. In fact, they did not understand the meaning of the cross, which links suffering to the resurrection. The cross of Jesus is the proof that life is stronger than death.
- Mark 9: 11-13: The return of the prophet Elijah. The prophet Malachi had announced that Elijah would return to prepare the path for the Messiah (Mal 3: 23-24): this same announcement is found in the Book of Ecclesiasticus/Ben Sira (Sir 48: 10). But how could Jesus be the Messiah if Elijah had not yet returned? This is why the disciples asked, “Why do the scribes say that Elijah has to come before?” (Mk 9: 11). The response of Jesus is clear: “But I tell you Elijah has come and they have treated him as they pleased, just as the scriptures say about him” (9: 13). Jesus was speaking about John the Baptist, who was killed by Herod (Mt 17: 13).

## Personal Questions

- Has your faith in Jesus given you moments of transfiguration and of intense joy? How do these moments of joy give you strength in times of difficulty?
- How can we transfigure today our personal and family life as well as our community life?

## Concluding Prayer

All goes well for one who lends generously, who is honest in all his dealing; for all time to

come he will not stumble, for all time to come the upright will be remembered. (Ps 112: 5-6)

## Sunday, February 20, 2022

*VII Sunday in Ordinary Time*

### Opening Prayer

God our Father, You redeem us and make us Your children in Christ. Look upon us, give us true freedom and bring us to the inheritance You promised. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, Your Son, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

### Gospel Reading - Luke 6: 27-38

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

### Reflection

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

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

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

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

- Luke 6: 37-38: "Do not judge and you will not be judged; do not condemn and you will not be condemned; forgive and you will be forgiven; give and there will be gifts for you; a full measure, pressed down, shaken together, and overflowing, will be poured into your lap; because the standard you use will be the standard used for you." These are four counsels: two in a negative form, do not judge and do not condemn; and two in positive form: to forgive and to give an abundant measure. When He says, "there will be gifts for you," Jesus refers to the treatment which God wants to bestow on us. But when our way of treating others is mean, God cannot use with us the abundant and overflowing measure that He would want to use.
- Celebrate the visit of God. The Discourse on the Plains or the Sermon on the Mount, from the beginning, leads the listeners to make a choice, to opt, in favor of the poor. In the Old Testament, several times, God placed before people this same choice, blessing or curse. People were given the freedom to choose: "Today I call heaven and earth to witness against you: I am offering you life or death, blessing or curse. Choose life, then, so that you and your descendants may live" (Deut 30: 19). It is not God who condemns, but the people themselves according to the choice that they make between life and death, good or evil. These moments of choosing are moments of the visit of God to His people (Gen 21: 1; 50: 24-25); Ex 3: 16; 32: 34; Jr 20: 10; Ps 65: 10; Ps 80: 15; Ps 106: 4). Luke is the only Evangelist who uses this image of the visit of God (Lk 1: 68, 78; 7: 16; 19: 44; Acts 15:1 6). For Luke it is the visit of God which places the choice between blessing or curse before people: "Blessed are you who are poor" and "Alas for you, the rich!" But people do not recognize the visit of God (Lk 19: 44).

## Personal Questions

- Do we look at life and at people with the same viewpoint as Jesus?

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

## Concluding Prayer

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

# Monday, February 21, 2022

*Ordinary Time*

## Opening Prayer

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

## Gospel Reading - Mark 9: 14-29

As they were rejoining the disciples they saw a large crowd round them and some scribes arguing with them.

At once, when they saw him, the whole crowd were struck with amazement and ran to greet him. And he asked them, 'What are you arguing about with them?' A man answered him from the crowd, 'Master, I have brought my son to you; there is a spirit of dumbness in him, and when it takes hold of him it throws him to the ground, and he foams at the mouth and grinds his teeth and goes rigid. And I asked your disciples to drive it out and they were unable to.' In reply he said to them, 'Faithless generation, how much longer must I be among you?

How much longer must I put up with you? Bring him to me.' They brought the boy to him, and at once the spirit of dumbness threw the boy into convulsions, and he fell to the ground and lay writhing there, foaming at the mouth. Jesus asked the father, 'How long has this been happening to him?' 'From childhood,' he said, 'and it has often thrown him into fire and into water, in order to destroy him. But if you can do anything, have pity on us and help us.' 'If you can?' retorted Jesus. 'Everything is possible for one who has faith.' At once the father of the boy cried out, 'I have faith. Help my lack of faith!'

And when Jesus saw that a crowd was gathering, he rebuked the unclean spirit. 'Deaf and dumb spirit,' he said, 'I command you: come out of him and never enter him again.' Then it threw the boy into violent convulsions and came out shouting, and the boy lay there so like a corpse that most of them said, 'He is dead.' But Jesus took him by the hand and helped him up, and he was able to stand.

When he had gone indoors, his disciples asked him when they were by themselves, 'Why were we unable to drive it out?' He answered, 'This is the kind that can be driven out only by prayer.'

## Reflection

The Gospel today informs us that the disciples of Jesus were not able to cast out the devil from the body of a boy. The power of evil was greater than their capacity. Today, also, there are many evils which surpass our capacity to face them: violence, drugs, war, sickness, jobless people, terrorism, etc. We make great efforts in life, but it seems that instead of improving, the world becomes worse. What good is there in struggling? Keeping this question in mind, let us read and meditate on today's Gospel.

