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Lectio Divina: Sunday, April 1, 2018

To see in the night and believe for love
John 20:1-9

1. Let us invoke the Holy Spirit

Lord Jesus Christ, today Your light shines in us, source of life and joy. Send the Spirit of love and truth, so that, like Mary Magdalene, Peter and John, we too may discover and interpret in the light of the Word, the signs of Your divine presence in our world. May we welcome these signs in faith that we may always live in the joy of Your presence among us, even when all seems to be shrouded in the darkness of sadness and evil.

2. The Gospel

a) A key to the reading:

For John the Evangelist, the resurrection of Jesus is the decisive moment in the process of His glorification, inextricably linked with the first phase of this glorification, His passion and death.

The event of the resurrection is not described in the spectacular and apocalyptic details of the synoptic Gospels. For John, the life of the Risen One asserts itself silently, in the discreet and irresistible power of the Spirit.

The state of the faith of the disciples is announced, "While it was still dark" and begins through the vision of the material signs that recall the Word of God. Jesus is the great protagonist of the story, but He does not appear personally.

b) The text:

On the first day of the week, Mary of Magdala came to the tomb early in the morning, while it was still dark, and saw the stone removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and told them, "They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we don't know where they put him." So Peter and the other disciple went out and came to the tomb. They both ran, but the other disciple ran faster than Peter and arrived at the tomb first; he bent down and saw the burial cloths there, but did not go in. When Simon Peter arrived after him, he



went into the tomb and saw the burial cloths there, and the cloth that had covered his head, not with the burial cloths but rolled up in a separate place. Then the other disciple also went in, the one who had arrived at the tomb first, and he saw and believed. For they did not yet understand the Scripture that he had to rise from the dead.

c) A subdivision of the text for a better understanding:

Verse 1: introduction and events prior to the situation;

Verse 2: Mary's reaction and the first announcement of the newly discovered fact;

Verses 3-5: the immediate reaction of the disciples and the interaction among them.

Verses 6-7: verification of the event announced by Mary;

Verses 8-9: the faith of the other disciple and its relationship to the Sacred Scriptures.

3. A moment of interior and exterior silence

to open our hearts and make room within for the Word of God:

- A slow re-reading of the whole passage;

- I too am in the garden: the empty sepulchre is before my eyes;

- I allow Mary Magdalene's words to echo within me;

- I too run with her, Peter and the other disciple;

- I allow myself to be immersed in the joyful wonder of faith in Jesus Christ, even though, like them, I do not see Him with my bodily eyes.

4. The gift of the Word to us

* *Chapter 20 in John*: This is quite a fragmented text where it is clear that the editor has intervened several times to put the stress on some themes and to unify the various texts received previously from (at least three) preceding sources.

* *The day after the Sabbath*: it is "the first day of the week" and, in Christian circles, inherits the sacredness of the Jewish Sabbath. For Christians it is the first day of the new week, the beginning of the new time, the memorial day of the resurrection called "the day of the Lord" (*dies Domini*).

Here and in verse 19, the Evangelist adopts an expression that is already traditional for Christians (e.g.: *Mk 16:2, 9; Acts 20:7*) and is older than the expression that later became characteristic of the first evangelisation: "the third day" (e.g.: *Lk 24:7, 46; Acts 10:40; 1Cor 15:4*).

* *Mary Magdalene*: This is the same woman as the one present at the foot of the cross with other women (19:25). Here she seems to be alone, but the words in verse 2 ("we do not know") show that the original story, worked on by the Evangelist, told of more women, as is true of the other Gospels (cf. *Mk 16:1-3; Mt 28:1; Lk 23:55-24:1*).

However the synoptics (cf. *Mk 16:1; Lk 24:1*), do not specify the reason for her visit to the sepulchre, seeing that it implied that the rite of burial had already been carried out (19:40); perhaps, the only thing missing is the funereal lamentation (cf. *Mk 5:38*). In any case, the fourth Evangelist reduces to a minimum the story of the discovery of the empty sepulchre so as to focus the attention of the reader on what comes after.

* *Early, while it was still dark:* Mark (16:2) says something different, but from both we understand that it was the very early hours of the morning, when the light is very weak and still pale. Perhaps John stresses the lack of light in order to contrast symbolically the *darkness* - lack of faith and *light* - welcoming of the Gospel, of the resurrection.

* *The stone had been taken away from the tomb:* the Greek work is generic: the stone had been "taken away" or "removed" (different from: *Mk 16:3-4*).

The verb to "take away" recalls *Jn 1:29*: the Baptist points Jesus out as "Lamb who takes away the sin of the world". Perhaps the Evangelist wishes to recall the fact that this stone, "taken away," flung away from the sepulcher, is the material sign that death and sin have been "taken away" by the resurrection of Jesus?

* *So she ran and went to Peter and the other disciple:* Mary Magdalene runs to those who share her love for Jesus and her suffering for His atrocious death, now made worse by this new discovery. She turns to them, perhaps because they were the only ones who had not run away with the others and remained in contact with each other (cf. *19:15, 26 - 27*). She wants to share at least with them this final pain of the outrage committed against His body.

We see how Peter and the "beloved disciple" and Mary Magdalene are characterized by a special love that unites them with Jesus: it is indeed reciprocal love that makes them capable of sensing the presence of the loved person.

* *The other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved:* is someone who appears only in this Gospel and only beginning with chapter 13, when he exhibits great intimacy with Jesus and deep understanding with Peter (*13:23-25*). He appears at every decisive moment of the passion and of the resurrection of Jesus, but remains anonymous and many theories have been advanced on his identity. He is probably the anonymous disciple of the Baptist who follows Jesus together with Andrew (*1:35, 40*). Since the fourth Gospel never speaks of John the apostle, and keeping in mind that this Gospel recounts details clearly known to an eyewitness, the "disciple" has been identified with John the apostle. The fourth Gospel has always been attributed to him even though he may not have materially written it, yet the origin of this particular tradition is that this Gospel and other writings are attributed to John. This also explains why he is someone who is somewhat idealized.

"The one whom Jesus loved": It is clear that this is an addition, not from the apostle, who would not have dared boast of having such a close relationship with the Lord, but from His disciples who wrote most of the Gospel and who coined this expression after reflection on the clearly privileged love between Jesus and him (cf. *13:25; 21:4, 7*). Where we read the simpler expression "the other disciple" or "the disciple", obviously the editors did not make the same addition.

* *They have taken the Lord out of the tomb:* these words, which recur in verses 13 and 15, show that Mary was afraid that body-snatchers had taken the body, a thing common then, so much so that the Roman Emperor had to promulgate severe decrees to check this phenomenon. In *Matthew (28:11-15)*, the chief priests use this possibility to

discredit the resurrection of Jesus and, eventually, to justify the lack of intervention on the part of the soldiers who guarded the tomb.

* *The Lord*: the title "Lord" implies an acknowledgement of divinity and evokes divine omnipotence. That is why this term was used by Christians for the risen Jesus. Indeed, the fourth Evangelist uses this term only in Paschal stories (see also 20:13).

* *We do not know where they have laid Him*: these words recall what happened to Moses, whose place of burial was unknown (*Deut* 34:10). Another implicit reference is to the words of Jesus Himself when He says that it is impossible to know where He is going (7:11, 22; 8:14, 28, 42; 13:33; 14:1-5; 16:5).

* *They both ran, but the other disciple outran Peter...but he did not go in*: This passage shows the anxiety that these disciples were living through. The fact that the "other disciple" stopped is more than just a gesture of politeness or respect towards someone older; it is the tacit acknowledgement that Peter, within the apostolic group, held a place of pre-eminence, even though this is not stressed. It is, therefore, a sign of communion. This gesture could also be a literary device to move from the event in terms of faith in the resurrection to the following and peak moment in the story.

It is also possible that it shows hesitation or fear. As their faith was under strain at this moment, there may have been a hesitation when confronted with confirming the situation one way or the other. Would there be something to further chip at his faith or not? It could be a confirmation of what they had hoped, or nothing at all.

* *The linen cloths lying and the napkin...rolled up in a place by itself*: although the other disciple did not go in, he had already seen something. Peter, crossing the entrance of the sepulchre, discovers the proof that no theft of the body took place: no thief would have wasted time to unfold the body, spread the cloths in an orderly fashion (*on the ground* would be translated better by "spread out" or "laid carefully on the floor") and then to roll up the napkin in a place by itself. Such an operation would have been complicated also because the oils with which the body had been anointed (especially myrrh) acted like glue, causing the cloths to stick perfectly and solidly to the body, almost as what happened to mummies. Besides, the napkin is folded; the Greek verb can also mean "rolled," or it could indicate that that piece of light cloth had, in large part, preserved the form of the face over which it had been placed, almost like a mortuary mask. The cloths are the same as those cited in *Jn* 19:40.

Everything is in order in the sepulchre, even though the body of Jesus is not there, and Peter was well able to see inside the sepulchre because the day was breaking. Different from Lazarus (11:44), then, Christ rises, abandoning completely His funerary trappings. Ancient commentators note that, in fact, Lazarus had to use the cloths again for his definitive burial, while Christ had no further use of them because He was not to die again (cf. *Rm* 6:9).

* *Peter...saw...the other disciple...saw and believed*: at the beginning of the story, Mary Magdalene also "saw". Although some translations use the same verb, the original text

uses three different verbs (*theorein* for Peter; *blepein* for the other disciple and Mary Magdalene; *idein*, here, for the other disciple), allowing us to understand that there is a growth in the spiritual depth of this "seeing" that, in fact, culminates in the faith of the other disciple.

The anonymous disciple had certainly not seen anything other than what Peter had observed. Perhaps he interprets what he sees differently from others because of the special relationship of love he had with Jesus (Thomas' experience is emblematic, 29:24-29). In any case, as indicated by the tense of the Greek verb, his is still an initial faith, so much so that he cannot find ways of sharing this experience with Mary Magdalene or Peter or any of the other disciples (there is no further reference to this). However, for the fourth Evangelist the double "see and believe" is quite meaningful and refers exclusively to faith in the resurrection of the (cf. 20:29), because it was impossible to believe truly before the Lord had died and risen (cf. 14:25-26; 16:12-15). The double vision-faith, then, characterizes the whole of this chapter, and "the beloved disciple" is presented as a model of faith who succeeds in understanding the truth about God through material (cf. also 21:7).

* *As yet they did not know the Scripture*: this obviously refers to all the other disciples. Even for those who had lived close to Jesus, it was difficult to believe in Him. For them, as for us as well, the only gateway that allows us to cross the threshold of authentic faith is knowledge of the Scriptures (cf. *Lk 24:26-27*; *1Cor 15:34*; *Acts 2:27-31*) in the light of the events of the resurrection.

5. A few questions to direct our reflection and its practice

- a) What, in the concrete, does it mean for us "to believe in Jesus the Risen One"? What difficulties do we encounter? Does the resurrection solely concern Jesus or is it really the foundation of our faith?
- b) The relationship that we see between Peter, the other disciple and Mary Magdalene is clearly one of great communion in Jesus. In what persons, realities, or institutions do we today find this same understanding of love and the same "common union" founded on Jesus? Where can we read the concrete signs of the great love for the Lord and "His own" that inspired all the disciples?
- c) We see three levels of growth in faith here: Mary, who sees but does not go deeper and instead asks for help to learn more, the other disciple, who is energetic and enthusiastic, yet stops short of totally being immersed in the truth, and Peter, who goes in entirely, to be fully involved in the truth within. These can represent different levels in the growth of one's faith as well. Where am I in this and who best represents my approach to being fully involved in the Lord?

6. Let us pray asking for grace and praising God

A hymn taken from the letter of Paul to the Ephesians (paraphrase of 1:17-23).

The God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory,
may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation
in the knowledge of Him,

having the eyes of your hearts enlightened,
that you may know what is the hope to which He has called you,
what are the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints,
and what is the immeasurable greatness of His power
in us who believe, according to the working of His great might
which He accomplished in Christ when He raised Him from the dead
and made Him sit at His right hand in the heavenly places,
far above all rule and authority and power and dominion,
and above every name that is named,
not only in this age but also in that which is to come;
and He has put all things under His feet
and has made Him the head over all things for the church,
which is His body,
the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

7. Closing prayer

The liturgical context is of great importance in praying this Gospel and the event of the resurrection of Jesus, which is the hub of our faith and of our Christian life. The sequence that characterizes the Eucharistic liturgy of today and of the whole week leads us to praise the Father and the Lord Jesus.

*Christians, to the Paschal Victim
Offer sacrifice and praise.
The sheep are ransomed by the Lamb;
and Christ, the undefiled
has sinners to His Father reconciled.
Death with life contended:
Combat strangely ended!
Life's own Champion, slain,
Yet lives to reign.
Tell us Mary:
say what you see upon the way.
The tomb the living did enclose;
I saw Christ's glory as He rose!
The angels there attesting;
Shroud with grave-clothes resting.
Christ, my hope, has risen:
He goes before you into Galilee.
That Christ is truly risen from the dead
we know.
Victorious king,
your mercy show.*

We may conclude our prayer also with this lively invocation by a contemporary poet, Marco Guzzi:

*Love, Love, Love!
I wish to feel, live and express all this Love,
Which is a joyful commitment in the world
and a happy contact with the others.
Only You free me, only You release me.
And the snows fall to water
the greenest of valleys in creation.*

Lectio Divina: Monday, April 2, 2018

Easter Time

1) Opening prayer

Our living God,
our heart is glad and rejoices
and we feel secure in our faith
that we have a living person to believe in, Jesus Christ, who is risen from the dead.
Let Him show us the path of life,
let us live in the joy of His presence
and give us the grace to make us witnesses,
so that we can proclaim with our whole life
that Jesus is our risen, living Lord
now and for ever.

2) Gospel Reading - Matthew 28:8-15

Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went away quickly from the tomb, fearful yet overjoyed, and ran to announce the news to his disciples. And behold, Jesus met them on their way and greeted them. They approached, embraced his feet, and did him homage. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me." While they were going, some of the guard went into the city and told the chief priests all that had happened. The chief priests assembled with the elders and took counsel; then they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, telling them, "You are to say, 'His disciples came by night and stole him while we were asleep.' And if this gets to the ears of the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble." The soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed. And this story has circulated among the Jews to the present day.

3) Reflection

- Easter! Today's Gospel describes the experience of the Resurrection which the disciples of Jesus had. At the beginning of his Gospel, in presenting Jesus, Matthew had said that Jesus is the Emmanuel, God with us (Mt 1:23). Now, at the end, he communicates and increases this certainty of faith, because he proclaims that Jesus is

risen (Mt 28:6) and that He will be with us always, until the end of time! (Mt 28:20). In the contradictions of life, this truth is questioned and contested very much. Opposition is not lacking. The enemies, the chief priests of the Jews, defended themselves against the Good News of the Resurrection and sent word to say that the body had been stolen by the disciples (Mt 28:11-13). This also happens today: on the one side, the effort of many people to live and to witness to the resurrection; on the other side, so many evil people who fight against the resurrection and against life.

- In the Gospel of Matthew, the truth of the Resurrection of Jesus is told in symbolic language, which reveals the hidden sense of the events. Matthew speaks about the earthquake, of lightning and of the angels who announce the victory of Jesus over death (Mt 2-4). It is an apocalyptic language, very common at that time, to announce that finally the world had been transformed by the power of God! The hope of the poor, who reaffirmed their faith, was fulfilled: “He is alive in our midst!”

- Matthew 28:8: The joy of the Resurrection overcomes fear. On Sunday morning, the first day of the week, two women went to the tomb, Mary of Magdala and Mary of James, also called the other Mary. All of a sudden the earth trembled and an angel appeared as lightning. The guards who were guarding the tomb were so shaken up with fear that they were like dead men. The women were frightened but the angel encouraged them, announcing the victory of Jesus over death and sending them to go join the disciples of Jesus in Galilee. And in Galilee they would be able to see Him again. Everything began there; they received the great revelation of the Risen Lord. The joy of the Resurrection began to overcome fear. Thus the announcement of life and resurrection begins in this way.

- Matthew 28:9-10: Jesus appears to the women. The women left quickly. There is a mixture of fear and of joy. These are sentiments typical of those who have a profound experience of the mystery of God. Suddenly, Jesus himself went to meet them and said to them, “Rejoice!” And they fell on their knees and adored Him. It is the attitude of the one who believes and accepts the presence of God, even if it surprises and goes beyond the human capacity to understand. Now, Jesus Himself orders them to go and join the brothers in Galilee: “Do not be afraid. Go and tell My brothers to go to Galilee and there they will see Me”.

- Matthew 28:11-15: The astuteness or guile of the enemies of the Good News. The opposition itself which Jesus had to face during His life, springs up again now after His Resurrection. The chief priests meet and give money to the guards. They should spread the news that the disciples have robbed the body of Jesus, and this in order to avoid everything which is said about the Resurrection. The chief priests do not accept the Good News of the Resurrection. They prefer to believe that it is an invention on the part of the disciples – men and women – of Jesus.

- The significance of the testimony of the women. The presence of the women at the death, at the burial, and at the resurrection of Jesus is significant. They are witnesses to the death of Jesus (Mt 27:54-56). At the moment of the burial, they remain sitting before the tomb and therefore, they can render witness of the place where Jesus was buried (Mt 27:61). Now, on Sunday morning, they are there once again. They know that the empty tomb is truly the tomb of Jesus! The profound experience of death and resurrection which they had, transformed their lives. They themselves become qualified witnesses

of the Resurrection in the Christian communities. This is why they receive the order to announce, "Jesus is alive! He has risen from the dead!"

4) Personal questions

- How do I experience the Resurrection in my life today?
- Does the Resurrection transform me in any way?
- Today, what is the mission of our community as disciples of Jesus? Through what in the Resurrection can we draw force and strength and courage to fulfill our mission?

5) Concluding Prayer

I bless Yahweh, who is my counselor,
even at night my heart instructs me.
I keep Yahweh before me always,
for with Him at my right hand,
nothing can shake me. (Ps 16:7-8)

Lectio Divina: Tuesday, April 3, 2018

Easter Time

1) Opening prayer

O God of life,
we profess our faith in Jesus
and recognize Him as our Lord and Savior. Make us listen to Him
when He speaks His good news to us
for it is a message of life.
May we also hear His voice
when He cries out to us in people in need
or simply when He speaks to us
in people who express to us
their joys and hopes, their love and their faith.
We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

2) Gospel Reading - John 20:11-18

Mary Magdalene stayed outside the tomb weeping. And as she wept, she bent over into the tomb and saw two angels in white sitting there, one at the head and one at the feet where the Body of Jesus had been. And they said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken my Lord, and I don't know where they laid him." When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus there, but did not know it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" She thought it was the gardener and said to him, "Sir, if you carried him away, tell me where you laid him, and I will take him." Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni," which means Teacher. Jesus said to her,

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

3) Reflection

- Today's Gospel describes the apparition of Jesus to Mary Magdalene. The death of her great friend prompts Mary to lose her sense of life. But she does not give up her search. She goes to the tomb in order to meet again the one whom death has taken away. There are moments in our life in which everything crumbles. It seems that everything is finished. Death, disasters, pain and suffering, disillusionments, betrayals: so many things which may cause us to feel lost, as if standing on firm ground, and which can lead us to fall into a deep crisis. But other things also happen. For example, suddenly we meet a friend again, and that can give us hope anew and can make us discover that love is stronger than death and defeat. The Lord allows desolation, but He also provides consolation as we need it.
- Chapter 20 in John's Gospel, besides the apparitions of Jesus to Mary Magdalene, also speaks about diverse episodes which indicate the richness of the experience of the Resurrection: (a) to the beloved disciple and to Peter (Jn 20:1-10); (b) to Mary Magdalene (Jn 20:11-18); (c) to the community of disciples (Jn 20:19-23) and (d) to the Apostle Thomas (Jn 20:24-29). The purpose of the writing of the Gospel is to lead people to believe in Jesus, and believing in Him, to have life (Jn 20:30-31).
- In the way of describing the apparition of Jesus to Mary Magdalene one is aware of the different stages of the road that she had to follow, of the sorrowful search until the time of the encounter at Easter. These are also the stages through which we all have to pass, throughout our life, in seeking God and living the Gospel.
- John 20:11-13: Mary Magdalene weeps, but she seeks. There was a very strong love between Jesus and Mary Magdalene. She was one of the few persons who had the courage to remain with Jesus up to the moment of His death on the Cross. After the obligatory rest on Saturday, she goes back to the tomb to be in the place where she had seen her beloved for the last time. But, surprisingly, the tomb is empty! The angels ask her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" and her response is, "They have taken away my Lord and I do not know where they have put Him!" Mary Magdalene looked for Jesus, that Jesus whom she had known for three years.
- John 20:14-15: Mary Magdalene speaks with Jesus without knowing Him. The disciples at Emmaus saw Jesus but they did not recognize Him. She thinks that Jesus is the gardener. And just as the angels had done, Jesus also asks, "Why are you weeping?" and He adds, "Whom are you looking for?" The response: "If you have taken Him away, tell me where you have put Him and I will go and get Him". She was still looking for the Jesus of the past, the same one of three days before. And it is precisely the image of the Jesus of the past which prevents her from recognizing the living Jesus, who is present before her.
- John 20:16: Mary Magdalene recognizes Jesus. Jesus pronounces her name: "Mary!" This was the signal to recognize Him: the same voice, the same way of pronouncing her name. She answers, "Master!" Jesus had returned the same as the one who had died on the cross. The first impression was that death was only a painful incident on the journey,

but now everything has again become as before. Mary embraces Jesus strongly. He was the same Jesus whom she had known and loved. And thus is fulfilled what the Parable of the Good Shepherd said: “He calls them by name and they recognize His voice”. “I know My sheep and My sheep know Me” (Jn 10:3, 4, 14).

- John 20:17-18: Mary Magdalene receives the mission to announce the resurrection to the apostles. In fact, it is the same Jesus, but the way of being together with her is not the same as before. Jesus tells her, “Do not cling to me, because I have not as yet ascended to the Father!” He goes toward the Father. Mary Magdalene has to let Jesus go and assume her mission: to announce to the brothers that He, Jesus, has ascended to the Father. Jesus has opened up the way for us and thus, once more, God is close to us.

4) Personal questions

- Have you ever had an experience which gave you the feeling of loss and death? What was it like? What gave you new life and gave you back the hope and joy of living?
- What is the change that took place in Mary Magdalene throughout the dialogue? Mary Magdalene was looking for Jesus in a certain way and found Him in a different way. How does this take place in our life?
- Do we also look for Jesus in the past, as a historical figure, when He is present right before us in the poor and outcast we meet every day? What can we do to be more aware of Him in those that we meet today?
- Has Jesus ever called to me as I faced someone who was poor and outcast? Did I recognize my name as He called me through that person and that opportunity to see Him?

5) Concluding Prayer

We are waiting for Yahweh;
He is our help and our shield,
for in Him our heart rejoices,
in His holy name we trust.
Yahweh, let Your faithful love rest on us,
as our hope has rested in You. (Ps 33:20-22)

Lectio Divina: Wednesday, April 4, 2018

Easter Time

1) Opening prayer

God our Father,
You are a God not of the dead
nor of those paralyzed by their fears and limitations
but the God of the living. Raise us up and make us walk forward
in joy and hope
as companions on the road

of Him whom you raised from the dead,
Jesus Christ, our Risen Lord for ever.