- Mark 9: 14-22: The situation of the people: despair without solution. Coming down from the mountain of the Transfiguration, Jesus met many people around the disciples. A parent was in despair, because an evil spirit had taken possession of his son. With detail, Mark describes the situation of the possessed boy, the anguish of the father, the incapacity of the disciples and the reaction of Jesus. Two things strike us in a particular way: on one side, the confusion and the powerlessness of the people and of the disciples in the face of the phenomenon of possession, and on the other hand, the power of faith in Jesus before which the devil loses all his influence. The father had asked the disciples to drive out the devil from the boy, but they were not able to do it. Jesus becomes impatient and says: "Faithless generation! How much longer must I be among you? How much longer must I put up with you? Bring him to me." Jesus asks information regarding the sickness of the boy. And from the response of the father, Jesus knows that the boy, "from childhood," was affected by a serious illness which endangered his life. The father asked: "But if you can do anything, have pity on us and help us!" The phrase of the father expresses a very real situation of the people: (a) they are faithless; (b) they are not in a condition to solve the problem, but (c) have such good will.
- Mark 9: 23-27: The answer of Jesus: the way of faith. The father answers: Lord, I believe! But help my lack of faith! The response of the father has the central place in this episode. It indicates that this should be the attitude of the disciple, that, in spite of his/her limitations and doubts, he/she wants to be faithful. Seeing that many people were coming, Jesus acted rapidly. He ordered the spirit to get out of the boy and not to return "again ever!" This is a sign of the power of Jesus on evil. It is also a sign that Jesus did not want any popular propaganda.
- Mark 9: 28-29: Deepening this with the disciples. In the house, the disciples want to know why they were not able to drive out the devil. Jesus answers: This is the kind of evil spirit that can be driven out only by prayer! Faith and prayer go together. One does not exist without the other. The disciples had become worse. Before they were capable of driving out the devil (cfr. Mk 6: 7, 13). Now, no more. What is lacking? Faith or prayer? Why is it lacking? These are questions which come from the text and enter into our head in a way that we can proceed also to a kind of revision of our life.
- The expulsion of the devils in the Gospel of Mark. During the time of Jesus many persons spoke of Satan and of the expulsion of the devils. People were afraid and, there were some persons who profited and took advantage of the fear of the people. The power of evil had many names: Demon, Devil, Beelzebul, Prince of Demons, Satan, Dragon, Domination, Power, Beast-wild animal, Lucifer, etc. (cfr. Mk 3: 22-23; Mt 4: 1; Rv 12: 9; Rm 8: 38; Eph 1: 21). Today also, among us the power of evil has many names. It is enough to consult the dictionary and look for the word Devil or Demon. Today, also, many dishonest people enrich themselves, profiting of the fear which people have of the devil. Now, one of the objectives of the Good News of Jesus is, precisely, to help people to free themselves from this fear. The coming of the Kingdom of God means the coming of a stronger power. The strong man was an image which indicated the power of evil which maintained people imprisoned by fear (Mk 3: 27). The power of fear oppresses persons and makes them lose

themselves. He does in such a way that they live in fear and death (cfr. Mk 5: 2). It is such a strong power that nobody can stop it (Mk 5: 4). The Roman Empire with its "Legion" (cfr. Mk 5: 9), that is, with its armies, was the instrument used to maintain this situation of oppression. But Jesus is the strongest man who overcomes, seizes and drives out the power of evil! In the Letter to the Romans, the Apostle Paul gives a list of all the possible powers or demons which could threaten us and he summarizes everything in this way: "I am certain of this: neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nothing already in existence and nothing still to come, nor any power, nor the heights nor the depths, nor any created thing whatever, will be able to come between us and the love of God, known to us in Christ Jesus, our Lord!" (Rm 8: 38-39). Nothing of all this! And the first words of Jesus after the Resurrection are: "Do not be afraid! Rejoice! Do not fear! Peace be with you!" (Mk 16: 6; Mt 28: 9-10; Lk 24: 36; Jn 20: 21).

## Personal Questions

- Have you ever lived an experience of powerlessness before some evil or violence? Was this an experience for you only or also for the community? How did you overcome it
- Which is the type of evil today which can only be overcome with much prayer?

## Concluding Prayer

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

# Tuesday, February 22, 2022

*Feast of the Chair of St. Peter, Apostle*

## Opening Prayer

Father of everlasting goodness, our origin and guide, be close to us and hear the prayers of all who praise You. Forgive our sins and restore to life. Keep us safe in Your love.

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

## Gospel Reading – Mt. 16: 13-10

Jesus went into the region of Caesarea Philippi and he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" They replied, "Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter said in reply, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus said to him in reply, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah. For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father. And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys to the Kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." Then he strictly ordered his disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ. From that time on,

Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer greatly from the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed and on the third day be raised. Then Peter took Jesus aside and began to rebuke him, "God forbid, Lord! No such thing shall ever happen to you." He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are an obstacle to me. You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do."