2) Gospel Reading - Luke 24:13-35

That very day, the first day of the week, two of Jesus' disciples were going to a village seven miles from Jerusalem called Emmaus, and they were conversing about all the things that had occurred. And it happened that while they were conversing and debating, Jesus himself drew near and walked with them, but their eyes were prevented from recognizing him. He asked them, "What are you discussing as you walk along?" They stopped, looking downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, said to him in reply, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know of the things that have taken place there in these days?" And he replied to them, "What sort of things?" They said to him, "The things that happened to Jesus the Nazarene, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, how our chief priests and rulers both handed him over to a sentence of death and crucified him. But we were hoping that he would be the one to redeem Israel; and besides all this, it is now the third day since this took place. Some women from our group, however, have astounded us: they were at the tomb early in the morning and did not find his Body; they came back and reported that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who announced that he was alive. Then some of those with us went to the tomb and found things just as the women had described, but him they did not see." And he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are! How slow of heart to believe all that the prophets spoke! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them what referred to him in all the Scriptures. As they approached the village to which they were going, he gave the impression that he was going on farther. But they urged him, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening and the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them. And it happened that, while he was with them at table, he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them. With that their eyes were opened and they recognized him, but he vanished from their sight. Then they said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he spoke to us on the way and opened the Scriptures to us?" So they set out at once and returned to Jerusalem where they found gathered together the Eleven and those with them who were saying, "The Lord has truly been raised and has appeared to Simon!" Then the two recounted what had taken place on the way and how he was made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

3) Reflection

- Today's Gospel speaks to us of a very well know episode, of the apparition of Jesus to the disciples at Emmaus. Luke writes in the year 80 for the communities of Greece, which for the most part were made up of converted Gentiles. The years 60's and 70's had been most difficult ones. There had been the great persecution of Nero in the year 64. Six years later, in the year 70, Jerusalem was completely destroyed by the Romans. In the year 72, in Masada, in the desert of Judah, there was the massacre of the last rebellious Jews. In those years, the Apostles, witnesses of the Resurrection, disappeared gradually. People began to feel tired on the journey. From where could they draw the

strength so as not to get discouraged? How to discover the presence of Jesus in such a difficult situation? The story of the apparition of Jesus to the disciples at Emmaus tries to give a response to all these anguishing questions. Luke wants to teach the communities how to interpret Scripture in order to be able to rediscover the presence of Jesus in life.

- Luke 24:13-24: 1st Step: to get away from reality. Jesus meets the two friends in a situation of fear and lack of faith. The force of death, the cross, had killed the hope in them. This was the situation of many people at the time of Luke, and is also the predicament of many people today. Jesus gets close to them and walks by their side. He listens to their conversation and asks, “What are all these things that you are discussing as you walk along?” The dominant ideology of the government and of the official religion of the time prevent them from seeing. “Our hope had been that He would be the one to set Israel free.” What is the conversation of people who suffer today? The first step is this one: get close to the people, listen to their reality, feel their problems: be capable of asking questions which will help the people to look at reality from a more critical perspective.

- Luke 24:25-27: 2nd step: use the Bible to enlighten life. Jesus uses the Bible and the history of people to illuminate the problem which made the two friends suffer, and to clarify the situation in which they are living. He also uses it to place them in the whole plan of God which came from Moses and the prophets. Thus, He indicates that history had not escaped from God’s hand. Jesus uses the Bible not as a doctor who knows everything, but rather like a companion who comes to help friends and to remind them of what they had forgotten. Jesus tries to awaken their memory: “Foolish and slow to believe all that the prophets have said! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer before entering into His glory?”

This is the second step: With the Bible, help people to discover the wisdom which already exists in them, and transform the cross, a sign of death, into a sign of life and of hope. What prevented them from walking now becomes for them strength and light on the journey. How can we do this today?

Luke 24:28-32: 3rd step: to share in community. The Bible in itself does not open their eyes. It only makes their heart burn. What opens the eyes and makes them see is the breaking of the bread, the communal gesture of sharing, and the celebration of the Supper. At the moment in which both recognize Jesus, they are born anew, and Jesus disappears. Jesus does not take possession of his friends’ road. He is not paternalistic. Risen, the disciples are capable of walking alone.

The third step is the following: to know how to create a fraternal environment of faith, of celebration and of sharing, where the Holy Spirit can act. It is He who makes us discover and experience the Word of God in life, which leads us to understand the meaning of the words of Jesus (Jn 14:26; 16:13).

- Luke 24:33-35: 4th step: The result: To resurrect means to go back to Jerusalem. The two of them, courageously, get back on the road to go to Jerusalem, where the same forces of death, which had killed Jesus and had killed their hope, continue to be active. But, now everything has changed. If Jesus is alive, then there is in Him and with Him a stronger power than that which killed Him. This experience makes them resurrect! Truly, everything has changed. There is return and not flight! Faith and not unbelief! Hope and not despair! Critical conscience and not fatalism in the face of power! Liberty

and not oppression! In one word: life and not death! Instead of the bad news of the death of Jesus, the Good News of his Resurrection! Both of them experience life and life in abundance! (Jn 10:10). This is a sign that the Spirit of Jesus is acting in them!

4) Personal questions

- Both of them say, “We were hoping, but...!” Have you ever been in a situation of discouragement which led you to say, “I was hoping, but...!”?
- How do you read, use and interpret the Bible? Have you ever felt your heart burning when reading and meditating on the Word of God? Do you read the Bible alone or are you part of a Bible group?
- Considering these steps, and the way Jesus enlightened these disciples, how would you help a friend who was losing hope or faith?

5) Concluding Prayer

Give thanks to Yahweh, call on His name,
proclaim His deeds to the peoples!
Sing to Him, make music for Him,
recount all His wonders! (Ps 105:1-2)

Lectio Divina: Thursday, April 5, 2018

Easter Time

1) Opening prayer

Almighty God and Father,
Jesus died for us on the cross
and You raised Him from the dead.
We have not seen the marks of the nails in His hands
nor touched the wound in His side,
but we believe that He is alive
and present here among us.
Open our hearts to His word
and let us touch Him in the bread of the Eucharist,
that He may raise us above our sins
and change us into new people.
May we thus bear witness to Your risen Son,
Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

2) Gospel Reading - Luke 24:35-48

The disciples of Jesus recounted what had taken place along the way, and how they had come to recognize him in the breaking of bread. While they were still speaking about this, he stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be with you." But they were startled

and terrified and thought that they were seeing a ghost. Then he said to them, "Why are you troubled? And why do questions arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me and see, because a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you can see I have." And as he said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. While they were still incredulous for joy and were amazed, he asked them, "Have you anything here to eat?" They gave him a piece of baked fish; he took it and ate it in front of them. He said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and in the prophets and psalms must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. And he said to them, "Thus it is written that the Christ would suffer and rise from the dead on the third day and that repentance, for the forgiveness of sins, would be preached in his name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things."

3) Reflection

- In these days after Easter, the Gospel texts narrate the apparitions of Jesus. At the beginning, in the first years after the death and the Resurrection of Jesus, the Christians were concerned with defending the Resurrection through the apparitions. They themselves, the living community, were a great apparition of the Risen Jesus. But in the measure in which the criticism of the enemies against the faith in the Resurrection increased, and that internally, and as there arose criticism and doubts concerning diverse functions in the community (cf. 1 Co 1:12), they began to recall the apparitions of Jesus. There are two types of apparitions: (a) those which stress the doubts and the resistance of the disciples in believing in the Resurrection, and (b) those who call attention to the orders of Jesus to the disciples – men and women – conferring some mission to them. The first ones respond to criticisms from the outside. These show that Christians are not naïve and credulous persons who accept everything and anything. Au contraire! They themselves had many doubts in believing in the Resurrection. The others respond to the criticism from within and establish the community functions and tasks, not on human qualities which are always debatable, but on the authority and orders received from the Risen Jesus. The apparitions of Jesus in today's Gospel put together two different aspects: the doubts of the disciples and the mission to announce and to forgive received from Jesus.
- Luke 24:35: The summary of the story of Emmaus. Returning to Jerusalem, the two disciples found the community together and they shared with them the experience that they had lived. They told them what had happened along the road and how they recognized Jesus in the breaking of the bread. The community gathered together, and in turn, shared the apparition of Jesus to Peter. This was a reciprocal sharing of the experience of the Resurrection, as it also happens today when the communities gather together to share and celebrate their faith, their hope and their love.
- Luke 24:36-37: The apparition of Jesus causes great fright in the disciples. At this moment, Jesus becomes present among them and says, "Peace be with you!" This is the most frequent greeting of Jesus: "Peace be with you!" (Jn 14:27; 16:33; 20:19, 21, 26). But the disciples, upon seeing Jesus, were frightened and did not recognize Him. Before them is Jesus in person, but they think that they are seeing a ghost, a phantasm. They cannot believe it. It is now the encounter between Jesus of Nazareth and the Risen Jesus.

- Luke 24:38-40: Jesus helps them to overcome fear and unbelief. Jesus does two things to help the disciples overcome fear and unbelief. He shows them His hands and His feet, saying, “It is I Myself!”, and tells them to touch His body saying, “A ghost has no flesh and bones as you can see I have!” Jesus shows His hands and feet because on them is the sign of the nails (cf. Jn 20:25-27). The Risen Christ is Jesus of Nazareth, the same one who was nailed to the Cross and not a phantasm Christ as the disciples imagined when they saw Him. He orders them to touch His body, because the Resurrection is the Resurrection of the whole person, body and soul. The Resurrection has nothing to do with the theory of the immortality of the soul, which the Greeks taught.
- Luke 24:41-43: The other gesture to help them overcome unbelief. But it does not suffice! Luke said that they could not believe because their joy was so great that they became dumbfounded. Jesus asks them to give Him something to eat. They offer Him some fish and He eats before them, to help them to overcome doubt.
- Luke 24:44-47: A key to understanding the new significance of the Scripture. One of the greatest difficulties of the first Christians was that of accepting the Crucified as the promised Messiah, because the Law taught that a crucified person was a “person cursed by God” (Deut 21:22-23). For this reason, it was important to know that Scripture had already announced that “Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead on the third day and that in His name, conversion and forgiveness of sins would be preached to all peoples.” Jesus shows them what had already been written in the Law of Moses, in the prophets and in the psalms. Jesus risen from the dead, alive in their midst, becomes the key to opening to them the total significance of Sacred Scripture.
- Luke 24:48: You are witnesses of this. In this last order is enclosed the whole mission of the Christian communities: to be witnesses to the Resurrection, in such a way that the love of God which accepts us and forgives us will be manifested, and which wants us to live in community as sons and daughters, brothers and sisters with one another.

4) Personal questions

- Sometimes unbelief and doubt beset the heart and weaken the certainty that faith gives us concerning the presence of God in our life. Have you ever experienced this? How have you overcome it?
- Our mission is that of being witnesses to the love of God revealed in Jesus. Am I a witness to this love?
- Can I identify those things in my life which cast doubt on my faith? How do I defend against these attacks?

5) Concluding Prayer

What are human beings
that You spare a thought for them,
or the child of Adam that You care for him? (Ps 8:4)

Lectio Divina: Friday, April 6, 2018

Easter Time

1) Opening prayer

Our God and Father,
through our risen Lord, Your Son Jesus Christ,
You have given us a message of hope
and a person to live for.
Free our faith from triviality and routine
and fill us with His Spirit of courage,
that we may learn to live
with the insecurities of the change of renewal
ever-demanded by the gospel
and by the needs of the times.
May our Christian living bear witness
to the name of Him by whom we are saved,
Jesus Christ, our risen Lord.

2) Gospel Reading - John 21:1-14

Jesus revealed himself again to his disciples at the Sea of Tiberias. He revealed himself in this way. Together were Simon Peter, Thomas called Didymus, Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, Zebedee's sons, and two others of his disciples. Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We also will come with you." So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. When it was already dawn, Jesus was standing on the shore; but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, "Children, have you caught anything to eat?" They answered him, "No." So he said to them, "Cast the net over the right side of the boat and you will find something." So they cast it, and were not able to pull it in because of the number of fish. So the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord." When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he tucked in his garment, for he was lightly clad, and jumped into the sea. The other disciples came in the boat, for they were not far from shore, only about a hundred yards, dragging the net with the fish. When they climbed out on shore, they saw a charcoal fire with fish on it and bread. Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish you just caught." So Simon Peter went over and dragged the net ashore full of one hundred fifty-three large fish. Even though there were so many, the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, "Come, have breakfast." And none of the disciples dared to ask him, "Who are you?" because they realized it was the Lord. Jesus came over and took the bread and gave it to them, and in like manner the fish. This was now the third time Jesus was revealed to his disciples after being raised from the dead.

3) Reflection

- Chapter 21 of the Gospel of Saint John seems like an appendix which was added after the Gospel had already been written. The conclusion of the previous chapter (Jn 20:30-

31) makes one suspect that it is an addition. However, whether it is an addition or not, it is the Word of God, which presents to us the beautiful message of the Resurrection on this fifth day of Easter week.

- John 21:1-3: The fisherman of men returns to be a fisherman of fish. Jesus has died and has risen. After three years of life together with Jesus, the disciples returned to Galilee. A group of them find themselves together at the lakeshore. Peter goes back to the past and says: “I am going fishing!” The others answer: “We will come with you!” Thus, Thomas, Nathanael, John and James together with Peter go to the boat to go fishing. They go back to the life of the past as if nothing had happened. But something did happen. Something was taking place! The past did not return! “We have caught nothing!” They return to shore, tired. This had been a night filled with frustration.

- John 21:4-5: The context of the new apparition of Jesus. Jesus was on the shore, but they did not recognize Him. Jesus asks, “Little children, have you anything to eat?” They answer, “No!” In the negative response they realize that the night had been deceiving because they had caught nothing. They had been called to be fishermen of men (Mk 1:17; Lk 5:10), and they go back to be fishermen of fish. But something had changed in their life! The experience of three years with Jesus produces in them an irreversible change. It was no longer possible to return to the past as if nothing had happened, as if nothing had changed.

- John 21:6-8: “Throw the net out to the right of the boat and you will find something.” They did something which perhaps they had never done in their life. Five experienced fishermen obey a carpenter who orders them to do something which is in contrast to their experience. Jesus, that unknown Person, who is on the shore, orders them to throw the net on the right side of the boat. They obey; they throw the net, and behold the unexpected result. The net was full of fish! How was this possible? How to explain this surprise so unexpected, unforeseen! Love makes one discover. The beloved disciple says, “It is the Lord”. This intuition clarifies everything. Peter jumps into the water to get close to Jesus very quickly. The other disciples follow him, pulling the boat, and dragging the net full of fish.

- John 21:9-14: The kindness of Jesus. Coming ashore, they saw a charcoal fire which had been lit by Jesus, where He was roasting fish and bread. He asked them to take some of the fish they had caught, and immediately Peter went to the boat and towed the net containing one hundred and fifty-three fish. A great number of fish and the net did not break. Jesus calls the multitude, “Come and eat!” He had the kindness to prepare something to eat after a disappointing night during which they had caught nothing: a very simple gesture which reveals something of God’s love for us. “Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father” (Jn 14:9). None of the disciples was bold enough to ask, “Who are you?” because they knew He was the Lord. Recalling the Eucharist, John the Evangelist contemplates: “Jesus stepping forward took the bread and gave it to them.” Thus, he suggests that the Eucharist is the privileged place for the encounter with the Risen Jesus.

4) Personal questions

- Has it ever happened to you that someone told you to throw the net to the right side of your life, to do something contrary to your experience? Did you obey and throw in the

net?

- The kindness of Jesus. How is your kindness in the small things of life?
- Do you recognize Jesus only after signs and miracles, or do you see Him in the simple acts of life, such as making a meal?

5) Concluding Prayer

Give thanks to Yahweh for He is good,
for His faithful love endures for ever.
Let those who fear Yahweh say,
“His faithful love endures for ever.” (Ps 118)

Lectio Divina: Saturday, April 7, 2018

Easter Time

1) Opening prayer

Our God and Father,
Your Son Jesus lived among us,
flesh of our flesh, blood of our blood.
He died for our sake
and You raised Him back to life.
May we experience His love and His presence
to such an extent
that we can never stop proclaiming
what we have seen and heard,
and that people may give glory to You, our God.
We ask this in the name of Jesus the Lord. Amen.

2) Gospel Reading - Mark 16:9-15

When Jesus had risen, early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had driven seven demons. She went and told his companions who were mourning and weeping. When they heard that he was alive and had been seen by her, they did not believe. After this he appeared in another form to two of them walking along on their way to the country. They returned and told the others; but they did not believe them either. But later, as the Eleven were at table, he appeared to them and rebuked them for their unbelief and hardness of heart because they had not believed those who saw him after he had been raised. He said to them, “Go into the whole world and proclaim the Gospel to every creature.”

3) Reflection

- Today’s Gospel is part of a broader literary unit (Mk 16:9-20) which presents a list or summary of diverse apparitions of Jesus: (a) Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene, but the disciples do not accept her testimony (Mk 16:9-11); (b) Jesus appears to the disciples,

but the others do not accept their testimony (Mk 16:12-13); (c) Jesus appears to the eleven; He criticizes their lack of faith and orders them to announce the Good News to all (Mk 16:14-18); (d) Jesus ascends to heaven and continues to cooperate with the disciples (Mk 16:19-20).

- Besides this list of apparitions in the Gospel of Mark, there are other lists of apparitions which do not always coincide among themselves. For example, the list kept by Paul in the Letter to the Corinthians is very different (1 Cor 15:3-8). This variety shows that at the beginning the Christians were not concerned with proving the Resurrection by means of the apparitions. For them faith in the Resurrection was so evident and alive that there was no need to prove it. A person sunbathing on the shore is not concerned with showing that the sun exists, because she herself, sun burnt, is the evidence of the existence of the sun. The communities, existing in the midst of the immense Empire, were a living proof of the Resurrection. The list of the apparitions began to appear later, in the second generation, in order to refute the criticism of opponents.

- Mark 16:9-11: Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene, but the other disciples do not believe her. Jesus first appears to Mary Magdalene. She goes to announce this to the others. To come into the world, God wanted to depend on the womb of a young girl 15 or 16 years old, called Mary of Nazareth (Lk 1:38). To be recognized alive in our midst, He wants to depend on the announcement of a woman who had been liberated from seven devils, also called Mary, of Magdala! (This is why she was called Mary Magdalene). But the others did not believe her. Mark says that Jesus appeared first to Mary Magdalene. In the list of apparitions, recorded in the letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor 15:3-8), the apparitions of Jesus to the women are not mentioned. The first Christians had difficulty believing in the testimony of women. It is shameful!

- Mark 16:12-13: Jesus appears to the disciples, but the others do not believe them. Without too many details, Mark refers to an apparition of Jesus to two disciples, “while they were on their way into the country.” This is perhaps a reference to the apparition of Jesus to the disciples at Emmaus, narrated by Luke (Lk 24:13-35). Mark insists on saying that “the others did not believe them either”.

- Mark 16:14-15: Jesus criticizes the unbelief and orders them to announce the Good News to all creatures. For this reason, Jesus appears to the eleven and reproaches them because they did not believe the people who had seen Him in His resurrected body. Once again, Mark refers to the resistance of the disciples in refusing to believe the testimony of those who have experienced the Resurrection of Jesus. Why? Probably to teach three things: in the first place, that faith in Jesus passes through the faith in the people who give witness; in the second place, that nobody should be discouraged when doubt or unbelief arises in the heart; in the third place, to refute the claim of those who said that the Christian is naïve and accepts any news uncritically, because the eleven had great difficulty accepting the truth of the Resurrection!

- Today’s Gospel ends with the sending forth: “Go out to the whole world; proclaim the Gospel to all creation!” Jesus confers upon them the mission to announce the Good News to all creatures.

4) Personal questions

- Which of these: Mary Magdalene, the two disciples of Emmaus, or the eleven disciples, had the greatest difficulty believing in the Resurrection? Why? With whom

do I identify?

- What can convince people of the presence of Jesus in our midst?

5) Concluding Prayer

May God show kindness and bless us,
and make His face shine on us.
Then the earth will acknowledge Your ways,
and all nations Your power to save. (Ps 67:1-2)

Lectio Divina: Sunday, April 8, 2018

*The mission of the disciples and
the witness of Thomas the apostle
John 20:19-31*

1. Opening prayer

Father, who on the Lord's day gather Your people to celebrate the One who is the First and the Last, the living One who conquered death, grant us the strength of Your Spirit so that, having broken the chains of evil, calmed our fears and indecisions, we may render the free service of our obedience and love, to reign in glory with Christ.

2. LECTIO

a) A key to the reading

We are in the so-called "book of the resurrection" where we are told, in a not-so-logical sequence, several matters concerning the risen Christ and the facts that prove it. In the fourth Gospel, these facts take place in the morning (20:1-18) and evening of the first day after the Saturday and eight days later, in the same place and on the same day of the week. We are faced with an event that is the most important in the history of humanity, an event that challenges us personally. "If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is useless and your believing is useless... and you are still in your sins" (1Cor 15:14,17) says Paul the Apostle, who had not known Jesus before His resurrection, but who zealously preached Him all his life. Jesus is sent by the Father. He also sends us. Our willingness to "go" depends on the depth of the faith we have in the Risen One. Are we prepared to accept His mandate and to give our lives for His Kingdom? This passage is not just about the faith of those who have not seen (the witness of Thomas), but also about the mission entrusted to the Church by Christ.

b) A suggested division of the text to facilitate its reading

20:19-20: appearance to the disciples and showing of the wounds

20:21-23: gift of the Spirit for the mission

20:24-26: special appearance to Thomas eight days later

20:27-29: dialogue with Thomas

20:30-31: the aim of the Gospel according to John

c) The text:

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the doors were locked, where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be with you." When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained." Thomas, called Didymus, one of the Twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples said to him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger into the nail marks and put my hand into his side, I will not believe." Now a week later his disciples were again inside and Thomas was with them. Jesus came, although the doors were locked, and stood in their midst and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands, and bring your hand and put it into my side, and do not be unbelieving, but believe." Thomas answered and said to him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you come to believe because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed." Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples that are not written in this book. But these are written that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that through this belief you may have life in his name.



3. A moment of silence

to allow the Word to enter into our hearts

4. MEDITATIO

a) A few questions to help in our meditation:

Who or what drew my interest and wonder in the reading? Is it possible for someone to profess being Christian and yet not believe in the Resurrection of Jesus? Is the Resurrection even separable from the mission of Jesus? What does the gift of the Spirit for the mission mean to me? How does Jesus' mission in the world continue after the Resurrection? What is the content of the missionary proclamation? What are, if any, my doubts concerning the faith? How do I meet them and still carry on? Am I able to give reasons for my faith? Through different methods Jesus meets and renews the different disciples, to the point of a physical one-on-one encounter with Thomas. At what point do I believe?

b) Comment:

In the evening of that same day, the first day of the week: the disciples are living through an extraordinary day. For the community, at the time of the writing of the fourth Gospel, the day after the Sabbath is already "the Lord's day" (Rev 1:10), Dies Domini (Sunday), and is more important than the Sabbath was in the tradition of the Jews.

The doors were closed: a detail which shows that the body of the risen Jesus, even though recognizable, is not subject to the ordinary laws of human life.

Peace be with you: this is not just a wish, but the actual peace promised to them when they were saddened by His departure (Jn 14:27; 2Thess 3:16; Rom 5:3), the messianic peace, the fulfillment of the promises made by God, freedom from all fear, victory over sin and death, reconciliation with God, fruit of His passion, free gift of God. This peace is repeated three times in this passage as well as in the introduction (20:19) further on (20:26) in the exact same way.

He showed them His hands and His side: Jesus provides evident and tangible proof that He is the one who was crucified. Only John records the detail of the wound in the side caused by the spear of a Roman soldier, whereas Luke mentions the wounds of the feet (Lk 24:39). In showing His wounds, Jesus wants to say that the peace He gives comes from the cross (2Tim 2:1-13). They are part of His identity as the risen One (Rev 5:6).

The disciples were filled with joy when they saw the Lord: This is the same joy expressed by the prophet Isaiah when he describes the divine banquet (Is 25:8-9), the eschatological joy foreshadowed in the farewell discourse and that no one can take away (Jn 16:22; 20:27). Cf also Lk 24:39-40; Mt 28:8; Lk 24:41.

As the Father sent Me, so am I sending you: Jesus is the first missionary, "the apostle and high priest of the faith we profess" (Rev 3:1). After the experience of the cross and the resurrection, Jesus' prayer to the Father comes true (Jn 13:20; 17:18; 21:15, 17). This is not a new mission, but the mission of Jesus extended to those who are His disciples, bound to Him as branches are bound to the vine (15:9), so also they are bound

to His Church (Mt 28:18-20; Mk 16:15-18; Lk 24:47-49). The eternal Son of God was sent so that “the world might be saved through Him” (Jn 3:17) and the whole of His earthly existence, fully identified with the saving will of the Father, is a constant manifestation of that divine will that all may be saved. He leaves as an inheritance to the whole Church this historical plan, especially to ordained successors to those apostles within the Church.

He breathed on them: this action recalling the life-giving breath of God on man (Gen 2:7), does not occur anywhere else in the New Testament. It marks the beginning of a new creation.

Receive the Holy Spirit: after Jesus was glorified, the Holy Spirit was bestowed (Jn 7:39). Here the Spirit is transmitted for a special mission, whereas at Pentecost (Acts 2) the Holy Spirit comes down on the whole people of God.

For those whose sins you forgive they are forgiven; for those whose sins you retain, they are retained: we find the power to forgive or not forgive sins also in Matthew in a more juridical form (Mt 16:19; 18:18). According to the Scribes and Pharisees (Mk 2:7), and according to tradition (Is 43:25), God has the power to forgive sins. Jesus gives this power (Lk 5:24) and passes it on to His Church. In our meditation, it is better not to dwell on this text’s theological development in church tradition and the consequent theological controversies. In the fourth Gospel the expression may be taken in a wide sense. Here it is a matter of the power of forgiving sins in the Church as salvation community and those especially endowed with this power are those who share in the apostolic charism by succession and mission. In this general power is included the power to forgive sins also after baptism, what we call “the sacrament of reconciliation” expressed in various forms throughout the history of the Church.

Thomas, called the Twin, who was one of the Twelve: Thomas is one of the main characters of the fourth Gospel and his doubting character, easily discouraged, is emphasized (11:16; 14:5). “One of the twelve” is by now a stereotyped expression (6:71), because in fact they were only eleven. “Didimus” means “the Twin”, and we could be his “twin” through our difficulty in believing in Jesus, Son of God, who died and rose again.

We have seen the Lord! When Andrew, John and Philip had found the Messiah, they had already run to announce the news to others (Jn 1:41-45). Now there is the official proclamation by eye-witnesses (Jn 20:18).

Unless I see the holes that the nails made in His hands and can put my finger into the holes they made, and unless I can put my hand into His side, I refuse to believe: Thomas cannot believe the eye-witnesses. He wants to experience the event himself. The fourth Gospel is aware of the difficulty that some may have in believing in the Resurrection (Lk 24:34-40; Mk 16:11; 1Cor 15:5-8), especially those who have not seen the risen One. Thomas is their (and our) interpreter. He is willing to believe, but he wants to personally resolve any doubt, for fear of being wrong. Jesus does not see in Thomas an

indifferent skeptic, but a man in search of truth and satisfies him fully. This is, however, an occasion to express an appreciation of future believers (verse 29).

Put your finger here, look, here are My hands. Give me your hand; put it into My side. Doubt no longer but believe! Jesus repeats Thomas' words and enters into a dialogue with him. He understands Thomas' doubts and wishes to help him. Jesus knows that Thomas loves Him and therefore has compassion for him because Thomas does not yet enjoy the peace that comes from faith. Jesus helps him to grow in faith. In order to enter deeper into this theme, see the parallels in 1Jn 1-2; Ps 78:38, 103:13-14; Rom 5:20; 1Tim 1:14-16.

My Lord and my God! This is a profession of faith in the risen One and in His divinity as is also proclaimed in the beginning of John's Gospel (1:1). In the Old Testament "Lord" and "God" correspond respectively to "Yahweh" and "Elohim" (Ps 35:23-24; Rev 4:11). It is the fullest and most direct paschal profession of faith in the divinity of Jesus. In Jewish circles these terms had greater value because they applied to Jesus texts concerning God. Jesus does not correct Thomas' words as He corrected the words of the Jews who accused Him of wanting to be "equal to God" (Jn 5:18ff) thus approving the acknowledgement of His divinity.

You believe because you can see Me. Happy are those who have not seen and yet believe! Jesus cannot stand those who look for signs and miracles in order to believe (Jn 4:48) and He seems to take Thomas to task. Here we must remember another passage concerning a more authentic faith, a "way of perfection" towards a faith to which we must aspire without the demands of Thomas, a faith received as gift and as an act of trust, like the exemplary faith of our ancestors (Rev 11) and of Mary (Lk 1:45). Two thousand years after the coming of Jesus, we are told that, although we have not seen Him, yet we can love Him and believing in Him, we can exult with "an indescribable and glorious joy" (1 Pet 1:8).

These (signs) are recorded so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing this you may have life through His name. The fourth Gospel, like the other Gospels, does not mean to write a complete biography of Jesus, but only to show that Jesus was the Christ, the awaited Messiah, the Liberator, and that He was the Son of God. Believing in Him means that we possess eternal life. If Jesus is not God, then our faith is in vain!

5. ORATIO

Psalm 118 (117)

O give thanks to the Lord, for He is good;
His steadfast love endures forever!
Let Israel say,
"His steadfast love endures forever."
Let the house of Aaron say,
"His steadfast love endures forever."

Let those who fear the LORD say,
"His steadfast love endures forever."

I was pushed hard, so that I was falling,
but the Lord helped me.
The Lord is my strength and my song;
He has become my salvation.
Hark, glad songs of victory in the tents of the righteous.

The stone which the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone.
This is the Lord's doing;
it is marvelous in our eyes.
This is the day which the Lord has made;
let us rejoice and be glad in it.
Save us, we beseech Thee, O Lord!

O Lord, we beseech Thee, give us success!

6. CONTEMPLATIO

Closing prayer

I thank You Jesus, my Lord and my God, that You have loved me and called me, made me worthy to be Your disciple, that You have given me the Spirit, the One sent to proclaim and witness to Your resurrection, to the mercy of the Father, to salvation and pardon for all men and women in the world. You truly are the Way, the Truth and the Life, the dawn without a setting, the sun of justice and peace. Grant that I may dwell in Your love, bound to You like a branch to its vine. Grant me Your peace so that I may overcome my weaknesses, face my doubts and respond to Your call and live fully the mission You entrusted to me, praising you forever. You who live and reign forever and ever. Amen.

Lectio Divina: Monday, April 9, 2018

God's covenant with humanity
Mary's yes and our yes
Luke 1:26-38

1. Opening prayer

Merciful Father, in this holy time of prayer and of listening to Your Word, send also to me Your holy angel that I may receive the proclamation of salvation and that, after opening my heart, I may offer my yes to Love. Let, I beg You, the Holy Spirit overshadow me as an overwhelming power. From now on, Father, I do not wish to

express anything other than my “Yes!” and to say to You: “Behold, I am here for You. Do unto me whatever pleases You.” Amen.

2. Reading

a) The context of the passage:

The story of the annunciation takes us from the temple, a holy place par excellence, to the house, to the intimacy of a personal meeting of God with His creature; it leads us into ourselves, into the deepest part of our being and our story, where God alone can reach and touch us. The announcement of the birth of John the Baptist had opened the sterile womb of Elizabeth, thus overcoming the absolute powerlessness of humankind and transforming it into the ability to collaborate with God. On the other hand, the announcement of the birth of Jesus, knocks on the door of a fertile womb of the one who is “full of grace” and awaits a reply: it is God who waits for our yes so as to work everything in us.

b) An aid to the reading of this passage:

vv. 26-27: The first two verses place us at the time and sacred space of the event on which we are meditating and which we relive: we are in the sixth month from the conception of John the Baptist and in Nazareth, a city in Galilee, the land of the marginalized and unclean. Here God has come down to speak with a virgin, to speak to our hearts.

The people involved in this unsettling event are presented to us: Gabriel, the messenger of God, a young woman called Mary and her spouse Joseph of the royal house of David. We too are made welcome into this company and are called to enter into the mystery.

vv. 28-29: These are the very first words of the dialogue between God and His creature: just a few words, a mere breath, but all-powerful words that disturb the heart, that question deeply the meaning of human life, plans and expectations. The angel announces joy, grace and the presence of God; Mary is disturbed and asks herself how can any of this be happening to her. Where can such a joy come from? How can such a great grace, that can change her very being, be hers?

vv. 30-33: These are the central verses of the excerpt: it is the explosion of the announcement, the manifestation of the gift of God, of His omnipotence in the life of human beings. Gabriel, the strong, speaks of Jesus: the eternal king, the Savior, the God made child, the humble all-powerful. He speaks of Mary, of her womb, of her life that she was chosen to be the gateway to welcoming God in this world and into the lives of all people. Even at this stage of the events, God begins to draw near, to knock. He stands, attentive, by the door of the heart of Mary, and even now by our house, our hearts...

v. 34: Mary, faced with God’s proposal, allows herself to stand naked. She allows herself to be read to her very depths. She speaks of herself, her heart, her wishes. She

knows that for God the impossible is possible; she does not doubt or harden her heart and mind; she does not count the cost; she only wants to be fully available, open, and allows herself to be reached by that humanly impossible touch, but one already written, already realized in God. In a gesture of utter poverty, she places before God her virginity, her not knowing man. This is a complete and absolute surrender of self, full of faith and trust. It is her preliminary yes.

vv. 35-37: God, most humble, gives an answer; the all-powerful bends over the fragility of this woman, who represents each one of us. The dialogue continues; the covenant grows and is strengthened. God reveals the how. He speaks of the Holy Spirit, of the fruitful overshadowing, which does no violence, does not break, but preserves intact. He speaks of the human experience of Elizabeth. He reveals another impossible thing made possible; almost like a guarantee or security. And then comes the last word when one must make a choice: to say yes or no, believe or doubt, dissolve or harden oneself, to open the door or close it. "Nothing is impossible for God."

v. 38: The last verse seems to contain an infinity. Mary says her "Here I am." She opens herself wide to God and then the meeting, the union takes place forever. God enters into the human and the human becomes the place of God: these are the most sublime nuptials possible on earth. And yet, the Gospel ends on a sad and hard note: Mary stays alone; the angel leaves. What remains, however, is the yes pronounced to God and God's presence; what remains is real life.

c) The Text:

The angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary. And coming to her, he said, "Hail, full of grace! The Lord is with you." But she was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his Kingdom there will be no end." But Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?" And the angel said to her in reply, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. And behold, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren; for nothing will be impossible for God." Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

3. A moment of prayerful silence

I have read and listened to the words of the Gospel. Now I stand in silence ... God is present, at the door, and asks for shelter, yes, even from me and from my poor life ...

4. A few questions

a) God's announcement, His angel, enters my life, stands before me and speaks to me. Am I prepared to welcome Him, to give Him space, to listen to Him attentively?

b) Suddenly I receive an upsetting announcement. God speaks to me of joy, grace and presence: all the things that I have been seeking for so long, always. Who can make me really happy? Am I willing to trust in His happiness and His presence?

c) Not much is needed, just a movement of the heart, of my being; He is already aware of this. He is already overwhelming me with light and love. He says to me, "You have found favor in My sight." So, I please God? He finds me pleasant, loveable? Yes, that is how it really is. Why is it that I would not believe it before? Why have I not listened to Him?

d) The Lord Jesus wants to come into this world also through me; He wants to reach my brothers and sisters through the paths of my life, of my being. Would I lead Him astray? Would I refuse Him, keep Him at a distance? Would I wipe Him out of my story, my life?

5. A key to the reading

Some important and strong words that resonate in this Gospel passage.

● Rejoice!

This is a really strange greeting from God to His creature; it seems hard to explain and perhaps even senseless. And yet, for centuries it resonated in the pages of Sacred Scripture and thus also on the lips of the Hebrew people. Rejoice, be glad, exult! Many times the prophets had repeated this gentle breath of God and had shouted the silent beat of His heart for His people, His remnant. I read this in Joel: "Land, do not be afraid; be glad, rejoice, for Yahweh has done great things... (2:21-23); in Zephaniah: "Shout for joy, daughter of Zion, Israel, shout aloud! Rejoice, exult with all your heart, daughter of Jerusalem! Yahweh has repealed your sentence" (3:14); in Zechariah: "Sing, rejoice, daughter of Zion, for now I am coming to live among you – Yahweh declares!" (2, 14). I read and listen to it today; I say it also in my heart, in my life; a joy is announced to me, a new happiness, never before experienced. I rediscover the great things that the Lord has done for me; I experience the freedom that comes from His pardon: I am no longer sentenced, but graced forever; I live the experience of the presence of the Lord next to me, in me. Yes, He has come to dwell in our midst; He is once more setting up His tent in the land of my heart, of my existence. Lord, as the psalm says, You rejoice in Your creatures (Ps 104:31); and I too rejoice in You, give thanks to You; my joy is in You (Ps 104:34).

● The Lord is with you

These simple and enlightened words, pronounced by the angel to Mary, release an all-powerful force; I realize that these words alone would suffice to save my life, to lift me up again from whatever fall or humiliation, to bring me back when I go astray. The fact that He, my Lord, is with me, keeps me alive, gives me courage and trust to go on being. If I am, it is because He is with me. Who knows but that the experience of Isaac told in Scripture might not be valid for me, when one day Abimelech came to Isaac with his men to tell him, "It became clear to us that Yahweh was with you" (Gen 26:28) and then asked to become friends and form an alliance. Would that the same thing might be said of me; would that I could show that the Lord is truly with me, in my life, in my desires, in my affections, in my choices and actions; would that others might meet Him through me. Perhaps for this, it is necessary for me to absorb more of the presence of God, for me to eat and drink of Him.

Let me go to the school of Scripture, to read and re-read some passages where the voice of the Lord tells me again and again of this truth and, while He speaks, to be transformed, ever more in-dwelt. "Remain for the present in that country; I shall be with you and bless you" (Gen 26:3). "To Joshua son of Nun, Yahweh gave this order: Be strong and stand firm, for you are to be the one to bring the Israelites into the country which I have promised them on oath, and I myself shall be with you" (Deut 31:23). "They will fight against you but will not overcome you, because I am with you to save you and rescue you" (Jer 15:20). "The angel of Yahweh appeared to him and said: Yahweh is with you, valiant warrior!" (Judg 6:12). "Yahweh appeared to him the same night and said, 'I am the God of your father Abraham. Do not be afraid, for I am with you. I shall bless you and multiply your offspring for My servant Abraham's sake'" (Gen 26:24). "Be sure, I am with you; I shall keep you safe wherever you go, and bring you back to this country, for I shall never desert you until I have done what I have promised you" (Gen 28:15). "Do not be afraid, for I am with you; do not be alarmed, for I am your God. I give you strength, truly I help you, truly I hold you firm with my saving right hand" (Is 41:10)

● Do not be afraid

The Bible is packed with this pronouncement full of kindness; like a river of mercy, these words are found throughout the sacred books, from Genesis to the Apocalypse. It is the Father who repeats to His children not to be afraid, because He is with them; He will not abandon them; He will not forget them; He will not leave them in the hands of their enemies. It is like a declaration of love from God to humanity, to each one of us; it is a pledge of fidelity that is relayed from hand to hand, from heart to heart, and finally comes down to us. Abraham heard these words and after him his son Isaac, then the patriarchs, Moses, Joshua, David, Solomon and, with them, Jeremiah and all the prophets. No one is excluded from this embrace of salvation that the Father offers His children, even those farthest from Him, most rebellious against Him. Mary knows how to listen to these words and knows how to believe full of faith, in an attitude of absolute surrender. She listens and believes, welcomes and lives for us too. She is the strong and courageous woman who opens herself to the coming of God, letting go of all fears,

incredulity and a closed spirit. She repeats these same words of God in our lives and invites us to believe like her.

● **You enjoy God's favor**

“Lord, if I enjoy favor in your sight...”. This is the prayer that time and time again comes out of the lips and hearts of those who seek refuge in the Lord. The Scriptures tell us about such people. We come across them in our crossroads when we know not where to go, when we feel hounded by solitude or by temptation, when we experience abandonment, betrayals, heavy defeats of our own existence. When we no longer have anyone and we fail to find even ourselves, then we too, like them, find ourselves praying by repeating these same words: “Lord, if I enjoy favor in your sight...”. Who knows how often we have repeated these words, even alone and in silence. But today, here in this simple passage of the Gospel, we are forestalled, we are welcomed in anticipation; we need no longer plead, because we have already found everything that we always sought and much more. We have received freely. We are overwhelmed and now we can overflow!

● **Nothing is impossible to God**

I have nearly come to the end of this strong journey of grace and liberation; I now come across a word that shakes me in my depths. My faith is being sifted; the Lord is testing me, scrutinizing me, testing my heart. What the angel says here in front of Mary, had already been proclaimed many times in the Old Testament; now the time has come for the fulfilment; now all the impossible things come to pass. God becomes man; the Lord becomes friend, brother; the distant is very close. And I, even I, small and poor as I am, am given to share in the immensity of this gift, this grace; I am told that in my life too the impossible becomes possible. I only have to believe, to give my consent. But this means that I have to allow myself to be shattered by the power of God; to surrender to Him, who will transform me, free me and renew me. Not even this is impossible. Yes, I can be reborn today, here and now, by the grace of the voice that has spoken to me, that has reached me even to the very depths of my heart. I seek and transcribe the passages of Scripture that repeat this truth. And as I write them, as I re-read them and say them slowly, devouring every word, and what they say takes place in me... Genesis 18:14; Job 42:2; Jeremiah 32:17; Jeremiah 32:27; Zechariah 8:6; Matthew 19:26; Luke 18:27.

● **Here I am**

Now I cannot escape, nor can I avoid the conclusion. I knew from the beginning that here, in this word, so small and yet so full, so final, that God was waiting for me. The appointment of love, of the covenant between Him and me had been fixed precisely on this word, just a gentle voice, just a kiss. I am unsettled by the richness of the presence I feel in this “Here I am!”; I need not make much effort to recall the number of times that God first pronounced and repeated these words to me. He is the ‘Here I am’ made man, absolutely faithful, unforgettable. I only need to tune into Him, only find His footprints in the sand of my poverty, of my desert; I only need to welcome His infinite

love that never ceases to seek me, to stay close to me, to walk with me wherever I go. The “Here I am” has already been pronounced and realized. It is already real. How many before me and how many today have experienced this! I am not alone. I still remain silent, listening before I reply...

“Here I am!” (Is 65:1) God repeats; Mary replies, “Here I am, I am the servant of the Lord”; and Christ says, “I come to do Your will” (Ps 39:8)...

6. A time of prayer: Psalm 138

Father, into Your hands I commend my life.

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.
A word is not yet on my tongue before You,
Yahweh, know all about it.
You fence me in, behind and in front,
You have laid Your hand upon me.
Such amazing knowledge is beyond me,
a height to which I cannot attain.
Where shall I go to escape Your spirit?
Where shall I flee from Your presence?
If I scale the heavens You are there,
if I lie flat in Sheol, there You are.

You created my inmost self,
knit me together in my mother's womb.
For so many marvels I thank You;
a wonder am I, and all Your works are wonders.
You knew me through and through,
How hard for me to grasp Your thoughts,
how many, God, there are!
If I count them, they are more than the grains of sand;
if I come to an end, I am still with You.
God, examine me and know my heart,
test me and know my concerns.
Make sure that I am not on my way to ruin,
and guide me on the road to eternity.

7. Closing prayer

Father, You came down to me; You have come to me; You have touched my heart; You have spoken to me and promised joy, presence and salvation. By the grace of the Holy Spirit, who overshadows me, I, together with Mary, have been able to say to You yes,

the “Here I am” of my life for you. Now there remains only the force of Your promise, of Your truth: “You are to conceive and bear Jesus.” Lord, here is the womb of my life, of my being, of all that I am and have, open before You. I place all things in You, in Your heart. Enter, come, come down again, I beg You, and make me fruitful, make me one who gives birth to Christ in this world. May the overflowing love I receive from You find its fullness and truth in touching the brothers and sisters that You place beside me. May our meeting, Father, be open, a gift to all. May Jesus be the Savior. Amen.

Lectio Divina: Tuesday, April 10, 2018

Easter Time

1) Opening prayer

All praise and thanks be to You,
Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.
You have given us Your risen Son
to be alive in our communities.
Make us see Him with eyes of faith,
that He may unite us, heart and soul.
May His dynamic presence among us
move us to become with Him,
each other's bread of life,
that no one among us may hunger
for food or help when in need.
We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

2) Gospel Reading - John 3:7b-15

Jesus said to Nicodemus: "You must be born from above.' The wind blows where it wills, and you can hear the sound it makes, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes; so it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." Nicodemus answered and said to him, 'How can this happen?' Jesus answered and said to him, "You are the teacher of Israel and you do not understand this? Amen, amen, I say to you, we speak of what we know and we testify to what we have seen, but you people do not accept our testimony. If I tell you about earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? No one has gone up to heaven except the one who has come down from heaven, the Son of Man. And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life."

3) Reflection

- Today's Gospel speaks about the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus. Nicodemus had heard people speak about the things Jesus did, and he was struck, surprised. He wishes to speak with Jesus in order to be able to understand better. He

thought he knew the things of God. He lived with the booklet of the past in his hand to see if this agreed with the newness announced by Jesus. In the conversation, Jesus says that the only way in which Nicodemus could understand the things of God was to be born again! Sometimes we are like Nicodemus: we only accept as something new what is in agreement with our old ideas. Other times, we allow ourselves to be surprised by facts and we are not afraid to say, “I am born anew!”