## Reflection

- We are now in the narrative part between the discourse on the Parables (Mt 13) and the discourse on the community (Mt 18). In these narrative parts which link together the five discourses, Matthew usually follows the sequence of the Gospel of Mark. Once in a while, he gives other information, also known by Luke. Here and there, he quotes texts which appear only in the Gospel of Matthew, like, for example, the conversation between Jesus and Peter in today's Gospel. This text has different interpretations and even contradictory ones among the diverse Christian Churches.
- At that time, the communities fostered a very strong affective bond of union with the leaders who had given origin to the community. For example, the communities of Antioch in Syria fostered their relationship with Peter. Those of Greece promoted their relationship with Paul; some communities of Asia, with the Beloved Disciple and others with the person of John of the Apocalypse. Identification with these leaders to whom they owed their origin helped the communities to build better their identity and spirituality. But this could also be a reason for dispute, like in the case of the community of Corinth (1 Cor 1: 11-12).
- Matthew 16: 13-16 - The opinions of the people and of the disciples concerning Jesus. Jesus asks the opinion of the people concerning Himself, the Son of Man. The responses are varied: John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, one of the Prophets. When Jesus asks the disciples' opinion, Peter becomes the spokesman and says, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God!" The response is not a new one. Previously, the disciples had said the same thing (Mt 14: 33). In John's Gospel, the same profession of faith is made by Martha (Jn 11: 27). It means that the prophecies of the Old Testament are realized in Jesus.
- Matthew 16: 17 - Jesus' response to Peter: "Blessed are you, Simon!" Jesus proclaims Peter "Blessed" because he has received a revelation from the Father. Here, also, the response of Jesus is not new. Before, Jesus had praised the Father because He had revealed the Son to the little ones and not to the wise (Mt 11: 25-27) and had made the same proclamation of joy to the disciples who were seeing and hearing new things which, up until then, nobody had known or heard (Mt 13: 16).
- Matthew 16: 18-20 - The attributions of Peter: To be rock and to receive the keys of the Kingdom.
  - (a) To be rock: Peter has to be Rock that is the stable basis for the Church in such a way that it can prevail against the gates of hell. With these words which Jesus addressed to Peter, Matthew encourages the persecuted community of Syria and Palestine, to see in Peter the leader who belongs to their origin. In spite of persecution and weakness, the community has a firm basis, guaranteed by the word of Jesus. The notion of being rock based on faith evokes the word of God to the people in exile: "Listen to Me, you who pursue saving justice, you who seek Yahweh; consider the rock (pietra) from which you were hewn, the quarry from which you were dug; consider Abraham your father, and Sarah who gave birth to you. When I called him, he was the only one, but I blessed him and made

him numerous" (Isa 51: 1-2). This indicates that a new beginning of the People of God is with Peter.

- (b) The keys of the Kingdom: Peter receives the keys of the Kingdom. The same power of binding and loosing is also given to the communities (Mt 18: 18) and to the other disciples (Jn 20: 23). One of the points on which the Gospel of Matthew insists is reconciliation and pardon. It is one of the more important tasks of coordinators of the communities. By imitating Peter, they should bind and loosen, that is, do in such a way that there is reconciliation and reciprocal acceptance, construction of fraternity, even up to seventy times (Mt 18: 22).
- Matthew 16: 21-22 - Jesus completes what was missing in Peter's response, and Peter reacts. Jesus begins saying that He had "to go to Jerusalem and suffer very much on the part of the Elders, of the high priests and of the scribes, and be killed and on the third day, rise from the dead." Saying that He had to go and would be killed, or that it was necessary to suffer, He indicated that suffering had been foreseen by the prophecies. The way of the Messiah is not only one of triumph and glory, but also one of suffering and of the cross! If Peter accepts Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God, he has to accept Him also as Messiah servant who will be killed. But Peter does not accept Jesus' correction and tries to draw Him away. Taking Jesus aside, he began to rebuke Him: Heaven preserve You, Lord, this must not happen to You!"
- Matthew 16: 23 - Jesus' reply to Peter: stumbling stone. Jesus' response is surprising. Peter wanted to steer Jesus in another direction. Jesus reacts: "Get behind Me, Satan. You are an obstacle in My path, because you are thinking not as God thinks but as human beings do." Peter has to follow Jesus, and not the contrary. Jesus is the one who gives the directions. Satan is the one who draws people away from the road traced by Jesus. Once again the expression rock – *pietra* - appears, but now in the contrary sense. Peter, at one time, is the supporting rock; at other times, the stumbling block! The communities at the time of Matthew were like that, characterized by ambiguity. This is the way we all are, according to what John Paul II said, that the papacy itself was characterized by the same ambiguity of Peter: rock of support for the faith and stumbling block in the faith.

## Personal Questions

- What are the opinions about Jesus which exist in our community? These differences in the way of living and of expressing faith, do they enrich the community or do they render the way more difficult?
- What type of rock is our community? What is our mission?

## Concluding Prayer

Give me back the joy of Your salvation, sustain in me a generous spirit. I shall teach the wicked Your paths, and sinners will return to You. (Ps 51: 12-13)

# Wednesday, February 23, 2022

*Ordinary Time*

## Opening Prayer

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

## Gospel Reading - Mark 9: 38-40

John said to Jesus, "Teacher, we saw someone driving out demons in your name, and we tried to prevent him because he does not follow us." Jesus replied, "Do not prevent him. There is no one who performs a mighty deed in my name who can at the same time speak ill of me. For whoever is not against us is for us."

## Reflection

Today's Gospel narrates quite a beautiful and actual example of the pedagogy of Jesus. It shows us how He helped His disciples to perceive and to overcome the "yeast of the Pharisees and of Herod."

- Mk 9: 38-40: *A closed mentality: He was not one of ours*"Someone who did not belong to the community used the name of Jesus to drive out devils. John, the disciple, sees this and forbids it: *We have stopped him because he was not one of us.* In the name of the community, he forbids that the other one can do a good deed! He thinks that being a disciple, he can have a monopoly on Jesus, and because of this, he wants to forbid that others use the name of Jesus to do good. This was the closed mentality of the "chosen People, a separated People!" Jesus responds: "*You must not stop him; no one who works a miracle in my name could soon afterwards speak evil of me. Anyone who is not against us is for us.*" (Mk 9: 40). It would be very difficult to find a more ecumenical affirmation than this affirmation of Jesus. For Jesus, what is important is not if the person forms part of the community or not, but rather if the person does the good which the community should do.
- *A picture of Jesus, formator of His disciples.* Jesus, the Master, is the axis, the center, and the model of formation given to the disciples. By His attitudes He is an example of the Kingdom. He embodies the love of God and reveals it (Mk 6: 31; Mt 10: 30; Lk 15: 11-32). Many small gestures show this witness of life with which Jesus marked His presence in the life of the disciples, preparing them for life and for their mission. This was His way of giving a human form to the experience which He had of God, the Father. The following is a picture of Jesus, the formator of His disciples:
  - He involves them in the mission (Mk 6: 7; Lk 9 :1-2; 10: 1) when they return He reviews with them all that they have lived (Lk 10: 17-20)
  - He corrects them when they fail and want to be the first ones (Mk 9: 33-35; 10: 14-15)
  - He waits for the opportune moment to correct them (Lk 9: 46-48; Mk 10: 14-15)
  - He helps them to discern (Mk 9: 18-19)
  - He challenges them when they are slow (Mk 4:13; 8:14-21)
  - He prepares them to face the conflict (Jn 16: 33; Mt 10: 17-25)
  - He orders them to observe reality (Mk 8: 27-29; Jn 4: 35; Mt 16: 1-3)
  - He reflects with them on questions of the moment (Lk 13: 1-5)
  - He confronts them with the needs of the people (Jn 6: 5)

- He teaches them that the needs of the people are above the ritual prescriptions (Mt 12: 7-12)
- He meets alone with them so as to be able to instruct them (Mk 4: 34; 7: 17; 9: 30-31; 10: 10; 13: 3)
- He knows how to listen even if the dialogue is difficult (Jn 4: 7-42)
- He helps them to accept themselves (Lk 22: 32)
- He is demanding and asks them to leave everything out of love for Him (Mk 10: 17-31)
- He is severe concerning hypocrisy (Lk 11: 37-53)
- He asks more questions than gives responses (Mk 8: 17-21)
- He is firm and does not allow himself to deviate from the right path (Mk 8: 33; Lk 9: 54)
- He prepares them for conflict and persecution (Mt 10: 16-25).

Formation was not, in the first place, the transmission of truths to be remembered, but the communication of the new experience of God and the life which radiates from Jesus for the disciples. The community which was forming around Jesus was the expression of this new experience. Formation led people to have a different way of looking, to have different attitudes. It gave them a new conscience concerning the mission and concerning themselves. It helped them to place themselves at the side of the excluded. And soon afterwards, it produced “conversion” as a consequence of the acceptance of the Good News (Mk 1: 15).

## Personal Questions

- *“Anyone who is not against us is for us.”* How do we define “for us” and “against us” today with so many variations in Christian beliefs?
- If someone selectively and creatively creates their own “doctrine” and interpretations of Jesus’ teachings, are they “for us” or “against us”?
- How does my formation in Jesus take place in my life? Is it a serious, ongoing process, or whatever comes along?
- Go back to the list of how Jesus does formation. Read each, adding the question “how does He do this for me personally?” at the end of each line. Then answer each for your own formation.

## Concluding Prayer

Bless Yahweh, my soul, from the depths of my being, His holy name; bless Yahweh, my soul, never forget all His acts of kindness. (Ps 103: 1-2)

# Thursday, February 24, 2022

Ordinary Time

## Opening Prayer

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

## Gospel Reading - Mark 9: 41-50

Jesus said to his disciples: "Anyone who gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ, amen, I say to you, will surely not lose his reward. "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were put around his neck and he were thrown into the sea. If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed than with two hands to go into Gehenna, into the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life crippled than with two feet to be thrown into Gehenna.

And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. Better for you to enter into the Kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into Gehenna, where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched. "Everyone will be salted with fire. Salt is good, but if salt becomes insipid, with what will you restore its flavor? Keep salt in yourselves and you will have peace with one another."

## Reflection

Today's Gospel narrates some advice from Jesus on the relationship of adults with the little ones and the excluded. At that time, many persons were excluded and marginalized. They could not participate. Many of them would lose their faith. The text on which we are going to meditate now contains strange affirmations which, if taken literally, cause perplexity in the reader.

- Mark 9: 41 - *A glass of water will be rewarded.* A phrase from Jesus is inserted here: If anyone gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ, then in truth I tell you, he will most certainly not lose his reward. Two thoughts: 1) "Anyone who gives you a cup of water to drink". Jesus is going to Jerusalem to give His life. A gesture of great donation! But He does not forget the small gestures in life each day: a cup of water, an act of acceptance or kindness, to give alms, so many gestures. Anyone who rejects and despises the brick will never be able to construct a house! 2) "... because you belong to Christ": Jesus identifies Himself with us who want to belong to Him. This means that for Him we have great value. The word here is *because*, not *if*. To give a cup of water *because* the receiver belongs to Christ also acknowledges Christ! In this act of kindness, the giver is also acknowledging Christ by his action.
- Mark 9: 42 - *Who is a cause of scandal for these little ones.* *Scandal*, literally, it is a stone along the road, a stone in the shoe. It is what leads a person away from the right path. *To scandalize the little ones* is to be the cause of why the little ones go away from the right path and lose their faith in God. Anyone who does this receives the following sentence: "*It would have been better to be thrown into the sea with a great millstone hung round his neck!*" Jesus identifies Himself with the little ones (Mt 23: 40-45). Today, in the whole world, many little ones, many poor people, are leaving the traditional churches. Every year, in Latin America, approximately three million people leave to other churches. They cannot believe what we profess! Why does this happen? Is this an action taken in full knowledge and as a definitive statement? Is it based on a lack of understanding or teaching? Up to what point are we to be blamed for this? Do we also merit having a millstone round our neck?