- When the Evangelists recall the last words of Jesus, they have in mind the problems of the communities for which they write. Nicodemus’ questions to Jesus are a reflection of the questions of the communities of Asia Minor at the end of the first century. For this reason, Jesus’ answers to Nicodemus were, at the same time, a response to the problems of those communities. At that time, the Christians followed the catechesis in this way. Most probably, the account of the conversation of Jesus with Nicodemus formed part of the baptismal catechesis, because He says that the people have to be reborn of water and the Spirit (Jn 3:6).

- John 3:7b-8: Born from above, born anew, again, and born of the Spirit. In Greek, the same word means anew, again and from above. Jesus had said, “No one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit” (Jn 3:5). And He adds, “What is born of human nature, is human (flesh); what is born of the Spirit is Spirit” (Jn 3:6). Here “flesh” means that which is born only from our own ideas. What is born from us has our own mark, our own measure. To be born of the Spirit is another thing! And Jesus once again reaffirms what He had said before: “One has to be born from above (born again).” That is, one must be reborn of the Spirit who comes from above. And He explains that the Spirit is like the wind. Both in Hebrew and in Greek, the same word is used to say spirit and wind. Jesus says, “The wind blows where it pleases; you can hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” The wind has within it a direction. We are aware of the direction of the wind, for example, the wind of the North and the wind of the South, but we do not know nor do we control the cause why the wind moves in one direction or another. The Spirit is like this. “No one is the master of the Spirit” (Eccl 8:8). That which best characterizes the wind, the Spirit, is liberty. The wind, the Spirit, is free; it cannot be controlled. It acts on others, and nobody can act on it. Its origin is the mystery; its destiny is the mystery. The fisherman has, in the first place, to discover the direction of the wind. Then he should place the sails according to that direction. This is what Nicodemus should do and what all of us should do.

- John 3:9: Question of Nicodemus: How is that possible? Jesus does nothing more than summarize what the Old Testament taught concerning the action of the Spirit, of the holy wind, in the life of the People of God and which Nicodemus, Teacher and Doctor, should know. And just the same, Nicodemus is frightened in hearing Jesus’ response and acts as if he was ignorant: “How is that possible?”

- John 3:10-15: Jesus’ answer: Faith comes from witness and not from miracle. Jesus changes the question: “You are the Teacher of Israel and you do not know these things?” For Jesus, if people believe only when things are according to their own arguments and ideas, then faith is not perfect. Faith is perfect when it is the faith of one who believes because of the witness. He leaves aside his own arguments and gives himself, because he believes in the one giving witness.

4) Personal Questions

- Have you had some experience in which you have had the impression of being born again? What did it consist of?
- Jesus compares the action of the Holy Spirit with the wind. What does this comparison of the action of the Spirit of God reveal in our life? Have you already set the sails of your life in sync with the wind of the Spirit?
- The action of the Holy Spirit, like the wind, is often not like a hurricane, but rather like a small voice (1Kgs 19:11) – a whisper of the wind. Am I attentive enough to hear when the Holy Spirit speaks to me so softly?

5) Concluding Prayer

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. (Ps 34:18-19)

Lectio Divina: Wednesday, April 11, 2018

Easter Time

1) Opening prayer

Lord our God,
You loved the world - that is us - so much
that You gave us Your only Son
to save us from ourselves
and to give us eternal life. Do not condemn us, Lord,
do not leave us to ourselves
and to our little schemes
but give us Your Son now to stay with us
and to make love and justice and peace
ever new realities among us,
Your people reborn in Your Son,
Jesus Christ our Lord.

2) Gospel Reading - John 3:16-21

God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him will not be condemned, but whoever does not believe has already been condemned, because he has not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God. And this is the verdict, that the light came into the world, but people preferred darkness to light, because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come toward the light, so that his works might

not be exposed. But whoever lives the truth comes to the light, so that his works may be clearly seen as done in God.

3) Reflection

- John's Gospel is like a fabric or cloth made of three different, but similar, threads. The three of them are so well combined with one another that, sometimes, it is not possible to understand when one goes from one thread to the other. (a) The first thread is the facts and words of Jesus during the thirty years, preserved by the eye witnesses who kept the things which Jesus did and taught. (b) The second thread is the facts of the life of the community. Because of their faith in Jesus and convinced of His presence among them, the communities enlightened their path with the words and the gestures of Jesus. This has some impact on the description of the facts. For example, the conflict of the communities with the Pharisees at the end of the first century marks the way of describing the conflicts of Jesus with the Pharisees. (c) The comments made by the Evangelist are the third thread. In some passages it is difficult to perceive when Jesus ceases to speak and the Evangelist begins to weave his own comments. The text of today's Gospel, for example, is a beautiful and profound reflection of the Evangelist on the action of Jesus. The people can hardly notice the difference between when Jesus speaks and when the Evangelist does. In any case, both of them are Word of God.
- John 3:16: God loved the world. The word world is one of those words used more frequently in the Gospel of John: 78 times! It has several meanings. In the first place world may signify the earth, the space inhabited by human beings (Jn 11:9; 21:25) or also the created universe (Jn 17:5, 24) World can also mean the people who inhabit this earth, all of humanity (Jn 1:9; 3:16; 4:42; 6:14; 8:12). It can also mean a large group of people, as when we speak of "the whole world" (Jn 12:19; 14:27). Here, in our text the word world also has the sense of humanity, all human beings. God so loves humanity that He gave His only Son. The one who accepts that God reaches down to us in Jesus has already passed through death and has eternal life.
- John 3:17-19: The true sense of judgment. The image of God which appears in the three verses is that of a Father full of tenderness and not of a severe judgment. God sends His Son not to judge and condemn the world, but in order that the world may be saved through Him. The one who believes in Jesus and accepts Him as the revelation of God is not judged, because he is already accepted by God. And the one who does not believe in Jesus has already been judged. He excludes himself. And the Evangelist repeats what he had already said in the Prologue: many people do not want to accept Jesus, because His light reveals the evil which exists in them (cf. Jn 1:5, 10-11).
- John 3:20-21: To practice truth: In every human being, there is a divine seed, a trait of the Creator. Jesus, the revelation of the Father, is a response to this deepest desire of the human being. The one who wants to be faithful to what he has deepest in him accepts Jesus. It is difficult to find a broader ecumenical vision than the one expressed in these three verses in the Gospel of John.
- To complete the significance of the word *world* in the Fourth Gospel. Other times the word world means that part of humanity opposed to Jesus and to His message. There the word *world* assumes the meaning of "enemies" or "opponents" (Jn 7:4,7; 8:23, 26; 9:39; 12:25). This world which is contrary to the practice of the liberty of Jesus, is directed by the enemy, or Satan, also called the "prince of this world" (Jn 14:30; 16:11).

It represents the Roman Empire and, at the same time, also those Jews responsible for driving out the followers of Jesus from the synagogue. This world persecutes and kills the communities, causing tribulations for the faithful (Jn 16:33). Jesus will liberate them, conquering the prince of this world (Jn 12:31). Therefore, world means a situation of injustice, of oppression, which generates hatred and persecution against the communities of the beloved disciple. The persecutors are those people who have the power, the leaders, both of the Empire and of the synagogue. Lastly, world means all those who practice injustice using the name of God (Jn 16:2). The hope which the Gospel gives to the persecuted communities is that Jesus is stronger than the world. This is why He says: "In the world you will have hardship, but be courageous, I have conquered the world!" (Jn 16:33)

4) Personal questions

- God so loved the world that He gave His only Son. Has this truth penetrated the depth of your heart? Can we imagine sacrificing someone we love for a cause?
- The most ecumenical truth that exists is the life which God has given us and for which He has given His only Son. How do I live ecumenism in my daily life?
- It is clear at the end of this passage that "belief in His Son" does not just mean verbal acknowledgement. Believing also means believing the way of life He points us to by following every instruction and motivation He shares with us. Do we seek to know the wants, motivations, and actions He shares with us to live, and do we fulfill them?

5) Concluding Prayer

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. (Ps 34:1-2)

Lectio Divina: Thursday, April 12, 2018

Easter Time

1) Opening prayer

Lord our God,
Your Son Jesus Christ came from You
and bore witness to the things
He had heard and seen.
He could not but bear witness to You.
Give us the Spirit of Your Son, we pray You,
to speak Your word and to live it,
that we may show Christ, Your living Word,
to those who have not seen Him.
We ask You this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

2) Gospel Reading - John 3:31-36

The one who comes from above is above all. The one who is of the earth is earthly and speaks of earthly things. But the one who comes from heaven is above all. He testifies to what he has seen and heard, but no one accepts his testimony. Whoever does accept his testimony certifies that God is trustworthy. For the one whom God sent speaks the words of God. He does not ration his gift of the Spirit. The Father loves the Son and has given everything over to him. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever disobeys the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God remains upon him.

3) Reflection

- During the month of January we meditated on John 3:22-30, which shows us the last witness of John the Baptist concerning Jesus. It was a response given by him to his disciples, in which he reaffirms that he, John, is not the Messiah, but rather his precursor (Jn 3:28). On that occasion, John utters that beautiful phrase which summarizes his witness: “It is necessary that He grow greater and I grow smaller!” This phrase is the guide for all those who want to follow Jesus.
- The verses of today’s Gospel are again a comment of the Evangelist in order to help the communities to better understand the importance of the things that Jesus did and taught. Here, we have another indication of those three threads of which we spoke before.
- John 3:31-33: A refrain which is always repeated. Throughout the Gospel of John, there often appears conflict between Jesus and the Jews who challenge the words of Jesus. Jesus speaks of what He hears from the Father. He is total transparency. His enemies, not opening themselves to God and because they cling to their own ideas here on earth, are not capable of understanding the deep significance of the things that Jesus lives, does and says. Ultimately, this is the evil one which pushes the Jews to arrest and condemn Jesus.
- John 3:34: Jesus gives us the Spirit without reserve. John’s Gospel uses many images and symbols to signify the action of the Spirit. As in Creation (Gen 1:1), in the same way the Spirit descends on Jesus “like a dove, come from Heaven” (Jn 1:32). It is the beginning of the new creation! Jesus repeats the words of God and communicates the Spirit to us without reserve (Jn 3:34). His words are Spirit and life (Jn 6:63). When Jesus is about to leave this earth, He says that He will send another Advocate, another defender, to be with us forever (Jn 14:16-17). By his Passion, Death and Resurrection, Jesus obtains for us the gift of the Spirit. Through baptism all of us have received this same Spirit of Jesus (Jn 1:33). When He appeared to the apostles, He breathed on them and said: “Receive the Holy Spirit!” (Jn 20:22). The Spirit is like the water which springs from the people who believe in Jesus (Jn 7:37-39; 4:14). The first effect of the action of the Spirit in us is reconciliation: “If you forgive anyone’s sins they will be forgiven; if you retain anyone’s sins, they are retained!” (Jn 20:23). The Spirit is given

to us to recall and understand the full significance of the words of Jesus (Jn 14:26; 16:12-13). Animated by the Spirit of Jesus we can adore God in any place (Jn 4:23-24). Here is fulfilled the liberty of the Spirit of which Saint Paul speaks: “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (2 Cor 3:17).

- John 3:35-36: The Father loves the Son. He reaffirms the identity between the Father and Jesus. The Father loves the Son and places all things in His hand. Saint Paul will say that the fullness of divinity dwells in Jesus (Col 1:19; 2:9). This is why the one who accepts Jesus and believes in Jesus has eternal life, because God is life. The one who does not accept and believe in Jesus, places himself outside.

4) Personal questions

- Jesus communicates the Spirit to us, without reserve. Have you had any experience of this Spirit in your life?
- He who believes in Jesus has eternal life. What does it mean to believe? If one proclaims someone is a king, but does not follow this king's commands, is there really belief there is a king? Using this parallel, what does it really mean to believe?

5) Concluding Prayer

Proclaim with me the greatness of Yahweh;
let us acclaim His name together.
Taste and see that Yahweh is good.
How blessed are those who take refuge in Him. (Ps 34:3, 8)

Lectio Divina: Friday, April 13, 2018

Easter Time

1) Opening prayer

Lord our God,
your Son Jesus fed
those who followed Him in the desert
and they received as much as they wanted. May we know and be convinced
that He can fill our own emptiness
not just with gifts
that fill our need of the moment
but with Himself,
and may we accept Him eagerly,
for He is our Lord forever. Amen.

2) Gospel Reading - John 6:1-15

Jesus went across the Sea of Galilee. A large crowd followed him, because they saw the signs he was performing on the sick. Jesus went up on the mountain, and there he sat down with his disciples. The Jewish feast of Passover was near. When Jesus raised his eyes and saw that a large crowd was coming to him, he said to Philip, "Where can we buy enough food for them to eat?" He said this to test him, because he himself knew what he was going to do. Philip answered him, "Two hundred days' wages worth of food would not be enough for each of them to have a little." One of his disciples, Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter, said to him, "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish; but what good are these for so many?" Jesus said, "Have the people recline." Now there was a great deal of grass in that place. So the men reclined, about five thousand in number. Then Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed them to those who were reclining, and also as much of the fish as they wanted. When they had had their fill, he said to his disciples, "Gather the fragments left over, so that nothing will be wasted." So they collected them, and filled twelve wicker baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves that had been more than they could eat. When the people saw the sign he had done, they said, "This is truly the Prophet, the one who is to come into the world." Since Jesus knew that they were going to come and carry him off to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain alone.

3) Reflection

- The reading of John today places before us two signs or miracles: the multiplication of the loaves (Jn 6:1-15) and walking on the water (Jn 6:16-21). Then the long discourse on the bread of life is mentioned (Jn 6:22-71). John places this fact close to the feast of the Passover (Jn 6:4). The central issue is the confrontation between the old Passover of the Exodus and the new Passover which takes place in Jesus. The discourse on the bread of life will explain the new Passover which takes place in Jesus.
- John 6:1-4: The situation. In the ancient Passover, the multitude crossed the Red Sea. In the new Passover, Jesus crosses the Sea of Galilee. A great crowd follows Moses. A great crowd follows Jesus in this new exodus. In the first exodus, Moses goes up to the mountain. Jesus, the new Moses, also goes up to the mountain. The crowds follow Moses who presents great signs. The crowds follow Jesus because they have seen the signs that He worked on behalf of the sick.
- John 6:5-7: Jesus and Philip. Seeing the multitude, Jesus confronts the disciples with the hunger of the people and asks Philip, "Where can we buy some bread for these people to eat?" In the first exodus, Moses obtained food for the hungry people. Jesus, the new Moses, will Himself provide the same thing. But Philip, instead of looking at the situation in the light of the Scripture, looked at it according to the system and replies, "Two hundred denarii would not buy enough!" One denarius was the minimum salary for one day. Philip is aware of the problem and recognizes his inability to solve it. He complains, but presents no solution.

- John 6:8-9: Andrew and the boy. Andrew, instead of complaining, seeks a solution. He finds a boy who has five loaves of bread and two fish. Five barley loaves and two fish were the daily ration of food for the poor. The boy hands over his daily ration of food! He could have said, “Five loaves of bread and two fish, what is this for all these people? It will serve nothing! Let us divide all this among ourselves, between two or three people,” but instead, he has the courage to give the five loaves of bread and the two fish to feed 5000 people (Jn 6:10) One who does this is either a fool or has much faith, believing that out of love for Jesus, all are ready to share their food as the boy did!

- John 6:10-11: The multiplication. Jesus asks the people to sit down on the ground. Then He multiplies the food, the ration of the poor. The text says, “Then Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed them to those who were sitting there; He then did the same with the fish, distributing as much as they wanted.” With this phrase, written in the year 100, John recalls the action of the Last Supper (I Cor 11:23-24). The Eucharist, when it is celebrated as it should be, will lead people to share as it impelled the boy to give all his ration of food to be shared.

- John 6:12-13: The twelve baskets of what was left over. Number twelve connotes the totality of the people with their twelve tribes. John does not say whether fish were also left over. He is interested in recalling the bread as a symbol of the Eucharist. The Gospel of John does not have the description of the Last Supper, but describes the multiplication of the loaves, symbol of what would happen in the communities through the celebration of the Eucharistic Supper. If among the Christian people there was a true and proper sharing, there would be abundant food and twelve baskets would be left over for many other people!

- John 6:14-15: They want to make Him king. The people interpret Jesus’ gesture, saying, “This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world!” The people’s intuition is correct. Jesus in fact, is the new Moses, the Messiah, the one whom the people were expecting (Deut 18:15-19). But this intuition had been corrupted by the ideology of the time which wanted a great king who would be strong and a dominator. This is why, seeing the sign, the people proclaim Jesus the Messiah and ask to make him King! Jesus realizes what could happen, and He withdraws and goes to the mountain alone. He does not accept this way of being Messiah and waits for the opportune moment to help the people to advance a step farther.

4) Personal questions

- With regard to the problem of hunger in the world, do you act as Philip, as Andrew or like the boy?

- The people wanted a Messiah who would be a strong and powerful king. Do we want a powerful Messiah in our life too, to take away all of our problems? Or do we submit as He did and accept what God has given us and follow rather than conquer?

5) Concluding Prayer

Yahweh is my light and my salvation,
whom should I fear?
Yahweh is the fortress of my life,
whom should I dread? (Ps 27:1)

Lectio Divina: Saturday, April 14, 2018

Easter Time

1) Opening prayer

Lord God,
also in our day we need men and women
filled with the Spirit of love and service
who are attentive to the needs of people.
Let them listen even to the unspoken cries
of people too timid to voice
their poverty and distress
and help without condescension
their brothers and sisters of Christ,
for He is our Lord for ever. Amen.

2) Gospel Reading - John 6:16-21

When it was evening, the disciples of Jesus went down to the sea, embarked in a boat, and went across the sea to Capernaum. It had already grown dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. The sea was stirred up because a strong wind was blowing. When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they began to be afraid. But he said to them, "It is I. Do not be afraid." They wanted to take him into the boat, but the boat immediately arrived at the shore to which they were heading.

3) Reflection

- Today's Gospel narrates the episode of the boat on the agitated sea. Jesus is on the *mountain*, the disciples in the *sea*, and the people on the *land*. By his way of describing the facts, John tries to help the communities discover the mystery which envelops the person of Jesus. He does it by recalling texts from the Old Testament which refer to the Exodus.

- At the time when John wrote, the small boat of the communities had to face a contrary wind both on the part of the converted Jews who wanted to reduce the mystery of Jesus to prophecies and figures of the Old Testament, and on the part of some converted Gentiles who thought that it was possible to have an alliance between Jesus and the Empire.

- John 6:15: *Jesus on the mountain*. Having seen the multiplication of the loaves, the people conclude that Jesus is the awaited Messiah, because according to the hope of the people of the time, the Messiah would have repeated the gesture of Moses: feeding the people in the desert. For this reason, according to the official ideology, the crowds thought that Jesus was the Messiah, and, because of this, they wanted to make Him king (cf. Jn 6:14-15). This request of the people was a temptation for Jesus as well as for the disciples. In Mark's Gospel, Jesus obliges the disciples to get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side of the lake (Mk 6:45). He wanted to prevent them from getting contaminated with this ideology. This is a sign that the "yeast of Herod and of the Pharisees" was very strong (Mk 8:15). Jesus faces the temptation with prayer on the mountain.

- John 6:16-18: *The situation of the disciples*. It was already night. The disciples went down near the sea; they got into the boat and headed toward Capernaum, on the other side of the sea. John says that it was already dark and that Jesus had not arrived as yet. On the one hand he recalls the Exodus: to cross the sea in the midst of difficulties. On the other, he recalls the situation of the communities in the Roman Empire: with the disciples, they were living in the dark, with a contrary wind, and the sea was agitated, and Jesus seemed to be absent!

- John 6:19-20. *Change of the situation*. Jesus approaches them walking on the water of the sea of life. The disciples are afraid. As happens in the story of Emmaus, they did not recognize Him (Lk 24:28). Jesus gets close to them and says, "*It is I! Do not be afraid!*" For those who know the story of the Old Testament, here again John recalls some very important facts: (a) He recalls the crowd, protected by God, crossing the Red Sea without fear. (b) He recalls that God, when calling Moses, declares His name, saying, "*I am!*" (Ex 3:15). (c) He recalls also the Book of Isaiah which presents the return from exile as a new Exodus, in which God repeats many times, "*I am!*" (cf. Is 42:8; 43:5, 11-13; 44:6, 25; 45:5-7).

- For the People of the Bible, the sea was the symbol of the abyss, of chaos, of evil (Rev 13:1). In Exodus the people go across toward liberty, facing and conquering the sea. God divides the sea with His breath and the crowds cross the sea, which is dry land. (Ex 14:22). In other passages the Bible shows God who conquers the sea (Gen 1:6-10; Ps 104:6-9; Prov 8:27). The sea was an immense part of nature, more powerful than man, and at any time or turbulence could swallow up those on it. To conquer the sea means to have control over even the most powerful nature on earth. In this passage Jesus reveals His divinity by dominating and conquering the sea, preventing the boat and His disciples from being carried away by the waves. This way of evoking or recalling the

Old Testament, of using the Bible, helped the communities to recognize the presence of God in Jesus and in the facts of life. *“Do not be afraid”!*

- John 6:22. *They reached the desired port.* They want to take Jesus into the boat, but it was not necessary, because the boat touched the shore where they were headed. They reached the desired port. The psalm says, “He reduced the storm to calm, and all the waters subsided. He brought them overjoyed at the stillness, to the port where they were bound.” (Ps 107:29-30).

4) Personal questions

- On the mountain: Why does Jesus seek to be alone to pray after the multiplication of the loaves? What is the result of His prayer?

- How is life like the sea? Does it scare us?
- Is it possible today to walk on the water of the sea of life? How?

5) Concluding Prayer

Shout for joy, you upright;
praise befits the honest.
Give thanks to Yahweh on the lyre,
play for Him on the ten-stringed lyre. (Ps 33:1-2)

Lectio Divina: Sunday, April 15, 2018

Jesus appears to the apostles
Luke 24:35-48

1. Opening prayer

Shaddai, God of the mountain,
You who make of our fragile life
the rock of Your dwelling place,
lead our mind
to strike the rock of the desert,
so that water may gush to quench our thirst.
May our feelings, poor as they are,
cover us as with a mantle in the darkness of the night
and may they open our hearts to hear the echo of silence
until the dawn,
wrapping us in the light of the new morning,
brings us,

who have kept vigil close to the divine Master,
the flavor of the holy memory.

2. Lectio

i) The text:

The two disciples recounted what had taken place on the way, and how Jesus was made known to them in the breaking of bread. While they were still speaking about this, he stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be with you." But they were startled and terrified and thought that they were seeing a ghost. Then he said to them, "Why are you troubled? And why do questions arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me and see, because a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you can see I have." And as he said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. While they were still incredulous for joy and were amazed, he asked them, "Have you anything here to eat?" They gave him a piece of baked fish; he took it and ate it in front of them. He said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and in the prophets and psalms must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. And he said to them, "Thus it is written that the Christ would suffer and rise from the dead on the third day and that repentance, for the forgiveness of sins, would be preached in his name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things."



ii) A moment of silence:

Let us allow the sound of the Word to echo within us.

3) Meditatio

i) A few questions:

- a) It happened that along the way, they recognized Him: How many are the occasions of grace along the way of our existence? Do we recognize Him as He breaks the bread at that moment with us in the inn at evening time?
- b) Jesus Himself among them. Look and touch: It is really I! Do we touch the lives of each other in a way that acknowledges Him in our neighbor?
- c) Startled and frightened, they supposed they were seeing a ghost: Which God attracts us? Is it the unseen God who is always beyond our little world, or is it God as we see in His Son?
- d) In their joy they still disbelieved: Is joy our walking stick on the journey? Is the sense

of expectation alive in us, or do we move in the shadow of resigning ourselves to our fate?

e) He opened their minds to understand the scriptures: Are we open to the many depths in scripture and seek to hold each?

ii) A key to the reading:

The idea of a journey in Luke mirrors the theological journey of the intervention of grace in human events. John prepares the way for the Lord who is to come (Lk 1:76) and cries to make straight His ways (Lk 3:4); Mary goes out and hurries towards the mountains (Lk 1:39); Jesus, God's way (Lk 20:21), walks with human beings and marks the way of peace (Lk 1:79) and of life (Acts 2:28), walking the way Himself first by His very existence. After the resurrection He continues the journey together with the disciples (Lk 24:32) and remains the protagonist on the journey of the Church that identifies itself with His journey (Acts 18:25). The whole *raison d'être* of the Church lies in this journey of salvation (Acts 16:17) that leads to God (Acts 18:2). She is called to live the way and to point it out to all so that everyone may leave his/her way (Acts 14:16) and walk towards the Lord who walks with those who belong to Him.

v. 35. Then, returning from Emmaus, the two disciples explained what had happened on the road and how they had recognized the Lord when He broke the bread. The experience of meeting with Life allows one to go back on one's tracks. This is not the going back of remorse or of regret. It is the going back of one who re-reads his/her own story and knows that s/he will meet God in those events. It is God who comes to meet us and walks beside us on the road, which is often dry and barren, with things unfinished. God reveals Himself through the familiar gestures of an experience long relished. People are called to welcome the new presence of God on their road where God reveals Himself in the basic signs of Christian community life: the Scriptures, read in a Christological light, and the breaking of the bread (Lk 24:1-33). The history of humankind, privileged space for God's action, is the history of salvation that is inherent in all human situations and throughout the centuries in a kind of perennial exodus, full of the newness of the proclamation.

v. 36. While the two were telling them this, suddenly the Lord Himself stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" Luke wisely weaves the events in order to give a foundation and continuity to the history of salvation. The seeds proclaimed would flower, and the atmosphere of newness, which blows gently through the pages of these events, forms a basis for the development of a "memoria Dei" that crops up from time to time. Jesus returns to those who belong to Him. He stands in their midst, Himself, complete, as before, even though in a different manner that is now definitive. He manifests Himself in His glorified bodily form to show that the resurrection is something that really happened.

v. 37. Startled and frightened they supposed they were seeing a ghost. The disciples' reaction does not seem to fit in well with the preceding story since they already believed in the resurrection on the word of Peter (24:34). Their confusion, however, does not

concern the conviction that Jesus is risen, but concerns the bodily nature of the risen Jesus. Thus there is no contradiction in the narrative. It was necessary for the disciples to experience intensely the bodily reality of the resurrection of Jesus for them to carry out adequately their future mission of witnessing to the good news and of clarifying ideas on the Risen One: they did not think it was Jesus Himself, but supposed they were seeing a ghost.

vv. 38-40. But He said to them: "Why are you alarmed? Why are these doubts coming up in your minds? Look at My hands and My feet, and see that it is I Myself. Touch Me, and you will know, for a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you can see I have". He said this and showed them His hands and His feet. The Jesus of Luke's Gospel is almost a hero who meets His fate with certainty, and the few shadows there are serve only to underscore and emphasize the fullness of His being. Luke had recalled the humble origins and the genealogy, quite common and devoid of prestigious people, a crowd of obscure people from whom the figure of the Christ sprang. In the turmoil and doubt of the disciples after the resurrection, it is clear that Jesus is not the Savior of the great, but of all, startled and frightened though they may be. He, the protagonist in the journey of the Church, walks the human paths of disbelief in order to heal them with faith and continues to walk in time, showing His hands and feet in the flesh and bones of believers.

vv. 41-42. They still could not believe, they were so full of joy and wonder; so He asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?" They gave Him a piece of broiled fish, which He took and ate in their presence. Every invitation to sit at table includes the desire for intimacy; it is a remaining, a sharing. The resurrection does not take away from Jesus the possibility of presenting Himself as the place for sharing. That cooked fish, for years eaten together with His disciples, continues to be a means of communion: a fish cooked in love for each other; a food that does not cease to reassure the hidden hunger of humankind; a common bond with all people.

v. 44. Then He said to them, "These are the very things I told you about while I was still with you: everything written about Me in the Law of Moses, the writings of the prophets, and the psalms had to come true." The moments of anxiety, of emotion, of tears for the nation (Lk 19:41), the exertion of going up to Jerusalem, the temptations, all these had defined the eternal border between humiliation-hiding and affirmation-glory focused in the various phases of Jesus' human life in the light of the Father's will. Bitterness, obscurity and suffering had nourished the Savior's heart: "I have a baptism to receive, and how distressed I am until it is over!" (Lk 12:50). Now the work of grace is visible because through the working of the Spirit, the eschaton, already accomplished in Christ and in the believer, creates an atmosphere of praise, a climate of joy and deep peace, typical of things accomplished. The parousia will mark the end of the salvific journey, a time of consolation and restoration of all things (Acts 3:21).

v. 45. Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. The faith of the apostles in the resurrection is the hermeneutic key for an interpretation of the Scriptures and the basis of the paschal proclamation. The Bible is fulfilled in Christ, in Him it is unified in

His prophetic value and in Him it acquires its full meaning. Human beings cannot of themselves understand the Word of God. The presence of the Risen One opens the mind to a full understanding of the mystery hidden in the sacred words concerning human existence.

vv. 45-47. "This is what is written: the Messiah must suffer and must rise from death three days later, and in His name the message of repentance and the forgiveness of sins must be preached to all nations beginning in Jerusalem." In Luke, salvation touches all of the human dimensions through the working of Christ who saves from evil, who frees from darkness (Acts 26:18) and from sin (Lk 5:20-26; Acts 2:38), from disease and from suffering, from death, from disbelief and from idols; who realizes human life in the community being of God, happy fraternity of love; who does not leave us orphans but is always present with His Spirit from on high (Acts 2:2). The radical salvation of humankind lies in freeing hearts of stone and in receiving a new heart, which implies a dynamism that frees from every form of slavery (Lk 4:16-22). God guides history. It is He who evangelizes and guides the journey of those who belong to Him. The evangelist of great horizons - from Adam to the kingdom, from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth - is also the evangelist of every day events. The historical-eschatological process is taking place through which concrete history is accomplished, transcending human history. Jesus goes on offering salvation through His Spirit who creates witnesses capable of prophecy and of spreading salvation until the time when Christ will return (Lk 21:28) and when the complete freedom of humankind will be manifest. In Acts 2:37 we find a resume of the whole *iter salutis* suggested here: to welcome the word, to be converted, believe, be baptized, obtain forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Spirit, and to live in the way the Lord has commanded. The word of salvation, word of grace, unfurls its power in the heart of one who listens (Lk 8:4-15), and the invocation of the name of the Savior seals salvation in the one converted to the faith. The action of Jesus through the Spirit, made present by the mediation of the Church (Acts 9:3-5), complements the action accomplished through the Church to whom He Himself refers as in the call of Paul (Acts 9:6-18).

v. 48. You are witnesses of these things. The Christian community, called to map the journey of witnessing in human history, proclaims by word and deed the fulfillment of the kingdom of God among human beings and the presence of the Lord Jesus who continues to work as Messiah, Lord and prophet in His Church. The Church will grow and walk in the fear of the Lord, full of the consolation of the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:31). This is a journey of service, meant to echo the Word of salvation to the farthest ends of the earth (Acts 1:1-11). Gradually the journey goes farther away from Jerusalem and goes to the heart of the pagan world. When it reaches Rome, the capital of the empire, Luke will put his signature to his evangelizing steps. No one will be excluded in the process. All are meant to receive salvation, especially sinners, for whose conversion there is great joy in heaven (Lk 15:7.10). Like Mary, who for Luke is the model of the disciple who walks in the Lord, believers are called to be completely transformed in order to live the messianic motherhood, whatever one's own "virginal" state, which is an expression of the poverty of being creature (Lk 1:30-35). The yes of the Magnificat is the way to go. We walk carrying within ourselves the word of salvation; we walk in

faith, trusting in God who keeps His promises; we walk in the joy of Him who makes us blessed, not through any merit of ours but in humility of life. May Mary's itinerary be ours: to go, carried by the Spirit, towards our brothers and sisters, taking with us as our only baggage the saving Word: Christ the Lord (Acts 3:6).

iii) Reflection

In His meeting with people, Jesus offered His benevolent presence and waited for the seed of the word and of faith to sprout. When the apostles abandoned Him, when Peter denied Him, when the sinful woman loved Him, when the Pharisees were closed to Him, He was neither scandalized nor perturbed. He knew that what He had said and suggested to them would not be lost...and indeed, after Pentecost these same people go before the Sanhedrin without fear to say that it is necessary to obey God rather than human beings. Peter preaches openly, even dying on a cross like his Master. The women are sent as witnesses of the resurrection to the apostles, and a Pharisee son of Pharisees, Paul of Tarsus, becomes the Apostle of the Gentiles.

If you, man or woman, cannot avoid living daily the death of yourself, you must not, however, forget that the resurrection is hidden in your wounds to make you live in Him, even now. In your neighbor, who may be for you a sepulchre of death and mud, a cursed cross, you will find new life. Yes, because the risen Christ will take on the appearance of your neighbor: a gardener, a traveler, a spirit, a person on the shore of a lake... When you can welcome the "challenge" of Pilate that echoes through the centuries and not accept the exchange suggested (Jn 18:39-40) because you will have learned in the nights of forsakenness that you cannot barter your brigand's life with the life of Jesus, then you too will shout like Thomas, the apostle, in the wonder of faith: "My Lord and my God" (Jn 20:28), my God and my all, and the beauty of your joy will never set on the horizon of your day.

4. Oratio

Lord, we seek You and wish to see Your face:
one day when the veil will be removed,
we shall be able to contemplate You.

We seek You in the Scriptures that speak of You:
under the veil of wisdom we welcome the cross, Your gift to all.

We seek You in the radiant faces of our brothers and sisters:
we see You in the marks of Your passion on their suffering bodies.

It is not our eyes, but our heart that sees You:
in the light of hope we hope to meet You and speak to You.

5. Contemplatio

Lord, give us the perseverance to walk towards the summits in the light of the only Word that saves. As blood brother or sister, the Blood that makes us all brothers and sisters, I remain here, near the tomb of every interior death to set out like a traveler on the paths of no feeling and come to the paths of friendship and meeting. Today, I would like to share the wonder of human love, the joy of wonderful people who live near me not on the edge of their existence, but in their open secrets, where their hearts embrace the absolute of God. Thank you for giving me His risen face and for Your heart enamored of Life and kissed by the eternal. Thank you for Your freedom of explorer that immerses itself in the depths of the essential. God of the desert that becomes garden, may I always be a small flame lit in the darkness of human endeavor, a heat that spreads where the cold winds of evil destroy and diminish the horizons of truth and beauty, that tells the world of the wonderful adventure of risen human love, the love that knows how to die in order to incarnate the smile of God. Amen.

Lectio Divina: Monday, April 16, 2018

Easter Time

1) Opening prayer

Our living God,
we hunger for lasting life and happiness
and the fulfillment of all our hopes.
Satisfy all our hungers
through your Son Jesus Christ, who is our bread of life.
And when he has filled us with himself,
may he lead and strengthen us
to bring to a waiting world
the food of reconciliation and joy,
which you alone can give to the full.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.

2) Gospel Reading - John 6:22-29

The next day, the crowd that remained across the sea saw that there had been only one boat there, and that Jesus had not gone along with his disciples in the boat, but only his disciples had left. Other boats came from Tiberias near the place where they had eaten the bread when the Lord gave thanks. When the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they themselves got into boats and came to Capernaum looking for Jesus. And when they found him across the sea they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you get here?" Jesus answered them and said, "Amen, amen, I say to you, you are looking for me not because you saw signs but because you ate the loaves and were filled. Do not work for food that perishes but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the

Son of Man will give you. For on him the Father, God, has set his seal.” So they said to him, “What can we do to accomplish the works of God?” Jesus answered and said to them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in the one he sent.”

3) Reflection

- In today’s Gospel we begin the discourse on the Bread of Life (Jn 6:22-71), which is extended during the next six days, until the end of the week. After the multiplication of the loaves, the people follow Jesus. They had seen the miracle; they had eaten and were satiated and wanted more! They were not concerned about looking for the sign or the call of God that was contained in all of this. When the people found Jesus in the synagogue at Capernaum, He had a long conversation with them, called the Discourse of the Bread of Life. It is not really a discourse, but it is a series of seven brief dialogues which explain the meaning of the multiplication of the bread, symbol of the new Exodus and of the Eucharistic Supper.

- It is good to keep in mind the division of the chapter in order to understand better its significance:

6:1-15: the great multiplication of the loaves

6:16-21: the crossing of the lake, and Jesus who walks on the water

6:22-71: the dialogue of Jesus with the people, with the Jews and with the disciples

1st dialogue: 6:22-27 with the people: the people seek Jesus and find Him in Capernaum

2nd dialogue: 6:28-34 with the people: faith as the work of God and the manna of the desert

3rd dialogue: 6:35-40 with the people: the true bread is to do God’s will.

4th dialogue: 6:41-51 with the Jews: the complaining of the Jews

5th dialogue: 6:52-58 with the Jews: Jesus and the Jews.

6th dialogue: 6:59-66 with the disciples: reaction of the disciples

7th dialogue: 6:67-71 with the disciples: confession of Peter

- The conversation of Jesus with the people, with the Jews, and with the disciples is a beautiful dialogue, but a demanding one. Jesus tries to open the eyes of the people in a way that they will learn to read the events and discover in them the turning point that life should take. It is not enough to follow behind miraculous signs which multiply the bread for the body. Man does not live by bread alone. The struggle for life without mysticism does not reach the roots. The people, while speaking with Jesus, always remain more annoyed or upset by his words. But Jesus does not give in, neither does He

change the exigencies. The discourse seems to be a funnel. In the measure in which the conversation advances, fewer people remain with Jesus. At the end only the twelve remain there, but Jesus cannot trust them either! Today the same thing happens. When the Gospel begins to demand commitment, many people withdraw and go away.

- John 6:22-27: People look for Jesus because they want more bread. The people follow Jesus. They see that He did not go into the boat with the disciples and, because of this, they do not understand what He had done to reach Capernaum. They did not even understand the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves. People see what has happened, but they cannot understand all this as a sign of something more profound. They stop only on the surface; in being satisfied with the food. They look for bread and life, but only for the body. According to the people, Jesus does what Moses had done in the past: to feed all the people in the desert. According to Jesus, they wanted the past to be repeated. But Jesus asks the people to take a step more and advance. Besides working for the bread that perishes, they should work for the imperishable food. This new food will be given by the Son of Man, indicated by God Himself. He brings life which lasts forever. He opens for us a new horizon on the sense of life and on God.

- John 6:28-29: Which is God's work? The people ask: what should we do to carry out this work of God? Jesus answers that the great work of God asks us to "believe in the one sent by God". That is, to believe in Jesus!

4) Personal questions

- The people were hungry, they eat the bread, and they look for more bread. They seek the miracle and do not seek the sign of God which was hidden in that. What do I seek more in my life: a miracle or a sign or the meaning?

- Keep silence within you for a moment and ask yourself: "To believe in Jesus: What does this mean for me specifically in my daily life?"

- What do I really work for in my life? Food that perishes or food that endures? Am I not committed and do a little of both, "just in case"?

5) Concluding Prayer

Lord, I tell You my ways and You answer me;
teach me Your wishes.
Show me the way of Your precepts,
that I may reflect on Your wonders. (Ps 119:26-27)

Lectio Divina: Tuesday, April 17, 2018

Easter Time

1) Opening prayer

Lord our God, generous Father,
You have given us Your Son Jesus
that we may relive with Him and like Him
His passion and His resurrection. Through Jesus, give us the courage
to place ourselves into Your hands
in the trials of life and in death,
that one day we may see Your glory
and at Your right hand Your Son Jesus Christ,
who lives with You for ever.

2) Gospel Reading - John 6:30-35

The crowd said to Jesus: "What sign can you do, that we may see and believe in you? What can you do? Our ancestors ate manna in the desert, as it is written: He gave them bread from heaven to eat." So Jesus said to them, "Amen, amen, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave the bread from heaven; my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." So they said to Jesus, "Sir, give us this bread always." Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst."

3) Reflection

- The discourse of the Bread of Life is not a text to be discussed and dissected, but rather it should be meditated on and pondered. This is why, even if it is not fully understood, we should not be concerned. This text of the Bread of Life demands a whole life to meditate on it and deepen it. People have to read it, meditate it, pray it, think about it, read it again, repeat it and ponder it, as one does with a good sweet in the mouth. We turn it and turn it in the mouth until it is finished. The one who reads the fourth Gospel superficially may have the impression that John always repeats the same thing. Reading it more attentively, one becomes aware that it is not a question of repetition. The author of the fourth Gospel has his own way of repeating the same theme, but always at a higher and more profound level. It seems to be like a winding staircase. By turning, one reaches the same place, but always at a higher level or a more profound one.
- John 6:30-33: What sign will you yourself do, the sign which will make us believe in you? People had asked: What should we do to carry out the work of God? Jesus responds: "The work of God is to believe in the one who was sent", that is to believe in Jesus. This is why people formulate a new question: "Which sign do you do so that we can see and can believe? Which work do you do?" This means that they did not understand the multiplication of the loaves as a sign from God to legitimize Jesus before

the people, as the one sent by God! They continue to argue: In the past our fathers ate the manna which Moses gave them! They called it “bread from Heaven” (Ws 16:20), that is, “bread of God”. Moses continues to be the great leader in whom to believe. If Jesus wants the people to believe in Him, He should work a greater sign than Moses. “What work do you do?”

- Jesus responds that the bread given by Moses was not the true bread from heaven. Coming from on high, yes, but it was not the bread of God, because it did not guarantee life to anyone. All of them died in the desert (Jn 6:49). The true bread of heaven, the bread of God, is the one which conquers death and gives life! It is the one which descends from Heaven and gives life to the world. It is Jesus Himself! Jesus tries to help the people to liberate themselves from the way of thinking of the past. For Him, fidelity to the past does not mean to close up oneself in the ancient things and not accept renewal. Fidelity to the past means to accept the newness which comes as the fruit of the seed which was planted in the past.

- John 6:34-35: Lord, gives us always of that bread! Jesus answers clearly: “I am the bread of life!” To eat the bread of heaven is the same as to believe in Jesus and accept to follow the road that He teaches us, that is: “My food is to do the will of the one who has sent me and to complete his work!” (Jn 4:34). This is the true food which nourishes the person, which transforms life and gives new life. This last verse of today’s Gospel (Jn 6:35) will be taken back as the first verse of tomorrow’s Gospel (Jn 6:35-40)

4) Personal questions

- Hungry for bread, hungry for God. Which of these two predominates in me?
- Jesus says: “I am the bread of life”. He takes away hunger and thirst. Which of these experiences do I have in my life?

5) Concluding Prayer

Lord turn Your ear to me, make haste.
Be for me a rock-fastness,
a fortified citadel to save me.
You are my rock, my rampart;
true to Your name, lead me and guide me! (Ps 31:1-2)

Lectio Divina: Wednesday, April 18, 2018

Easter Time

1) Opening prayer

God, our Father,
You are our faithful God,
even in days of trial for the Church
and for each of us personally;
You stay by our side, even if we are not aware of Your presence.
Give us an unlimited trust in You
and make us ever more aware
that Your Son Jesus is the meaning of our lives
and that He nourishes us with Himself,
today and every day, for ever.

2) Gospel Reading - John 6:35-40

Jesus said to the crowds, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst. But I told you that although you have seen me, you do not believe. Everything that the Father gives me will come to me, and I will not reject anyone who comes to me, because I came down from heaven not to do my own will but the will of the one who sent me. And this is the will of the one who sent me, that I should not lose anything of what he gave me, but that I should raise it on the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him may have eternal life, and I shall raise him on the last day."

3) Reflection

• John 6:35-36: I am the bread of life. The people, enthusiastic with the perspective of having bread from heaven of which Jesus speaks and which gives life forever (Jn 6:33), ask: "Lord, give us always that bread!" (Jn 6:34). They thought that Jesus was speaking about some particular kind of bread. This is why, the people, interested in getting this bread, ask: "Give us always of this bread!" This petition of the people reminds us of the conversation of Jesus with the Samaritan woman. Jesus had said that she could have had within her a spring of living water, welling up to eternal life, and she, in an interested way, asks: "Lord, give me of that water!" (Jn 4:15). The Samaritan woman is not aware that Jesus is not speaking about material water. Just as the people were not aware that Jesus was not speaking of material bread. Because of this, Jesus responds very clearly: "I am the bread of life! No one who comes to Me will ever hunger; no one who believes in Me will ever thirst". To eat the bread of heaven is the same as believing in Jesus. And to believe that He has come from heaven as a revelation of the Father. It is to accept the way which He has taught. But the people, in spite of having seen Jesus, do not believe in Him. Jesus is aware of the lack of faith and says: "You have seen Me and you do not believe".

- John 6:37-40: To do the will of Him who sent me. After the conversation with the Samaritan woman, Jesus had said to his disciples: “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me!” (Jn 4:34). Here, in the conversation with the people on the bread from heaven, Jesus touches on the same theme: “I have come from heaven not to do My own will, but to do the will of Him who sent Me. And this is the will of Him who sent Me that I should lose nothing of all that He has given to me; but that I should raise it up on the last day”. This is the food which people should look for: to do the will of the Heavenly Father. And this is the bread which nourishes the person in life and gives him/her life. Eternal life begins here, a life which is stronger than death! If we were really ready to do the will of the Father, we would have no difficulty to recognize the Father present in Jesus.