- Mark 9: 43-48 - *To cut off your hand and your foot and to tear out your eye.* Jesus orders the person to cut off the hand, the foot, to tear out the eye, in the case in which they are cause of scandal. And He says: “*It is better to enter into life or into the Kingdom with one foot (hand, eye) than to be thrown into hell with two feet, (hands, eyes)*”. These phrases are not to be taken literally, but rather, that there is nothing so important that it should be retained if it were to keep a person from entering the Kingdom. They mean that the person has to be rooted in his/her choice of God and of the Gospel. It might seem obvious that a person can't be more attached to something than their own hand or foot, but many are – to their money, their car or house, their social position, or even more trivial things. It is better to cut off the things that are not in alignment with the priorities of the Kingdom.
- The expression “*hell*”, *where their worm will never die nor their fire be put out*”, is an image to indicate the situation of a person who remains without God. “*Gehenna*” was the name of a valley near Jerusalem. Jeremiah condemns it (II Kings 23: 10; Jer 7: 31; 32: 35 et al.; see *Moloch*) as a place where children were cult sacrificed, which is the predominant rabbinical thought. Rabbi David Kimhi's commentary (ca. 1200 AD) stated it was where the trash of the city was thrown and where a fire was always burning to burn the trash. This place, terrible either way, full of stench, was used by the people to symbolize the situation of the person who did not participate in the Kingdom of God.
- Mark 9: 49-50 - *Salt and Peace.* These two verses help us to understand the severe words on scandal. Jesus says: “Have salt in yourselves and be at peace with one another!” The community, in which the members live in *peace with one another*, is like a bit of salt which gives flavor to all the meal. To live in peace and fraternally in the community is the salt that gives flavor to the life of the people of the community. It is a sign of the *Kingdom*, a revelation of the Good News of God. Are we salt? The salt which does not give flavor is good for nothing! Has our salt become insipid?
- *Jesus accepts and defends the life of the little ones.* Several times, Jesus insists that little ones should be accepted. “Anyone who welcomes a little child in my name welcomes me” (Mk 9: 37). Anyone who gives a cup of water to one of these little ones will not lose his reward (Mt 10: 42). He asks not to despise little ones (Mt 18: 10). And at the final judgment the just will be received because they would have given something to eat “to one of these little ones” (Mt 25: 40). If Jesus insists so much on acceptance of the little ones, it is because there are many simple people considered less, who are not accepted! In fact, women and children were not taken into account (Mt 14: 21; 15: 38), they were despised (Mt 18:10) and reduced to silence (Mt 21: 15-16). Even the Apostles prevented the children from getting close to Jesus (Mt 19: 13-14). In the name of the Law of God, misinterpreted by the religious authority of the time, many good people were excluded. Instead of welcoming the excluded, the law was used to legitimize the exclusion. In the Gospels, the expression “little ones” (in Greek it is said *elachisto, mikroï or nepioï*), sometimes indicates “the children”, and other times it indicates the sections excluded by society. It is not easy to discern. Sometimes the “little ones” in the Gospel means “the children”. This because *the children* belonged to the category of the “little ones,” of the excluded. Besides, it is not always easy to discern between what comes from the time of Jesus and that which comes from the time of the communities for which the Gospels were written. Even if things were like this, what is clear is the context of exclusion which reigned at the time and which the first communities kept from Jesus: He places Himself on the side of the little ones and the excluded and takes up their defense.

## Personal Questions

- Today in our society and in our community, who are the little ones and the excluded? How are they accepted on our part?
- *“Anyone who welcomes a little child in my name welcomes me”* (Mk 9:37). How does this apply to welcoming a child versus abortion in our society?
- We spoke of *“Anyone who is not against us is for us”* yesterday, and its relation to other Christian doctrinal interpretations. We talk about ecumenism. Today we talked about so many people leaving to other churches. These are various views on the same thing. How do they fit together?
- “A millstone round the neck” Does my behavior deserve a millstone or a cord round the neck? What does the behavior of our community deserve?

## Concluding Prayer

The Lord forgives all your offenses, cures all your diseases, He redeems your life from the abyss, crowns you with faithful love and tenderness. (Ps 103: 3-4)

# Friday, February 25, 2022

*Ordinary Time*

## Opening Prayer

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

## Gospel Reading - Mark 10: 1-12

Jesus came into the district of Judea and across the Jordan. Again, crowds gathered around him and, as was his custom, he again taught them. The Pharisees approached him and asked, "Is it lawful for a husband to divorce his wife?" They were testing him. He said to them in reply, "What did Moses command you?" They replied, "Moses permitted a husband to write a bill of divorce and dismiss her." But Jesus told them, "Because of the hardness of your hearts he wrote you this commandment. But from the beginning of creation, God made them male and female. For this reason, a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. So they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, no human being must separate." In the house the disciples again questioned Jesus about this. He said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her; and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery."

## Reflection

Yesterday's Gospel indicated the advice given by Jesus on the relationship between adults and children, between the great and the little ones in society. Today's Gospel advises us how the relationship between man and woman should be, between wife and

husband.

- Mark 10:1-2: *the question of the Pharisees: "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" The question is a malicious one. It wants to put Jesus to the test.* This is a sign that Jesus had a different opinion, because if this was not so the Pharisees would not have questioned Him on this matter. They do not ask if it is lawful for the wife to divorce the husband. That was not allowed. This is a clear sign of the strong dominion of men and the marginalization of women in the society of that time.
- Mark 10: 3-9 - *The answer of Jesus: man cannot divorce his wife.* Instead of responding, Jesus asks: *"What did Moses command you?"* The Law permitted a man to draw up a writ of dismissal in cases of divorce. This permission reveals the reigning machismo of the time. Man could divorce his wife, but the woman did not have the same right. Jesus explains that Moses acted that way because they were so hardhearted, but that the intention of God was different when He created the human being. Jesus goes back to the plan of the Creator and denies to man the right to divorce his wife. He takes away the privilege of man regarding his wife and asks for the maximum equality between the two.
- Mark 10: 10, 12 - *Equality of man and woman.* At home the disciples asked Jesus something on this point. Jesus draws the conclusions and reaffirms the equality of rights and duties between man and woman. The Gospel of Matthew adds a comment of the disciples on this point. They say: *"If that is how things are between husband and wife, it is advisable not to marry"* (Mt 19 :10). Jesus goes to the very depth of the question and says that there are only three cases in which a person is permitted not to get married: *"Not everyone can understand it but only those to whom it is granted. In fact there are eunuchs born so from their mother's womb; there are eunuchs made so by human agency and there are eunuchs who have made themselves so for the sake of the kingdom of Heaven. Let anyone accept this who can.* (Mt 19: 11-12). The three cases are: "(a) impotence, (b) castration, and (c) for the Kingdom. Not to get married only because man does not want to lose dominion over woman, this is not permitted by the *New Law of Love!* Matrimony as well as celibacy should be at the service of the Kingdom and not at the service of egoistic or selfish interests. Neither one of these can be a reason to maintain man's dominion on woman. Jesus changed the relationship man-woman, wife-husband.

## Personal Questions

- Equality in society is always framed in terms of power. Yet, this last week we have read almost every day about service, humility, and welcoming children. Jesus taught us to serve, to be humble, to welcome and care for the children in order to reach the Kingdom of God. It is not for the powerful. Who is closer to the Kingdom?
- In the life of my family and of my community, do we focus on power, or on service and humility as a basis for equality?
- Within community, how important to equality is listening, obedience, and prayer (*obsculta, oboedientia, oratio*) and what roles and purpose do each of these contribute to equality?

## Concluding Prayer

Yahweh is tenderness and pity, slow to anger and rich in faithful love; His indignation

does not last forever, nor His resentment remain for all time. (Ps 103: 8-9)

## Saturday, February 26, 2022

*Ordinary Time*

### Opening Prayer

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

### Gospel Reading - Mark 10: 13-16

People were bringing children to Jesus that he might touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this he became indignant and said to them, "Let the children come to me; do not prevent them, for the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Amen, I say to you, whoever does not accept the Kingdom of God like a child will not enter it." Then he embraced the children and blessed them, placing his hands on them.

### Reflection

The Gospel of two days ago indicated the advice of Jesus concerning the relationship of the adults with little ones and with the excluded (Mk 9: 41-50). Yesterday's Gospel indicated the advice on the relationship between man and woman, husband and wife (Mk 10: 1-12). Today's Gospel indicates the advice on the relationship between parents and sons. Jesus asked for the greatest acceptance for the little ones and the excluded. In the relationship man-woman, He asked for the greatest equality. Now, with the sons and their mother, He asks for the greatest tenderness.

- Mark 10: 13-16 - *Receive the Kingdom like a child*. People brought little children to Him, for Him to touch them. The disciples wanted to prevent this. Why? The text does not say it. Perhaps because according to the ritual norms of the time, the small children with their mothers lived almost constantly the legal impurity. To touch them meant to become impure! If they touched Jesus, He would become impure! But Jesus does not feel uncomfortable with this ritual norm of legal purity. He corrects the disciples and welcomes the mothers with the children. *He touches them, embraces them saying: "Let the little children come to me, do not stop them: for it is to such as these that the Kingdom of God belongs."* And He comments: *"In truth I tell you, anyone who does not accept the Kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it."* And then Jesus embraces the children and blesses them and laid His hands on them. What does this phrase mean? (a) The children receive everything from their parents. They cannot merit what they receive but live from gratuitous love. (b) The parents receive the children as a gift from God and take care of them with the greatest possible love. The concern of the parents is not to dominate the children, but to love them, educate them in a way in which they can grow and be fulfilled! *This* is the relationship we have with our Father in Heaven! We must be just like these children.