- John 6:41-43: The Jews complained. Tomorrow’s Gospel begins with verse 44 (John 6:44-51) and skips verses 41 to 43. Verse 41 begins with the conversation with the Jews who criticize Jesus. Here we will give a brief explanation of the meaning of the word Jews in the Gospel of John in order to avoid a superficial reading of it, avoiding the sentiment of anti-Semitism. First of all, it is well to remember that Jesus was a Jew and continues to be a Jew (Jn 4:9). His disciples were Jews. The first Christian communities were all Jewish who accepted Jesus as the Messiah. It was only later, little by little, that in the communities of the beloved disciple, Greeks and Christians began to be accepted on the same level as the Jews. They were more open communities. But this openness was not accepted by all. Some Christians who came from the group of the Pharisees wanted to keep the “separation” between Jews and Pagans (Acts 15:5). The situation was critical after the destruction of Jerusalem in the year 70. The Pharisees became the dominating religious current in Judaism and began to define the religious directives or norms for the whole People of God: to suppress worship in the Greek language; to adopt solely the biblical text in Hebrew; to define or determine the list of sacred books, and eliminate the books which existed only in the Greek translation of the bible: Tobias, Judith, Esther, Baruch, Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus and the two Books of the Maccabees: to segregate or separate the foreigners; not eat any food suspected to be impure or which had been offered to the idols. All these norms assumed by the Pharisees had repercussions on the communities of the Jews which accepted Jesus as Messiah. These communities had already journeyed very much. The openness for the Pagans was now irreversible. The Greek bible had already been used for a long time. Thus, slowly, a reciprocal separation grew between Christianity and Judaism. In the years 85-90 the Jewish authorities began to discriminate against those who continued to accept Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah (Mt 5:11-12; 24:9-13). Those who continued to remain in the faith in Jesus were expelled from the Synagogue (Jn 9:34). Many Christian communities feared this expulsion (Jn 9:22) because it meant to lose the support of a strong and traditional institution such as the Synagogue. Those who were expelled lost the legal privileges that the Jews had conquered and gained throughout the centuries in the Empire. The expelled persons lost even the possibility of being buried decently. It was an enormous risk. This situation of conflict at the end of the first century had reflections of the conflict of Jesus with the Pharisees. When the Gospel of John speaks of the Jews he is not speaking of the Jewish people as such, but he is thinking much more of those Pharisee authorities which were expelling the Christians from the Synagogues in the

years 85-90, the time when the Gospel was written. We cannot allow this affirmation about the Jews to make anti-Semitism grow among Christians.

4) Personal questions

- What do I know about Judaism – the religion of Jesus, its history and its beliefs?
- What do I know, or what can I learn, about the various groups within Judaism at the time of Jesus, such as the Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, and so on? With that deeper understanding, can I use it to better understand the life of Jesus?
- To eat the bread of heaven means to believe in Jesus. How does all this help me to live the Eucharist better?

5) Concluding Prayer

Acclaim God, all the earth,
sing psalms to the glory of His name,
glorify Him with your praises,
say to God, “How awesome You are!” (Ps 66:1-3)

Lectio Divina: Thursday, April 19, 2018

Easter Time

1) Opening prayer

Father,
You draw all people to You
who believe in Your Son Jesus Christ.
Faith, Lord, faith it is that we need.
Give it to us, we pray You,
a living faith that we can encounter today
Jesus Christ, Your Son,
in Your word that You speak to us
in the bread that You offer us,
and in the food that we can give
and can be to one another,
in Jesus Christ, Your Son and our Lord,
who lives with You and the Holy Spirit
now and for ever.

2) Gospel Reading - John 6:44-51

Jesus said to the crowds: "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draw him, and I will raise him on the last day. It is written in the prophets: They shall all be taught by God. Everyone who listens to my Father and learns from him comes to me. Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father. Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the desert, but they died; this is the bread that comes down from heaven so that one may eat it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my Flesh for the life of the world."

3) Reflection

- Up until now the dialogue had been between Jesus and the people. From now on, the Jewish leaders begin to enter into conversation and the discussion becomes more tense.
- John 6:44-46: Anyone who opens himself to God accepts Jesus and His proposal. The conversation becomes more demanding. Now, it is the Jews, the leaders of the people who complain: "Surely, this is Jesus, son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know. How can He say: I have come down from heaven?" (Jn 6:42). They thought they knew the things of God. But, in reality, they did not know them. If we were truly open and faithful to God, we would feel within us the impulse of God which attracts us toward Jesus and we would recognize that Jesus comes from God, because it is written in the Prophets: "They will all be taught by God; everyone who has listened to the Father and has learned from Him, comes to me."
- John 6:47-50: Your fathers ate manna in the desert and they are dead. In the celebration of the Passover, the Jews recalled the bread of the desert. Jesus helps them to take a step ahead. Anyone who celebrates the Passover, recalling only the bread that the fathers ate in the past, will die as all of them did! The true sense of the Passover is not to recall the manna which falls from heaven, but to accept Jesus, the new Bread of Life and to follow the way which He has indicated. It is no longer a question of eating the meat of the paschal lamb, but rather of eating the flesh of Jesus, so that the one who eats it will not die, but will have eternal life!
- John 6:51: Anyone who eats of this bread will live for ever. And Jesus ends saying: "I am the living bread which has come down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread he will live for ever and the bread that I shall give is My flesh for the life of the world." Instead of the manna and the paschal lamb of the first exodus, we are invited to eat the new manna and the new paschal lamb that was sacrificed on the cross for the life of all.
- The new Exodus. The multiplication of the loaves takes place close to the Passover (Jn 6:4). The feast of the Passover was the prodigious remembrance of the Exodus, the liberation of the people from the clutches of Pharaoh. The whole episode which is narrated in chapter 6 of the Gospel of John has a parallel in the episodes related to the feast of the Passover, whether as liberation from Egypt or with the journey of the people

in the desert in search of the promised land. The discourse of the Bread of Life, in the Synagogue of Capernaum, is related to chapter 16 of the Book of Exodus which speaks about the Manna. It is worth while to read all of chapter 16 of Exodus. In perceiving the difficulties of the people in the desert we can better understand the teaching of Jesus here in chapter 6 of the Gospel of John. For example, when Jesus speaks of a “food which does not perish, which endures for eternal life” (Jn 6:27) He is recalling the manna which produced worms and became rotten (Ex 16:20). As when the Jews “complained” (Jn 6:41), they do the same thing as the Israelites in the desert, when they doubted of the presence of God in their midst during their journey across the desert (Ex 16:2; 17:3; Nb 11:1). The lack of food made the people doubt about God and they began to complain against Moses and against God. Here too, the Jews doubt God’s presence in Jesus of Nazareth and begin to complain (Jn 6:41-42).

4) Personal questions

- Does the Eucharist help me to live in a permanent state of Exodus? Am I succeeding?
- Anyone who is open to truth finds the response in Jesus. Today, many people withdraw and do not find any response. Whose fault is it? Is it of the persons who know how to listen? Or is it the fault of us, Christians, who do not know how to present the Gospel as a message of life?
- How is one “drawn by the Father”? In what way is this part of evangelization?
- The Pharisees were acting out the norms of their times, as well as being keepers of tradition. Not all were eye-witnesses of Jesus' miracles. What was their culpability? What is the balance between discerning God in our presence and avoiding being swayed by every new belief to come along? This is even more important in the age of “Internet information”.

5) Concluding Prayer

Come and listen, all who fear God,
while I tell what He has done for me.
To Him I cried aloud,
high praise was on my tongue. (Ps 66:16-17)

Lectio Divina: Friday, April 20, 2018

Easter Time

1) Opening prayer

Our living and loving God,
how could we know the depth of Your love

if Your Son had not become flesh of our flesh
and blood of our blood?
How could we ever have the courage
to live for one another and if necessary to die
if He had not given up His body
and shed His blood for us?
Thank you for letting Him stay in the eucharist with us
and making Himself our daily bread.
Let this bread be the food that empowers us
to live and die as He did,
for one another and for You,
our living God, for ever and ever.

2) Gospel Reading - John 6:52-59

The Jews quarreled among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his Flesh to eat?" Jesus said to them, "Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the Flesh of the Son of Man and drink his Blood, you do not have life within you. Whoever eats my Flesh and drinks my Blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day. For my Flesh is true food, and my Blood is true drink. Whoever eats my Flesh and drinks my Blood remains in me and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I have life because of the Father, so also the one who feeds on me will have life because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Unlike your ancestors who ate and still died, whoever eats this bread will live forever." These things he said while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum.

3) Reflection

- We are almost at the end of the discourse of the Bread of Life. Here begins the part of the greatest polemic. The Jews close themselves to, and begin to discuss, the affirmations of Jesus.
- John 6:52-55: Flesh and Blood: the expression of life and of the total gift. The Jews react: "How can this man give us His flesh to eat?" The feast of the Passover was close at hand. After a few days everybody would have eaten the meat of the paschal lamb in the celebration of the night of the Passover. They did not understand the words of Jesus, because they took them literally. But Jesus does not diminish the exigencies, He does not withdraw or take away anything of what He has said and He insists: "In all truth I tell you, if you do not eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Anyone who does eat My flesh and drink My blood has eternal life, and I shall raise that person up on the last day. For My flesh is real food and My blood is real drink. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood lives in Me and I live in that person". What gives life is not to celebrate the manna of the past, but rather to eat this new bread which is Jesus, His flesh and His blood. Participating in the Eucharistic Supper, we assimilate His life, His surrender, His gift of self. "If you do not eat the flesh of the Son

of Man and you do not drink His Blood you will not have life in you". They should accept Jesus as the Crucified Messiah, whose blood will be poured out.

- John 6:56-58: Whoever eats My flesh, will live in Me. The last phrases of the discourse of the Bread of Life are of the greatest depth and try to summarize everything which has been said. They recall the mystical dimension which surrounds the participation in the Eucharist. They express what Paul says in the letter to the Galatians: "It is no longer I, but Christ living in me (Ga 2:20). And what the Apocalypse of John says: "If one of you hears me calling and opens the door, I will come in to share a meal at that person's side" (Rev 3:20). And John himself in the Gospel: "Anyone who loves Me will keep my word, and My Father will love him and We shall come to him and make a home in him" (Jn 14:23). And it ends with the promise of life which marks the difference with the ancient Exodus: "This is the bread which has come down from heaven. It is not like the bread our ancestors ate, they are dead, but anyone who eats this bread will live for ever."

- John 6:59: The discourse in the Synagogue ends. The conversation between Jesus and the people and the Jews in the Synagogue of Capernaum ends here. As it has been said before, the discourse of the Bread of Life offers us an image of how the catechesis of that time was, at the end of the first century, in the Christian communities of Asia Minor. The questions of the people and of the Jews show the difficulties of the members of the communities. The answer of Jesus represents the clarification to help them to overcome the difficulties, to deepen their faith, and to live more intensely the Eucharist which was celebrated above all in the night between Saturday and Sunday, the day of the Lord.

4) Personal questions

- Beginning with the discourse on the Bread of Life, the celebration of the Eucharist receives a very strong light and an enormous deepening. Does this clarify the role of the Eucharist in my life?

- To eat the flesh and blood of Jesus is the commandment that he leaves. How do I live the Eucharist in my life? Even if I cannot go to Mass every day or every Sunday, my life should be Eucharistic. How do I try to attain this objective?

- Eucharistic Adoration is available in many parishes and highly recommended by Popes St John Paul II, Benedict, and Francis, among others. "In many places, adoration of the Blessed Sacrament is also an important daily practice and becomes an inexhaustible source of holiness" (*Encyclical Letter: Ecclesia De Eucharistia*). Do I take the time to sit and just "be" with Him when I can?

5) Concluding Prayer

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

Lectio Divina: Saturday, April 21, 2018

Easter Time

1) Opening prayer

Faithful God of the covenant,
in the daily choices we have to make
give us the courage to opt always
for Your Son and His ways
and to remain close to Him.
Bless the difficult road we have sometimes to take
without seeing where it will lead us.
Keep us from making half-hearted decisions
when our faith is rather weak
and make us accept all the consequences of our choice.
Keep us always faithful
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

2) Gospel Reading - John 6:60-69

Many of the disciples of Jesus who were listening said, "This saying is hard; who can accept it?" Since Jesus knew that his disciples were murmuring about this, he said to them, "Does this shock you? What if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? It is the Spirit that gives life, while the flesh is of no avail. The words I have spoken to you are Spirit and life. But there are some of you who do not believe." Jesus knew from the beginning the ones who would not believe and the one who would betray him. And he said, "For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by my Father." As a result of this, many of his disciples returned to their former way of life and no longer walked with him. Jesus then said to the Twelve, "Do you also want to leave?" Simon Peter answered him, "Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and are convinced that you are the Holy One of God."

3) Reflection

- Today's Gospel presents the last part of the discourse of the Bread of Life. It is a question of the discussion of the disciples among themselves and with Jesus (Jn 6:60-66) and of the conversation of Jesus with Simon Peter (Jn 6:67-69). The objective is to show the exigencies of faith and the need for a serious commitment with Jesus and with His proposal. Up until this moment everything took place in the Synagogue of Capernaum. The place of this last part is not indicated.
- John 6:60-63: Without the light of the Spirit these words cannot be understood. Many disciples thought that Jesus Himself was going too far! The celebration of the Passover

was coming to an end and He was placing Himself in the most central part of the Passover. For this reason many people separated from the community and no longer went with Jesus. Jesus reacts and says: “It is the Spirit that gives life; the flesh has nothing to offer”. It is here that He describes the impossibility of faith without divine action. It is only with the light of the Holy Spirit that it is possible to get the full sense of everything that Jesus says (Jn 14:25-26; 16:12-13). Paul, in the Letter to the Corinthians will say: “Written letters kill, but the Spirit gives life!” (2 Co 3:6).

- John 6:64-66: Some of you do not believe. In His discourse, Jesus had presented Himself as the food which satisfies hunger and thirst of all those who seek God. In the first Exodus, they have the test at Meriba. Before hunger and thirst in the desert, many doubted of the presence of God in their midst: “The Lord is in our midst, yes or no?” (Ex 17:7) and they complained against Moses (cf. Ex 17:2-3; 16:7-8). They wanted to get away from him and return to Egypt. The disciples fall into this same temptation, they doubt of the presence of Jesus in the breaking of the bread. Confronted with the words of Jesus to “eat My flesh and drink My blood”, many complained like the crowds in the desert (Jn 6:60) and make the decision to break away from Jesus and with the community: “they went away and accompanied Him no more” (Jn 6:66). The term “flesh and blood” is also a common Old Testament reference to life and the living.

- John 6:67-71: Confession of Peter. At the end only the twelve remain with Him. In the face of the crisis produced by His words and His gestures, Jesus turns toward His more intimate friends, represented there by the twelve and says: “Do you want to go away also?” For Jesus it is not a question of having many people following Him. Neither does He change the discourse when the message does not please. He speaks in order to reveal the Father and not to please anyone. He prefers to remain alone, and not be accompanied by people who are not committed to the Father’s plan. Peter’s response is beautiful: “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the message of eternal life, and we believe; we have come to know that You are the Holy One of God!” Even without understanding everything, Peter accepts Jesus as Messiah and believes in Him. In the name of the group He professes his faith in the broken bread and in His word. Jesus is the word and the bread which satisfies the new people of God (Dt 8:3). In spite of all his limitations, Peter is not like Nicodemus who wanted to see all things clearly according to his own ideas. But among the twelve there was someone who did not accept the proposal of Jesus. In this more intimate circle there was an enemy (the Devil) (Jn 6:70-71) “he who shares My table takes advantage of Me” (Si 41:10; Jn 13:18).

4) Personal questions

- If I place myself in Peter’s place before Jesus, what response do I give Jesus who asks me: “Do you want to go away also?”
- Today many persons no longer follow Jesus. Whose fault is it?
- Falling away can be like the crowd here. Little by little until there is nothing left. How do we see when we are falling away little by little and what can be done to prevent or reverse it?

- Which situation is worse: One who followed and then fell away, or one who never followed in the first place?

5) Concluding Prayer

Lord, I am Your servant, I am Your servant
and my mother was Your servant;
You have undone my fetters.
I shall offer You a sacrifice of thanksgiving
and call on the name of Yahweh. (Ps 116:16-17)

Lectio Divina: Sunday, April 22, 2018

Jesus the Good Shepherd
“So that all may have life and have it to the full!”
John 10:11-18

1. Opening prayer

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

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

2. Reading

a) A key to the reading:

The Gospel of the fourth Sunday after Easter presents to us the parable of the Good Shepherd. This is why, sometimes, it is called the Sunday of the Good Shepherd. In some parishes the feast of the parish priest is celebrated on this day, the shepherd of the flock. In today's Gospel, Jesus presented Himself as the Good Shepherd, who has come “so that they may have life and have it to the full” (Jn 10:10). At that time, the shepherd was the image of the leader. Jesus says that many presented themselves as shepherds but in fact they were thieves and bandits. The same thing happens today. There are people who present themselves as leaders, but in reality, instead of rendering service, they only seek their own interests. Some of them have such a meek way of speaking, and make such an intelligent type of propaganda that they succeed in deceiving people.

Have you ever had the experience of being deceived? How does one recognize a “false prophet” today? How is and how should a good shepherd be? Keeping these questions in mind, let us try to meditate on the text of today’s Gospel. During the reading let us try to be attentive to the images which Jesus uses to present Himself to the people as a true and good Shepherd.

b) A division of the text to help me in reading it:

Jn 10:11: Jesus presents Himself as the Good Shepherd who **gives his life for His sheep**

Jn 10:12-13: Jesus defines the attitude of the mercenary

Jn 10:14-15: Jesus presents Himself as the Good Shepherd who **knows His sheep**

Jn 10:16: Jesus defines the goal to be attained: only one flock and one shepherd

Jn 10:17-18: Jesus and the Father.

c) Text:

Jesus said: "I am the good shepherd. A good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. A hired man, who is not a shepherd and whose sheep are not his own, sees a wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away, and the wolf catches and scatters them. This is because he works for pay and has no concern for the sheep. I am the good shepherd, and I know mine and mine know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I will lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. These also I must lead, and they will hear my voice, and there will be one flock, one shepherd. This is why the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down on my own. I have power to lay it down, and power to take it up again. This command I have received from my Father."



3. A moment of prayerful silence

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

4. Some questions

to help us in our personal reflection.

- a) What is the difference between a shepherd and a hired man in our current day?
- b) Which are the images which Jesus applies to Himself? How does he apply them and what do they signify?
- c) How many times does Jesus use the term **life** in this text and what does he affirm about life?

- d) What does the text say about the sheep that we are? What are the qualities and the tasks of the sheep?
- e) **Shepherd (Pastor) - Pastoral.** Do our **pastoral works** continue the mission of Jesus as Shepherd?

5. For those who desire to deepen more into the text

a) Context:

i) The discourse of Jesus on the Good Shepherd (Jn 10:1-18) is like a brick inserted into a wall which already exists. With this brick the wall is stronger and more beautiful. Immediately before, in Jn 9:40-41, the Gospel spoke about the healing of the man born blind (Jn 9:1-38) and of the discussion of Jesus with the Pharisees on blindness (Jn 9:39-41). Immediately after in Jn 10:19-21, John gives the conclusion of Jesus' discussion with the Pharisees on blindness. The Pharisees presented themselves before the people as *leaders* and believed that they could discern and teach the things of God. In reality, they were blind (Jn 9:40-41) and they despised the opinion of the people represented by the man born blind who had been cured by Jesus (Jn 9:34). The discourse on the Good Shepherd has been inserted here for the purpose of offering some criteria to know how to discern who is the *leader*, the shepherd who deserves to be trusted. The parable fulfills a word which Jesus had just said to the Pharisees: "It is for judgment that I have come into this world, so that those without sight may see and those with sight may become blind." (Jn 9:39).

ii) The discourse of Jesus on the "Good Shepherd" presents three comparisons, linked among themselves by the image of the sheep, which offer criteria to discern who is the true shepherd:

First comparison (Jn 10:1-5): "*Enter through the gate*". Jesus distinguishes between the shepherd of the sheep and the one who climbs some other way to rob them. That which reveals the shepherd is the fact that He enters through the gate. The thief climbs some other way.

Second comparison: (Jn 10:6-10): "*I am the gate*". To enter through the gate means to act like Jesus, whose greatest concern is the life in abundance of the sheep. What the shepherd reveals is the defense of the life of the sheep.

Third comparison: (Jn 10:11-18): "*I am the Good Shepherd*". Jesus is not simply a shepherd. He is the **Good** Shepherd. That which reveals who is the Good Shepherd is (1) the reciprocal knowledge between the sheep and the shepherd and (2) to give His life for the sheep.

iii) In what way can the parable of the Good Shepherd take away the blindness and open the eyes of persons? At that time, the image of the shepherd was the symbol of the *leader*. But not because of the simple fact that someone who took care of sheep can be defined as shepherd. The mercenaries also count and the Pharisees were also *leaders*. But were they also shepherds? As we shall see, according to the parable, in order to discern who is shepherd and who is a mercenary, it is necessary to pay attention to two things: (a) To the attitude of the sheep before the shepherd guiding them, to see if they

recognize his voice. (b) To the attitude of the shepherd before the sheep to see if his interest is the life of the sheep and if he is capable to give his life for them (Jn 10:11-18).

iv) The text of the Gospel of the Fourth Sunday after Easter (Jn 10:11-18) is the last part of the discourse on the Good Shepherd (Jn 10:1-18). This is why we wish to comment on the whole text. We observe closely the diverse images which Jesus uses to present Himself to us as the true and Good Shepherd.

b) Commentary on the text:

i) Jn 10:1-5: First image: *the shepherd “enters through the gate”*

Jesus begins the discourse with the comparison of the gate: “He who does not enter through the gate, but climbs somewhere else, is a thief, a bandit! Instead, the one who enters through the gate is the shepherd of the sheep!” To understand this comparison, it is important to remember what follows. At that time, the shepherds took care of the flocks during the day. When night arrived, they took the sheep into a large communitarian place, which was well protected against thieves and wolves. All the shepherds from the same region took their flocks there. There was a guardian who took care of them during the night. On the following day, early in the morning, the shepherd would go, knocked on the gate and the guardian would open. The sheep recognized the voice of their shepherd, got up and got out following him to the pastures. The sheep of the other shepherds heard the voice, but did not move because for them it was an unknown voice. The sheep recognizes the voice of *their* shepherd. From time to time, there was the danger of bandits. To rob the sheep, the thieves didn't present themselves to the guardian by the door, but entered by another side or destroyed the wall.

ii) Jn 10:6-10: Second image: He explains what it means *“to enter through the gate”*: Jesus is the gate.

The Pharisees who were listening to Jesus, (cf. Jn 9:40-41), did not understand the comparison. Then, Jesus explained: “I am the gate of the sheepfold. All those who have come before Me, are thieves and bandits”. About whom is Jesus speaking using these hard words? Probably, he is referring to the religious *leaders* who drew people behind them, but who did not respond to the hopes of the people. They deceived the people, leaving them worse than before. They were not interested in the good of the people, but rather in their own interests and in their own portfolio. Jesus explains that the fundamental criterion to discern who is the shepherd and who is the bandit is the concern for the **life of the sheep**. He asks the people not to follow the one who presents himself as a shepherd, but does not desire the life of the people. It is here that Jesus pronounced that phrase which we sing even now: “I have come so that they may have life, and life to the full!” This is the first criterion.

iii) Jn 10:11-16: Third image: *he explains what it means “I have come so that they have life, and life to the full”* (The text for this fourth Sunday after Easter begins here).