- *A sign of the Kingdom - To welcome the little ones and the excluded.* There are many signs of the acting presence of the Kingdom in the life and the activity of Jesus. One of these is the way of welcoming, of accepting the little ones and the children:
  - *To welcome them and not scandalize them.* One of the hardest words of Jesus was against those who cause scandal to the little ones, that is, who are the reason so that the little ones no longer believe in God. For them it is better to have a millstone hung round their neck and be thrown into the sea (Mk 9: 42; Lk 17: 2; Mt 18: 6).
  - To identify oneself with the little ones. Jesus embraces the little ones and identifies Himself with them. Anyone who receives a child, "receives Me" (Mk 9: 37). "And as long as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to Me". (Mt 25: 40).
  - *To become like children.* Jesus asks the disciples to become like children and to accept the Kingdom as they do. Otherwise, it is not possible to enter into the Kingdom (Mk 10: 15; Mt 18: 3; Lk 9:4 6-48). He makes the children teachers of adults! And that is not normal. Generally, we do the contrary.
  - *To defend the right that children have to shout and yell.* When Jesus, entering into the Temple, turned over the tables of the money changers, the children were those who shouted the most: "Hosanna to the Son of David!" (Mt 21: 15). Criticized by the high priests and by the Scribes, Jesus defends them and in defending them He recalls the Scriptures (Mt 21: 16).
  - *To be pleasing for the Kingdom present in little children.* Jesus' joy is great, when He perceives that the children, the little ones, understand the things of the Kingdom which He announced to the people." *"I bless you, Father!"* (Mt 11: 25-26). Jesus recognizes that the little ones understand the things of the Kingdom better than the doctors!
  - *To welcome, accept and take care.* Many are the little children and the young whom Jesus accepts, takes care of and raises from the death: the daughter of Jairus who was 12 years old (Mk 5: 41-42), the daughter of the Canaanite woman (Mk 7: 29-30), the son of the widow of Nain (Lk 7: 14-15), the epileptic boy (Mk 9: 25-26), the son of the Centurion (Lk 7: 9-10), the son of the public officer (Jn 4: 50), the boy with the five loaves of bread and two fish (Jn 6: 9).

## Personal Questions

- In our society and in our community, who are the little ones and the excluded? How do we welcome and accept them?
- What have I learned in my life from children concerning the Kingdom of God?
- There are so many ways modern adults are not like children. What can I do to become more child-like for the Father and in relation to my peers; imitative, obedient, humble, grateful, innocent? Do I even want to?
- I place myself as innocent, obedient, humble, and grateful into my world of friends, my business, recreation and my responsibilities. What happens? How am I perceived by the world around me? If I continue to be this way, how would this make a better world?

## Concluding Prayer

Yahweh, I am calling, hurry to Me, listen to my voice when I call to You. May my prayer be like incense in Your presence, my uplifted hands like the evening sacrifice. (Ps 141: 1-2)

## Sunday, February 27, 2022

*Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time*

### Opening Prayer

God our Father, You redeem us and make us Your children in Christ. Look upon us, give us true freedom and bring us to the inheritance You promised. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, Your Son, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

### Gospel Reading - Luke 6: 39-42

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

### Reflection

Today's Gospel gives us some of the passages of the discourse which Jesus pronounced on the plain after having spent the night in prayer (Lk 6: 12) and after He had called the twelve to be His apostles (Lk 6: 13-14). Many of the sayings in this discourse had already been pronounced on other occasions, but Luke, imitating Matthew, puts them together in this Sermon on the Plain.

- Luke 6:39: The parable of the blind man who guides another blind man. Jesus tells a parable to the disciples: "Can a blind man guide another blind man? Will not both of them fall into a hole?" A parable of one line, quite similar to the warnings which, in Matthew's Gospel, are addressed to the Pharisees: "Alas for you, blind guides!" (Mt 23:16-17,19,24,26) Here in the context of the Gospel of Luke, this parable is addressed to the animators of the communities who consider themselves the masters of truth, superior to others and because of this, they are blind guides.
- Luke 6:40: Disciple – Master. "The disciple is not greater than the teacher, but the well prepared disciple will be like the teacher" Jesus is the Master, not the professor. The professor in class teaches different subjects, but does not live with the pupils. The Master or Lord does not teach lessons; he lives with the pupils. His subject matter is himself, his life witness, his way of living the things that he teaches. Living together with the Master, the Lord has three aspects:
  - (1) the Master is the model or example to be imitated (cf. Jn 13: 13-15).
  - (2) The disciple not only contemplates and imitates, he commits himself to the

same destiny of the Master, with his temptations (Lk 22:28), his persecution (Mt 10: 24-25), his death (Jn 11: 16);

(3) He not only imitates the model, he not only assumes the commitment, but arrives at identifying himself with Him: "I live, but it is not I who live, but Christ lives in me!" (Gal 2: 20). This third aspect is the mystical dimension of the following of Jesus, fruit of the action of the Spirit.

- Luke 6: 41-42: The splinter in the brother's eye. "Why do you observe the splinter in your brother's eye and never notice the great log in your own? How can you say to your brother: 'Brother, let me take out that splinter in your eye, when you cannot see the great log in your own? Hypocrite! Take the log out of your own eye first, and then you will see clearly enough to take out the splinter in your brother's eye". In the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew treats the same theme and explains a bit better the parable of the splinter in the eye. Jesus asks for a creative attitude which will make us capable of going and encountering others without judging them, without preconceptions and rationalizing, but accepting the brother (Mt 7: 1-5). This total openness toward others considering them as brothers/sisters will arise in us only when we are capable of relating to God with total trust as His children (Mt 7: 7-11).