* Jn 10:11: *Jesus presents himself as the Good Shepherd who gives his life for the sheep.* Jesus changes the comparison. First, He was the **gate** of the sheep. Now He says that he

is the *shepherd* of the sheep. And not just any shepherd, but rather: “I am the **Good Shepherd!**” The image of the good shepherd comes from the Old Testament. Everybody knew what a shepherd was and how he lived and worked. In saying that He is a Good Shepherd, Jesus presents Himself as the one who comes to fulfill the promises of the prophets and the hopes of the people. He insists on two points: (a) the defense of the life of the sheep; the **good** shepherd gives His life (Jn 10:11.15.17.18), and (b) in the reciprocal understanding between the shepherd and the sheep; the shepherd knows his sheep and they know the shepherd (Jn 10:4.14.16).

* Jn 10:12-13: *Jesus defines the attitude of the mercenary who is not a shepherd.* “The mercenary who is not a shepherd”. Looking from outside, the differences between the mercenary and the shepherd are not perceived. Both of them are busy with the sheep. Today there are many persons who take care of other persons in hospitals, in the communities, in the old peoples’ homes, in schools, in public services, in the parishes. Some do this out of love, others, *hardly* for a salary, in order to survive. These persons are not interested in the other persons. Their attitude is that of a functionary, of a worker earning a salary, of a mercenary. In a moment of danger, they are not interested, because “the sheep are not theirs”, the children are not theirs, the pupils are not theirs, their neighbors are not theirs, the faithful are not theirs, the sick are not theirs, the members of the community are not theirs.

Now, instead of judging the behavior of others, let us place ourselves before our own conscience and let us ask ourselves: “In my relationship with others, am I a mercenary or a shepherd?” Look, Jesus does not condemn you because the worker has a right to his salary (Lk 10:7), but he asks you to take another step forward and to become a shepherd.

* Jn 10:14-15: *Jesus presents himself as the Good Shepherd who knows His sheep.* Two things characterize the Good Shepherd: a) *He knows the sheep and is known by them.* In the language of Jesus, “**to know**” is not a question of knowing the name or the face of the person, but to be in relationship with a person as a friend, and with affection. b) *to give the life for the sheep.* That means to be ready to sacrifice oneself out of love. The sheep feel and perceive when a person defends and protects them. This is valid for all of us: for the parish priests and for those who have some responsibility towards other persons. In order to know if a parish priest is a *good shepherd* it is not sufficient to be named parish priest and to obey the norms of Canon Law. It is necessary to be recognized as a good shepherd by the sheep. Sometimes this is forgotten in the present day politics of the Church. Jesus says that not only does the shepherd know the sheep, but also the sheep know the shepherd. They have criteria for this. Because if they do not recognize him, even if he is named according to Canon Law, he is not a shepherd according to the Heart of Jesus. Not only the sheep have to obey the one who guides them. Also the one who guides has to be very attentive to the reaction of the sheep to know if he is acting like a shepherd or like a mercenary.

* Jn 10:16: *Jesus defines the goal to be attained; only one flock, only one shepherd.* Jesus opens the horizon and says that He has other sheep that are not of this fold. They have not as yet heard the voice of Jesus, but when they will hear it, they will become

aware that He is the shepherd and they will follow Him. Who will do this, and when will this happen? This intimates the future inclusion and call to the Gentiles later on. We are the ones, imitating in everything the behavior of Jesus, the Good Shepherd!

* Jn 10:17-18: *Jesus and the Father.*

In these two last verses Jesus opens Himself and makes us understand something which is in the deepest part of his heart: His relationship with the Father. Here the truth of everything He says in another moment is understood: “I shall no longer call you servants, but I have called you friends because all that I have heard from the Father I have made it known to you” (Jn 15:15). Jesus is for us an open book.

c) Extending the information:

The image of the Shepherd in the Old Testament which is realized in Jesus

i) In Palestine, the survival of the people depended on raising animals: goats and sheep. The image of the shepherd who guides his sheep to the pasture was known by everyone, just like today we know the image of the bus driver. It was normal to use the image of the shepherd to indicate the function of the one who governed and guided the people. The prophets criticized the kings because they were shepherds who were not concerned about their flocks and did not guide them to the pastures (Jr 2:8; 10:21; 23:1-2). This criticism of the bad shepherds increased and reached its summit when the people were deported into exile because of the fault of the king (Ezk 34:1-10; Zc 11:4-17).

ii) In the face of the frustration which they had to suffer because of the way the bad shepherds acted, the desire arose to have God as the shepherd. a desire which is very well expressed in the Psalm: “The Lord is my Shepherd, there is nothing I shall want (Ps 23:1-6; Gn 48:15). The prophets hope that in the future, God Himself will come to guide His fold, like a shepherd (Is 40:11; Ezk 34:11-16). And they hope that this time the people will know how to recognize the voice of their shepherd: “Today listen to His voice!” (Ps 95:7). They hope that God will come as a judge who will pronounce judgment among the sheep of the fold (Ezk 34:17). The desire and the hope arise that one day, God and the Messiah will be a Good Shepherd for the People of God (Jr 3:15; 23:4).

iii) Jesus fulfills this hope and presents Himself as the Good Shepherd, different from the bandits who, before Him, had robbed the people. He also presents Himself as the judge of the people who, at the end, will issue the sentence as the shepherd who separates the sheep from the goats (Mt 25:31-46). In Jesus, the prophecy of Zechariah is fulfilled, which says that the good shepherd will be persecuted by the evil shepherds, annoyed by His denunciation: “Strike the shepherd, scatter the sheep!” (Zc 13:7).

iv) At the end of the Gospel of John, the image is extended and Jesus at the end is everything at the same time: gate (Jn 10:7, shepherd (Jn 10:11) lamb and sheep (Jn 1:36)!

A key for the Gospel of John

Everyone perceives the difference that exists between the Gospel of John and the other three Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Someone defines it as follows: The other three make a photo, John makes an X-ray. That is, John helps his readers to discover the most profound dimension which exists in what Jesus says and does. He reveals the hidden things that only the X-rays of faith succeed to reveal. John teaches to read the other Gospels with the gaze of faith and to discover their most profound significance. Jesus Himself had already said that He would send the gift of his Spirit in order that we could understand all the fullness of His own word (Jn 14:24-25; 16:12-13). The ancient Fathers of the Church said: the Gospel of John is “spiritual” and “symbolic”.

Some examples: (a) Jesus cures the man born blind (Jn 9:6-7). For John this miracle has a more profound significance. It reveals that Jesus is the light of the World who makes us understand and contemplate the things of God in life (Jn 9:39). (b) Jesus rises Lazarus from the dead (Jn 11:43-44) not only to help Lazarus and to console his two sisters, Martha and Mary, but also to reveal that He is the Resurrection and the Life (Jn 11:25-26). (c) Jesus changes water into wine at the wedding at Cana (Jn 2:1-13). He does this not only to safeguard the joy of the feast, but above all, to reveal that the new law of the Gospel is like wine compared to the water of the former law. He does it with such great abundance (about 600 liters), precisely to signify that it will not be lacking for anyone, through to today! (d) Jesus multiplies the bread and feeds the hungry (Jn 6:11) not only to satisfy the hunger of those poor people who were with Him in the desert, but also to reveal that He Himself is the bread of life which nourishes all throughout life (Jn 6:34-58). (e) Jesus speaks with the Samaritan woman about water (Jn 4:7.10), but He wanted that she would succeed to discover the water of the gift of God which she already had within her (Jn 4:14-14). In one word, it is the Spirit of Jesus that gives life (Jn 6:63). The flesh or only the letter are not enough and can even kill the senses and the life (2 Co 3:6).

6. Prayer: Psalm 23 (22)

Yahweh is my shepherd!

Yahweh is my shepherd,
I lack nothing.
In grassy meadows He lets me lie.
By tranquil streams He leads me
to restore my spirit.
He guides me in paths of saving justice
as befits His name.

Even were I to walk in a ravine
as dark as death
I should fear no danger,
for You are at my side.
Your staff and Your crook
are there to soothe me.

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

Kindness and faithful love pursue me
every day of my life.
I make my home in the house
of Yahweh for all time to come.

7. Final Prayer

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

Lectio Divina: Monday, April 23, 2018

Easter Time

1) Opening prayer

Lord God, our Father,
the Spirit of Jesus calls us, as He called your Son,
to abandon our old selves and our old world
to be free for new life and growth.
Forgive us our fear and hesitations,
lead us out of our worn-out phrases and habits,
and our self-made certainties,
steep us in the gospel of Your Son,
that His good news may become credible
in our times and our world.
We ask you this through Christ our Lord.

2) Gospel Reading - John 10:1-10

Jesus said: "Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever does not enter a sheepfold through the gate but climbs over elsewhere is a thief and a robber. But whoever enters through the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens it for him, and the sheep hear his voice, as he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has driven out all his own, he walks ahead of them, and the sheep follow him, because they recognize his voice. But they will not follow a stranger; they will run away from him, because they do not recognize the voice of strangers." Although Jesus used this figure

of speech, they did not realize what he was trying to tell them. So Jesus said again, "Amen, amen, I say to you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. A thief comes only to steal and slaughter and destroy; I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly."

3) Reflection

- In Jesus we have the model of the true shepherd. In Him is fulfilled the expectation of the Good Shepherd promised by God: the "Great Shepherd", greater than Moses (Hb 13:20).
- John 10:1-6: The gate of the sheepfold. In Jn 10:1-10 it is said that Jesus is the "gate" to get to the sheep and to be led to the pastures (10:7.9-10). The image of the gate has several connotations. A gate protects what is inside, the sheep, from the evils outside. The gate is what keeps the sheep in community together inside. The gate is also the way into this community of sheep (the Church).

The theme of the sheep had already been introduced in John 2:15 and in a particular way in 5:2 where it is told that there was a pool with five porticos along which were laid the sick to be healed. In this last context, the sheep indicate the people who were oppressed by their leaders. In Jn 10:1, Jesus links the theme of the sheep to the atrium or inner courtyard of the Temple, the Jewish institution administered by men of power who trampled on the rights, justice and exploited the people. Such individuals were called by Jesus "thieves and bandits".

Jesus begins His long presentation before the Pharisees, who were closed up in their unbelief and insufficiency (9:40-41), with a general affirmation: the proper way to enter into contact with the sheep is by entering through the gate of the enclosure in which they are kept. Anyone who enters in a different way is not motivated by love for the sheep, but is there to exploit them for his own interest. This is the sin of those who direct the people: to take hold of everything that belongs to all for themselves. Jesus uses the term "thief". This was precisely the accusation that Jesus addressed to the chief priests of the people during His first visit to the Temple (2:13ss).

Another term that Jesus uses to indicate those who take away from the people what belongs to them is: "bandit". Such a term indicates those who use violence. Therefore, the chief priests of the Temple oblige the people to submit themselves to the violence of their system (7:13; 9:22). The effect of this is that it produces a state of death (5:3.21.25).

The shepherd enters through the gate to take care of the sheep, not to oppress them or maltreat them. In fact, the sheep recognize his authority (voice) and follow him. The voice of Jesus contains a message of liberation for them that is typical of the Messiah. Besides, His voice is not addressed to an anonymous group of people, but rather calls each one personally. For Jesus, no anonymous crowd of people exists. Each person has

a face, a name, and dignity. The Temple (the enclosure of the sheep) has become a place of darkness, characterized only by economic interests; money has replaced the exclusive attention to God: the Temple has become a business or trading house (Jn 2:16).

Jesus leads the people to take them out of darkness. He does not do this in a fictitious way, but in a real way, because this is the work which the Father has entrusted to Him. The fundamental strokes of this mission are: to enter and to call. Those who respond to that call, the call to liberty, become a new community: "Those who are His own".

- John 10:7-10: Jesus is the new door. Jesus again uses the symbolism of the gate in vv. 7-8: applying it to Himself. He is the new door not only in regard to the old enclosure of Israel represented by the chief priests of the people, but also in regard to those who follow Him. He reminds the first ones of His legitimacy - the only place of access for the sheep because He is the Messiah ready to give His life for the sheep. It is not by domination that one can approach the sheep to have a relationship with them, but rather by the attitude of one who gives his life for them. His words are an invitation to change mentality, the way of thinking, and way of relating.

The entrance through Jesus signifies the good of man as a priority. Anyone who attempts to do the contrary is an oppressor. The reader finds that the words of Jesus addressed to His contemporaries, and in a particular way to the chief priests of the people who have used domination and violence to exploit the people, truly hard and strong.

He is the new gate in regard to every person. But for men and women of today, what does it mean to enter through the door which is Jesus? It implies to "get close to Him", "to trust Him" (Jn 6:35), to follow Him, and to allow ourselves to be guided by His message (8:31. 51). It means to participating in the dedication of Jesus so that the true happiness of man may be accomplished.

4) Personal questions

- Jesus is the Good Shepherd because He always knows you, but do you recognize him? He is a Shepherd who comes to your life as a door to go out and to enter: do you allow Him to lead you when you relate with others?
- In the world today, are there bad shepherds who exploit those looking to surrender themselves to Jesus as sheep of the fold? Can we discern this by looking at the lives of these so-called shepherds and whether they are profiting from the trust given them?
- Who would you say are proper shepherds today? Do you see the distinction in their lives and their total giving to their sheep (communities) as a way of discernment?
- In your community and in your family are you also a door? Are you a door that is open to guiding others in, are you a door that seeks to protect what is inside, or are you a door which keeps others out and closed off?

5) Concluding Prayer

Lord, send out Your light and Your truth;
they shall be my guide,
to lead me to Your holy mountain
to the place where You dwell. (Ps 43:3)

Lectio Divina: Tuesday, April 24, 2018

Easter Time

1) Opening prayer

Lord God, our Father,
the Spirit of Jesus calls us, as He called Your Son,
to abandon our old selves and our old world
to be free for new life and growth.
Forgive us our fear and hesitations,
lead us out of our worn-out phrases and habits,
and our self-made certainties,
steep us in the gospel of Your Son,
that His good news may become credible
in our times and our world.
We ask you this through Christ our Lord.

2) Gospel Reading - John 10:22-30

The feast of the Dedication was taking place in Jerusalem. It was winter. And Jesus walked about in the temple area on the Portico of Solomon. So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, "How long are you going to keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly." Jesus answered them, "I told you and you do not believe. The works I do in my Father's name testify to me. But you do not believe, because you are not among my sheep. My sheep hear my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish. No one can take them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one can take them out of the Father's hand. The Father and I are one."

3) Reflection

- Chapters one to twelve of the Gospel of John are called "The Book of Signs". In these chapters we have the progressive revelation of the mystery of God in Jesus. In the measure in which Jesus makes this revelation, adherence and opposition grow around

Him according to the idea which each one has of the Messiah. This way of describing the activity of Jesus not only serves to tell how adherence to Jesus took place at that time, but also how this should take place in us today, as His followers and readers. At that time, all expected the coming of the Messiah and they had their criteria of how to recognize Him. They wanted Him to be like they imagined that He should be. But Jesus does not submit Himself to that requirement. He reveals the Father as the Father is and not as His listeners would want Him to be. He asks for conversion in the way of thinking and of acting. Today, each one of us has his/her own likes and preferences. Some times we read the Gospel to see if we find in it a confirmation of our desires. Today's Gospel presents some light concerning this.

- John 10:22-24: The Jews question Jesus. It was cold; it was Winter (v. 22). It was the Feast of the dedication which celebrated the purification of the temple done by Judah Maccabee (2M 10:1-10). It was a very popular Feast with much light. Jesus was out on the square of the Temple, in the Portico of Solomon. The Jews said: "How much longer are you going to keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us openly". They wanted Jesus to define Himself and that they could verify, according to their own criteria, if Jesus was or was not the Messiah. They wanted some proof. It is the method of one who feels that he dominates the situation. The new ones must present their credentials. Otherwise, they have no right to speak or to act.

- John 10:25-26: Response of Jesus: the works that I do are My witness. The response of Jesus is always the same: "I have told you, but you do not believe. The works that I do in My Father's name are my witness; but you do not believe, because you are no sheep of mine". It is not a question of giving proofs. It would be useless. When a person does not want to accept the witness of some one, there is no proof which is valid which will lead the person to change and think differently. The basic problem is the disinterested openness of the person toward God and toward truth. Where this openness exists, Jesus is recognized by His sheep. "The sheep that belong to Me listen to My voice". Jesus will say these words before Pilate (Jn 18:37). The Pharisees lacked this openness.

- John 10:27-28: My sheep listen to My voice. Jesus repeats the parable of the Good Shepherd who knows His sheep and they know Him. This mutual understanding – between Jesus who comes in the name of the Father and the persons who open themselves to truth – is the source of eternal life. This union between the Creator and the creature through Jesus exceeds every threat of death: "They will never be lost and no one will ever steal them from My hand!" They are safe and secure and, because of this, they are in peace and enjoy full freedom.

- John 10:29-30: The Father and I are one. These two verses refer to the mystery of the union between Jesus and the Father: "The Father, for what He has given Me, is greater than anyone, and no one can steal anything from My Father's hand. The Father and I are one". These and other phrases make us guess or have a glimpse at something of the greatest mystery: "Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father" (Jn 14:9). "The Father is in Me and I am in the Father" (Jn 10:38). He is one with the Father in mind, will, and

action. This union between Jesus and the Father is not something automatic, but rather it is the fruit of obedience: “I always do what pleases My Father” (Jn 8:29; 6:38; 17:4). “My food is to do the will of the Father” (Jn 4:34; 5:30). The Letter to the Hebrews says that Jesus learned obedience from the things that He suffered (Heb 5:8). “He was obedient until death and death on the Cross” (Ph 2:8). The obedience of Jesus is not a disciplinary one, but rather it was prophetic. He obeys in order to be totally transparent, and thus, to be the revelation of the Father. Because of this, He could say: “The Father and I are one!” It was a long process of obedience and of incarnation which lasted 33 years. It began with Mary’s YES (Lk 1:38) and ended with: “It is all fulfilled!” (Jn 19:30).

4) Personal questions

- Is my obedience to God, disciplinary or prophetic? Do I reveal something of God or am I only concerned about my own salvation?
- Jesus does not submit Himself to the exigencies of those who want to verify if He is the Messiah. Is my faith sufficient or do I ask for “signs” in order to satisfy my belief?
- Am I personally fed by doing the will of the Father? Is this “doing” only on Sunday, or occasionally, or at every moment throughout my day?

5) Concluding Prayer

May God show kindness and bless us,
and make His face shine on us.
Then the earth will acknowledge your ways,
and all nations your power to save. (Ps 67:2-3)

Lectio Divina: Wednesday, April 25, 2018

Easter Time

1) Opening prayer

Lord our God,
there is much in us that obscures Your word
and keeps us from being truly Your Church. We pray You today:
Call us, as once You called Mark,
to speak and live Your word.
Inspire us through Your Spirit
and teach us to live in the hope
that Your kingdom will come
and remain among us

through Jesus Christ, our Lord,
now and for ever.

2) Gospel Reading - Mark 16:15-20

Jesus appeared to the Eleven and said to them: "Go into the whole world and proclaim the Gospel to every creature. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved; whoever does not believe will be condemned. These signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will drive out demons, they will speak new languages. They will pick up serpents with their hands, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not harm them. They will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover." Then the Lord Jesus, after he spoke to them, was taken up into heaven and took his seat at the right hand of God. But they went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the word through accompanying signs.

3) Reflection

- Today's Gospel forms part of the appendix of the Gospel of Mark (Mk 16:9-20) which presents a list of some apparitions of Jesus: to Magdalene (Mk 16:9-11), to the two disciples who were walking out in the country (Mk 16:12-13) and to the twelve apostles (Mk 16:14-18). This last apparition, together with the description of the Ascension into Heaven (Mk 16:19-20), forms the Gospel for today.
- Mark 16:14: The signs which accompany the announcement of the Good News. Jesus appears to the eleven disciples and reproaches them for not believing the persons who had seen Him resurrected. They did not believe Mary Magdalene (Mk 16:11), nor the two disciples on the road out in the country (Mk 16:13). Several times, Mark refers to the resistance of the disciples to believing the witness of those who experienced the resurrection of Jesus. Why does Mark insist so much on the lack of faith of the disciples? Probably to teach two things: First, that faith in Jesus goes through faith in persons who give witness. Second, that no one should be discouraged when there is doubt in the heart. Even the eleven disciples doubted!
- Mark 16:15-18: The mission to announce the Good News to the whole world. After having criticized the lack of faith of the disciples, Jesus confers their mission to them: "Go out to the whole world, proclaim the Gospel to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved; whoever does not believe will be condemned". To those who had the courage to believe in the Good News and who are baptized, Jesus promises the following signs: they will cast out devils, they will speak new languages, they will pick up snakes in their hands and be unharmed if they drink deadly poison, and they will lay their hands on the sick who will recover. This happens even today. To cast out devils is to fight against the force of evil which destroys life. The life of many people improves because they entered into the community and have begun to live the Good News of the presence of God in their life.
 - to speak new languages: it means to begin to communicate with others in a new way. Sometimes we meet a person whom we have never seen before, and we care deeply for them and their situation, even though we don't know them well. This happens because we speak the same language, the language of love.
 - deadly poison will not harm them: there are many things that poison life together in

community. There is gossip which destroys the relationship between persons. The one who lives in the presence of God does not participate in these things and is able to not be disturbed by this terrible poison.

- they cure the sick. Wherever there is a clear and lively knowledge of God's presence, there is also a special care given to the excluded and marginalized, especially the sick. What can help cure is that the person feels accepted and loved.

• Mark 16:19-20: Through the community, Jesus continues His mission. Jesus Himself, who lives in Palestine and accepts the poor of His time, revealing the love of the Father to them, continues to be alive in our midst in our community. Through us, He wants to continue His mission to reveal the Good News of God's love to the poor. Even up to this time the resurrection takes place, and it impels us to sing: "Who will separate us from the love of Christ, who will separate us?" No power of this world is capable of neutralizing the force that comes from faith in the Resurrection (Rm 8:35-39). A community which wants to be a witness of the Resurrection should be a sign of life and should struggle against the forces of death in such a way that the world may be a favorable place for life. Above all, in parts of the world such as Latin America and the Middle East, where the life of people is in danger because of the system of death which has become common there, the communities should be a living proof of the hope which overcomes the world without fear of being happy!

4) Personal questions

- How do these signs of God's presence take place in my life?
- What are the signs of the presence of Jesus in our midst that convince people the most today?
- Do I proclaim the Gospel through my words and actions every day, or just sometimes?

5) Concluding Prayer

I shall sing the faithful love of Yahweh for ever,
from age to age my lips shall declare Your constancy,
for You have said: love is built to last for ever,
You have fixed Your constancy firm in the heavens. (Ps 89:1-2)

Lectio Divina: Thursday, April 26, 2018

Easter Time

1) Opening prayer

All-powerful God,
Your Son Jesus reminds us today
that we are no greater than Your and our servant,
Jesus, our Lord and master.
Give us the love and endurance

to serve You and people
without waiting for awards or gratitude
and to accept the difficulties and contradictions
which are part of the Christian life
and which are normal for followers
of Him who bore the cross for us,
Jesus Christ our Lord.