## Personal Questions

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

## Concluding Prayer

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

# Monday, February 28, 2022

*Ordinary Time*

## Opening Prayer

Lord, guide the course of world events and give Your Church the joy and peace of serving You in freedom. You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

## Gospel Reading - Mark 10: 17-27

As Jesus was setting out on a journey, a man ran up, knelt down before him, and asked him, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus answered him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: You shall not kill; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal; you shall not bear false witness; you shall not defraud; honor your father and your mother."

He replied and said to him, "Teacher, all of these I have observed from my youth." Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said to him, "You are lacking in one thing. Go, sell what you have, and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." At that statement, his face fell, and he went away sad, for he had many possessions. Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the Kingdom of God!" The disciples were amazed at his words. So, Jesus again said to them in reply, "Children, how hard it is to enter the Kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for one who is rich to enter the Kingdom of God." They were exceedingly astonished and said among themselves, "Then who can be saved?" Jesus looked at them and said, "For men it is impossible, but not for God. All things are possible for God."

## Reflection

The Gospel today narrates two events: (a) it tells the story of a rich man who asks how to obtain eternal life (Mk 10: 17-22), and (b) Jesus warns on the danger of riches (Mk 10:23-27). The rich man does not accept the proposal of Jesus because he was very rich. A rich person believes he is protected by the security which is given to him by his riches. He has difficulty opening his hand and detaching himself from this security. He seizes the advantage of his goods and lives being concerned about defending his own interests. A poor person is not accustomed with this concern. But there may also be some poor people who have the mentality of the rich. Then, the desire for riches creates in them dependence and makes them become slaves of consumerism. They have no time to dedicate themselves to the service of neighbor. Keeping these problems in mind, problems of persons and of countries, let us read and meditate on the text of the rich man.

- Mark 10: 17-19 - *The observance of the commandments and eternal life.* A person came up to Jesus and asked: "*Good Master, what must I do to inherit eternal life?*" The Gospel of Matthew tells us that it was the case of a *young man* (Mt 19: 20-22). Jesus responds abruptly: "*Why do you call Me good? No one is good but God alone!*" Jesus takes away the attention from Himself to direct it toward God, because what is important is to do God's will, to reveal the Father's plan. Then Jesus affirms: "*You know the commandments: You shall not kill. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not give false witness. You shall not defraud. Honor your father and mother.*" It is important to always observe the response of Jesus. The young man had asked something concerning eternal life. He wanted to live *together with God*. But Jesus does not mention the first three commandments which define our relationship with God! He mentioned only those which indicate respect for the *life lived together with others*. According to Jesus, we can only be well with God if we know how to be well with our neighbor. It serves nothing to deceive ourselves. The door to reach God is our neighbor.
- Mark 10: 20 - *What good is it to observe the commandments?* The young man answered that he observed the commandments since his earliest days. What is strange is what follows. He wanted to know which was the way to eternal life. Now, *the way of life* was, and continues to be, to do God's will expressed in the *commandments*. It means that he observed the commandments without knowing for what purpose. Otherwise, he would not have asked any questions. This is what can happen today to many Catholics: they do not know what it means to be Catholic. "I was born in a Catholic country; this is why I am Catholic!" It is mindless!

- Mark 10: 21-22 - To share the goods with the poor and to follow Jesus. Hearing the response of the young man, “Jesus looked at him and was full of love for him and said: You need to do one more thing: go and sell what you own and give the money to the poor and you will have a treasure in heaven, then come, follow Me!” The observance of the commandments is only the first step of a stairway that goes higher. Jesus asks more! The observance of the commandments prepares the person for the total gift of self on behalf of neighbor. Jesus asks for much, but he asks it with much love. The rich young man does not accept the proposal of Jesus and goes away not just because he was a man of great wealth, but because he valued that wealth above all others.
- Mark 10: 23-27 - *The camel and the eye of the needle.* After the young man left, Jesus commented on His decision: “How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!” The disciples were astounded. Jesus repeats the same phrase and adds: “It is easier that a camel passes through the eye of a needle than for someone rich to enter the kingdom of God!”
- The expression “enter the kingdom” not only indicates in the first-place entrance into heaven after death, but also and above all, the entrance into the community around Jesus. The community is and should be a model of the Kingdom. The reference to the impossibility for *a camel to pass through the eye of a needle* comes from a popular proverb of the time used by the people to say that a thing was, humanly speaking, impossible and unfeasible.

The disciples were astounded by hearing this and they ask themselves: “*Then who can be saved?*” This is a sign that they had not understood the response of Jesus to the young rich man: “*Go, sell all you own and give the money to the poor and then come follow me.*”

The young man had observed the commandments since his earliest days, but without understanding the reason for this observance. Something similar was happening to the disciples. They had already abandoned all their goods as Jesus had asked the young rich man, but without understanding the reason, the *why* of this abandonment. If they had understood, they would not have been astounded at the demands of Jesus. When riches, or the desire for riches, occupies the heart and the gaze, the person cannot perceive the sense of the Gospel. Only God can help! Jesus looks at the disciples and says: “*Impossible for man but not for God. For God everything is possible.*”

## Personal Questions

Can someone who lives constantly concerned about her wealth, or who lives always wanting to buy all the things the television advertises, free herself from everything to follow Jesus and live in peace in a Christian community? Is it possible? How do you do it and what are the steps?

Do you know somebody who has succeeded in abandoning everything for the sake of the Kingdom? What does it mean for us today: “Go, sell all you own, and give the money to the poor”? How can we understand and practice this?

Does this instruct communities as well, or just individuals? How would a community “abandon everything” and still carry on its mission?

## 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) to the living God. (Ps 84: 2)