2) Gospel Reading - John 13:16-20

When Jesus had washed the disciples' feet, he said to them: "Amen, amen, I say to you, no slave is greater than his master nor any messenger greater than the one who sent him. If you understand this, blessed are you if you do it. I am not speaking of all of you. I know those whom I have chosen. But so that the Scripture might be fulfilled, The one who ate my food has raised his heel against me. From now on I am telling you before it happens, so that when it happens you may believe that I AM. Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever receives the one I send receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me."

3) Reflection

- Beginning today, every day for several weeks, except on feast days, the Gospel of each day is taken from the long conversation of Jesus with the disciples during the Last Supper (Jn 13 to 17). In these five chapters which describe the farewell of Jesus, the presence of those three threads which we had spoken before is seen. Those threads knit and compose the Gospel of John: the word of Jesus, the word of the community and the word of the Evangelist who writes the last redaction of the Fourth Gospel. In these chapters, the three threads are intertwined in such a way that the whole is presented as a unique fabric or cloth with a rare beauty and inspiration, where it is difficult to distinguish what is from one and what is from the other, but where everything is the Word of God for us.
- These five chapters present the conversation which Jesus had with His friends on the evening when He was arrested and put to death. It was a friendly conversation, which remained in the memory of the beloved disciple. Jesus seems to want to prolong this last encounter, this moment of great intimacy. The same thing happens today. There is conversation and more conversation. There is the superficial conversation which uses many words and reveals the emptiness of the person, and there is the conversation which goes to the depth of the heart and remains in the memory. All of us, once in a while, have these moments of friendly living together, which expand the heart and constitute strength in moments of difficulty. They help us to trust and to overcome fear.
- The five verses of today's Gospel draw two conclusions from the washing of the feet (Jn 13:1-15). They speak (a) of service as the principal characteristic of the followers of Jesus, and (b) the identity of Jesus as the revelation of the Father.

- John 13:16-17: The servant is not greater than his master. Jesus has just finished washing the feet of the disciples. Peter becomes afraid and does not want Jesus to wash his feet. “If I do not wash you, you can have no share with Me” (Jn 13:8). It is enough to wash the feet; there is no need to wash the rest (Jn 13:10). The symbolic value of the gesture of the washing of the feet consists in accepting Jesus as Messiah Servant, who gives Himself for others, and to reject a Messiah as glorious king. This gift of self, servant of all, is the key to understanding the gesture of the washing of the feet. To understand this is the root of the happiness of a person: “Knowing these things, you will be blessed if you put them into practice”. But there were some people, even among the disciples, who did not accept Jesus in this role. They did not want to be the servants of others. They likely wanted a glorious Messiah, king and judge, according to the official ideology. Jesus says: “I am not speaking about all of you. I know the ones I have chosen. but what Scripture says must be fulfilled: He who shares My table takes advantage of Me!” John refers to Judas, whose betrayal will be announced immediately afterward (Jn 13:21-30).

- John 13:18-20: I tell you this now, before it happens, so that you may believe that I AM HE. It was on the occasion of the liberation from Egypt at the foot of Mount Sinai that God revealed His name to Moses: “I am with you!” (Ex 3:12), “I am who I am” (Ex 3:14). “I Am” or “I AM” has sent me to you!” (Ex 3:14). The name Yahweh (Ex 3:15) expresses the absolute certainty of the liberating presence of God at the side of His people. In many ways and on many occasions this same expression *I Am* is used by Jesus (Jn 8:24; 8:28; 8:58; Jn 6:20; 18:5.8; Mk 14:62; Lk 22:70). Jesus is the presence of the liberating face of God in our midst.

4) Personal questions

- The servant is not greater than his master, nor any messenger greater than the one who sent him. This is an ultimate statement of humility. As a messenger of the Gospel in the world, do I take credit for my abilities and gifts which come from God and claim them as my own, rather than crediting them to God?

- Jesus knew how to live together with people who did not accept Him. Do I?

- How can I make of my life a permanent service to others?

5) Concluding Prayer

I shall sing the faithful love of Yahweh for ever,
 from age to age my lips shall declare Your constancy,
 for You have said: love is built to last forever,
 You have fixed Your constancy firm in the heavens. (Sal 89:1-2)

Lectio Divina: Friday, April 27, 2018

Easter Time

1) Opening prayer

Lord our God,
your Son Jesus Christ is to us
the way that leads to You and to one another,
the truth that is good news of love and hope,
the life which He sacrificed to give it.
Help us to show the way to Him
and to go His way to one another,
to speak the truth that is encouraging and credible,
to give life by sharing happiness,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

2) Gospel Reading - John 14:1-6

Jesus said to his disciples: “Do not let your hearts be troubled. You have faith in God; have faith also in me. In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. If there were not, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back again and take you to myself, so that where I am you also may be. Where I am going you know the way.” Thomas said to him, “Master, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way?” Jesus said to him, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

3) Reflection

- These five chapters (Jn 13-17) are a beautiful example of how the communities of the Beloved Disciple at the end of the first century in Asia Minor, which today is Turkey, carried on the catechesis. For example, in chapter 14, the questions of the three disciples, Thomas (Jn 14:5), Philip (Jn 14:8) and Judas Thaddeus (Jn 14:22) were also the questions and problems within the communities. The answers of Jesus to the three of them are like a mirror in which the communities found a response to their doubts and difficulties. To better understand the environment in which the catechesis was carried out, it is possible to do the following. During and after the reading of the text, it is good to close the eyes and pretend that we are in the room in the midst of the disciples, participating in the encounter with Jesus. While we listen, it is necessary to pay attention to the way which Jesus prepares His friends to separate themselves and reveals to them His friendship, communicating to them security and support.

- John 14:1-2: Do not let your hearts be troubled. The text begins with an exhortation: “Do not let your hearts be troubled!” And immediately He adds: “In my Father’s house there are many places to live in!” The insistence on continuing to use encouraging words to overcome troubles and differences is a sign that there were many disagreements

among the communities. One would say to the other: “Our way of living the faith is better than yours. We are saved! You live in error: If you want to go to heaven, you have to convert yourselves and live like we do!” Jesus says: “In My Father’s house there are many places!” It is not necessary that everybody thinks the same way. The important thing is that all accept Jesus, the revelation of the Father, and that out of love for Him, they have attitudes of understanding, service and love. Love and service are the basis which unite the bricks and help the diverse communities to become a Church of brothers and sisters.

- John 14:3-4: The farewell of Jesus. Jesus says that He is going to prepare a place and that afterwards He will return to take us with Him to the Father’s house. He wants us to be with Him forever. The return which Jesus speaks about is the coming of the Spirit that He sends and who acts in us, in such a way that we can live as He lived (Jn 14:16-17.26; 16:13-14). John's community feared a delay in His future return and his Gospel is filled with reminders of the Spirit. Jesus ends by saying: “You know the way to the place where I am going!” Anyone who knows Jesus knows the way, because the way is the life that He lived and which led Him through death together to the Father.

- John 14:5-6: Thomas asks which is the way. Thomas says: “Lord, we do not know where you are going, so how can we know the way?” Jesus answers: “I am the Way, I am Truth and Life! No one can come to the Father except through Me”. Three important words. Without the way we cannot go. Without the truth one cannot make a good choice. Without life, there is only death! Jesus explains the sense. He is the Way, because “No one can come to the Father except through Me”. And He is the gate through which the sheep enter and go out (Jn 10:9). Jesus is the truth, because looking at Him, we see the image of the Father. “Anyone who knows Me knows the Father!” Jesus is the life, because walking like Jesus, we will be united to the Father and we will have life in us!

4) Personal questions

- In the context and with knowledge of the last few days' Gospels, how do we go to the Father through Jesus? What is involved?
- Jesus says: “In My Father’s house there are many places”. How would you interpret this today? How would you interpret this relative to ecumenism? Or within Church doctrine?

5) Concluding Prayer

Sing a new song to Yahweh,
for He has performed wonders,
His saving power is in His right hand and His holy arm. (Ps 98:1)

Lectio Divina: Saturday, April 28, 2018

Easter Time

1) Opening prayer

Lord our God,
you are distant and unknown, and yet so near
that You know and love and save us
through Your Son Jesus Christ.
May He be present in us and in our actions
that we may do the same works
of justice, truth and loving service
and thus become the sign to the world
that Your Son is alive
and that You are a saving God
now and for ever.

2) Gospel Reading - John 14:7-14

Jesus said to his disciples: "If you know me, then you will also know my Father. From now on you do know him and have seen him." Philip said to Jesus, "Master, show us the Father, and that will be enough for us." Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you for so long a time and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on my own. The Father who dwells in me is doing his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else, believe because of the works themselves. Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever believes in me will do the works that I do, and will do greater ones than these, because I am going to the Father. And whatever you ask in my name, I will do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything of me in my name, I will do it."

3) Reflection

- John 14:7: To know Jesus is to know the Father. The text of today's Gospel is the continuation from yesterday. Thomas had asked: "Lord we do not know where You are going, how can we know the way?" Jesus answers: "I am the Way, I am Truth and Life! No one can come to the Father except through Me." And He adds: "If you know Me, you will know the Father too. From this moment you know Him and have seen Him". This is the first phrase of today's Gospel. Jesus always speaks of the Father, because it was the life of the Father which appeared in all that He said and did. This constant reference to the Father provokes Philip's question.
- John 14:8-11: Philip asks: "Lord, show us the Father and then we will be satisfied!" This was the desire of the disciples, the desire of many in the communities of the beloved disciple and it is the desire of many people today: What do people do to see the

Father whom Jesus speaks so much? The response of Jesus is very beautiful and is valid even now: “Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know Me! Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father!” People should not think that God is far away from us, distant and unknown. Anyone who wants to know who God the Father is, it suffices that he look at Jesus. He has revealed Him in His words and the actions of His life! “I am in the Father and the Father is in Me!” Through His obedience, Jesus identified Himself totally with the Father. At every moment He did what the Father asked Him to do (Jn 5:30; 8:28-29.38). This is why, in Jesus, everything is a revelation of the Father! And the signs and works are the works of the Father! As people say: “The son is the face of the father!” This is why in Jesus, and for Jesus, God is in our midst.

- John 14:12-14: The Promise of Jesus. Jesus makes a promise to say that His intimacy with the Father is not His privilege only, but that it is possible for all those who believe in Him. We also, through Jesus, can succeed in doing beautiful things for others as Jesus did for the people of His time. He intercedes for us. Everything that people ask Him for; He asks the Father and always obtains it, as long as it is to render service. Jesus is our advocate. He defends us. He leaves but He does not leave us defenseless. He promises that He will ask the Father and the Father will send another advocate or consoler, the Holy Spirit. Jesus even says that it is necessary for Him to leave, because otherwise the Holy Spirit will not be able to come (Jn 16:7). And the Holy Spirit will fulfill the things of Jesus in us, if we act in the name of Jesus and we observe the great commandment of the practice of love.

4) Personal questions

- To know Jesus is to know the Father. In the Bible the word “to know a person” is not only an intellectual understanding, but it also presupposes a profound experience of the presence of the person in one’s life. Do I know Jesus?

- Do I know the Father?

- Do my works reveal the Father and the Son to others at all times?

5) Concluding Prayer

The whole wide world has seen
the saving power of our God.
Acclaim Yahweh, all the earth,
burst into shouts of joy! (Ps 98:3-4)

Lectio Divina: Sunday, April 29, 2018

*The image of the true vine, that is, Jesus
The pressing invitation to remain in Him
in order to bear the fruit of love
John 15:1-8*

1. Opening prayer

Lord, You are! And this is sufficient for us, to live by, to go on hoping every day, to walk in this world, not to choose the wrong road of being closed and lonely. Yes, You are forever and from all time; You are constant, O Jesus! Your being is our constant gift; it is an ever ripe fruit that feeds and strengthens us in You, in Your presence. Lord, open our heart, open our being to Your being; open us to life with the mysterious power of Your Word. Help us to listen, to eat and savor this food for our souls, which is indispensable for us! Send us the good fruit of Your Spirit so that He may bring about in us that which we read and meditate about You.

2. Reading

a) To place the passage in its context:

These few verses are part of the great discourse of Jesus to His disciples during that intimate moment of the last supper and they begin with chapter 13, verse 31, and proceed up to the end of chapter 17. This passage has a very tight, deep and inseparable unity, unequalled in the Gospels, and sums up the whole of Jesus' revelation in His divine life and in the mystery of the Trinity. It is the text that says what no other text in the Scriptures is capable of saying concerning Christian life, its power, its tasks, its joys and pains, its hopes and its struggle in this world in the Church. Just a few verses, but full of love. That love to the very end that Jesus chose to live for His disciples, and for us, even to this day and forever. In the strength of this love, the supreme gesture of infinite tenderness, which includes all other gestures of love, the Lord bequeaths to His disciples a new presence. A new way of being. By means of the parable of the vine and its branches and the proclamation of the wonderful verb remain, repeated several times, Jesus initiates His new story with each one of us called indwelling. He is no longer with us, because He is going back to the Father, yet He remains within us.

b) To assist us in the reading of the passage:

vv. 1-3: Jesus reveals Himself as the true vine, which brings forth good fruit and excellent wine for His Father who is the vinedresser. He reveals to us, His disciples, the branches, that we must remain united to the vine so as not to die and to bear fruit. The pruning, which the Father accomplishes on the branches by means of the Word, is a purification, a joy, and a chant.

vv. 4-6: Jesus passes on to His disciples the secret of being able to continue to live in an intimate relationship with Him by remaining. As He lives in them and remains in

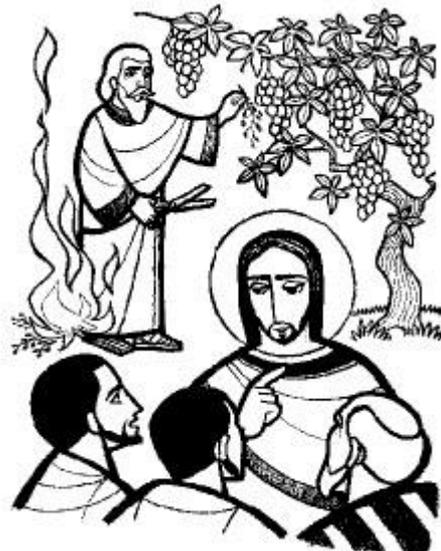
them, and is no longer external to them or with them, so they must also remain in Him, inside Him. This is the only way to be completely consoled, to be able to hold on to this life and bear good fruit which is love.

v. 7: Once more, Jesus bequeaths the gift of prayer in the heart of His disciples, that most precious and unique pearl, and He tells us that by remaining in Him, we can learn true prayer, the prayer that seeks insistently the gift of the Holy Spirit and knows that it will be granted.

v. 8: Jesus calls us to Himself, asks us to follow Him, and to be always His disciples. The remainder brings forth mission, the gift of life for the Father and for the neighbor. If we really remain in Jesus, then we shall really remain in the midst of our brothers and sisters, as gift and as service. This is the glory of the Father.

c) The text:

Jesus said to his disciples: "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower. He takes away every branch in me that does not bear fruit, and every one that does he prunes so that it bears more fruit. You are already pruned because of the word that I spoke to you. Remain in me, as I remain in you. Just as a branch cannot bear fruit on its own unless it remains on the vine, so neither can you unless you remain in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing. Anyone who does not remain in me will be thrown out like a branch and wither; people will gather them and throw them into a fire and they will be burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask for whatever you want and it will be done for you. By this is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples."



3. A moment of silent prayer

As a branch, I now remain united to the vine, my Lord, and I abandon myself to Him. I allow myself to be overtaken by the sap of His silent and deep voice, which is like living water. Therefore, I remain in silence and stay close.

4. A few questions

These help me remain and to discover the beauty of the vine, Jesus. They lead me to the Father, and allow Him to take over and labor in me, certain of His good labor as loving vine-dresser. They urge me to enter into the life blood of the Spirit to meet Him as the only necessary thing that I must seek untiringly.

a) "I am": it is beautiful that the passage begins with these words, which are like a song of joy of the victory of the Lord that He loves to sing all the time in the life of each one of us. "I am": He repeats this infinitely, every morning, every evening, at night, while we sleep, even though we are not aware of this. In fact, He really is at our disposal. He is turned towards the Father, and towards us for us. I meditate on these words and not only listen to them, but allow them to penetrate me, my mind, my innermost memory, my heart, and all my feelings as I ruminate on and absorb His being into my being. I try to enter into the depths of my being, overcoming fear, crossing the darkness that I find there and I gather those parts of my being that are most lifeless. I take them delicately and bring them to Jesus and I hand them over to His "I am".

b) The vine recalls to mind wine, that precious and good fruit, and also recalls to mind the covenant that nothing will ever break. Am I willing to remain in that embrace, in that continuous yes of my life thus woven into His? Together with the Psalmist, I shall also raise the chalice of the covenant, calling on the name of the Lord and saying to Him, "yes, I also love you".

c) Jesus calls His Father the vine-dresser, a very beautiful term that carries all the force of the love dedicated to working the land. It expresses a bending over the earth, a drawing close of body and being, a prolonged contact, a vital exchange. This is precisely the Father's attitude towards us! However, St. Paul says: "The farmer who has done the hard work should have the first share of the harvest" (2 Tim 2:6) and St. James reminds us "See how patient a farmer is as he waits for his land to produce precious crops" (Jas 5:7). Will I disappoint the patience of the Father who cultivates me every day, turns me over, gets rid of the stones, nourishes me with good fertilizer and builds a hedge all round me to protect me? To whom do I give the fruits of my existence, my heart, my mind, and my soul? For whom do I exist? For whom do I decide and choose to live every day, every morning, when I wake up?

d) I follow the text carefully and underline two verbs, which occur frequently: "to bear fruit" and "to remain". I understand that these two realities are a symbol of life itself and are woven together, each depending on the other. Only by remaining is it possible to bear fruit, and the only true fruit that we as disciples can bear in this world is to remain. Where do I remain every day, all day? With whom do I remain? Jesus always makes the connection of this verb with that wonderful and enormous particle: "in Me". Do I console myself with these two words "in Me"? Do I dig in search of the Lord as one digs for a well (cfr. Gn 26:18) or for treasure (Pr 2:4)? Or am I outside, always lost among the ways of this world, as far as possible from intimacy and from a relationship from contact with the Lord?

e) Twice Jesus reminds us of the reality of His Word and reveals to us that it is His Word that makes us pure and it is His Word that leads us to true prayer. The Word is proclaimed and given as a permanent presence within us. It also has the ability to remain, to make its dwelling place in our heart. However, I must ask myself, what ears do I have to listen to this proclamation of salvation and goodness, which the Lord addresses to me through His Words? Do I allow room to listen in depth to that which

the Scripture speaks to me all the time, in the Law, the Prophets, the Psalms and the apostolic writings? Do I allow the Word of the Lord to find me and overtake me in prayer, or do I prefer to trust in other words, lighter, more human and more like my words? Am I afraid of the voice of the Lord who speaks to me urgently and all the time?

5. A key to the reading

As a branch, I seek to be ever more one with my Vine, that is, the Lord Jesus. Here and now, I drink of His Word, the good sap, seeking to penetrate ever deeper so as to absorb the hidden nourishment that transmits real life to me. I pay attention to the words, the verbs, the expressions Jesus uses and which recall other passages of divine Scripture and, thus, I let myself be purified.

The meeting with Jesus, the "I am"

This passage is one of the texts where this strong expression appears, an expression that the Lord addresses to us in order to reveal Himself. It is wonderful to walk through the Scriptures in search of other texts similar to this one, where the Lord speaks of Himself directly. When the Lord says and repeats, in a thousand ways, with a thousand nuances, "I am". He does not do so in order to annihilate or humiliate us, but only to stress forcefully His overflowing love for us which desires to make us live that same life that belongs to Him. When He says "I am", He is also saying "You are" to each one of us, to each son and daughter who is born into this world. It is a fruitful and uninterrupted transmission of being, of essence, and I do not wish to let this be in vain. I wish to welcome it and welcome it inside me. So, I follow the luminous trace of the "I am" and I try to stop at each step. "I am your shield" (Gen 15:1), "I am the God of Abraham your father" (Gen 24:26), "I am the Lord who led you and still leads you out of the land of Egypt" (cfr. Es 6:6) and from the hands of every Pharaoh who will threaten your life. "I am He who heals you" (Es 15:26). I allow myself to be enlightened by the force of these words, which fulfill the miracle they speak of; they fulfill this miracle to this day, and for me, in this lectio. Then I go on reading in the book of Leviticus where at least 50 times this affirmation of salvation is found: "I am the Lord", and I believe these words and hold on to them with my whole being, my whole heart and say: "Yes, indeed the Lord is my Lord, He and no other!" I note that the Scriptures probe ever deeper. As the journey continues, gradually, the Scriptures penetrate me and lead me to an ever more intense relationship with the Lord. In fact, the book of Numbers says: "I am the Lord and I live among the people of Israel" (Num 35:34). "I am" is in the present, He who does not draw apart, does not turn His back to leave. It is He who cares for us from close by, from the inside, as only He can do. I read Isaiah and I receive life: 41:10; 43:3; 45:6 etc.

The holy Gospel is an explosion of being, presence, and salvation. I run through it letting John lead me: 6:48; 8:12; 10:9. 11; 11:15; 14:6; 18:37. Jesus is the bread, the light, the gate, the shepherd, the resurrection, the way, the truth, the life, the king. All for me and for us, and so I want to welcome Him, know Him and love Him, and I want to learn, through these words, to say to Him: "Lord you are!" It is this "You" that gives meaning

to my "I" that makes life a relationship and a communion. I know for certain that only here can I find full joy and live forever.

The vineyard, the true vine and its good fruit

God's vineyard is Israel, a beloved vineyard, a chosen vineyard, a vineyard planted on a fertile hill in a place where the earth has been cleared afresh, hoed, and freed of stones. A protected vineyard, worked, loved, large and one that God Himself has planted (cfr. Is 5:1ff; Ger 2:21). So loved is this vineyard that the beloved has never ceased to sing the canticle of love for her. Strong notes, yet sweet at the same time. Notes that bear true life, that go across the ancient covenant and come to the new covenant in even clearer notes. At first it was the Father who sang, now it is Jesus, but in both it is the Spirit who is heard, as the Song of Songs says: "The voice of the dove is still heard... and the vineyards spread fragrance" (Sgs 2:12ff). It is the Lord Jesus who draws us, who takes us from the old to the new, from love to love, towards an ever stronger communion, even to identification: "I am the vine, but you too are in me". Hence it is clear: the vineyard is Israel, is Jesus, is us. Always the same, always new, always chosen and beloved, loved, cared for, protected, visited: visited by rain and visited by the Word. Sent by the prophets day by day, visited by the sending of the Son, who is love, and who expects love, that is, the fruit. "He waited for the grapes to ripen, but every grape was sour" (Is 5:2). In love, disappointment is always around the corner. I stop here at this reality. I look inside me. I try to discover the places where I am closed, dry, and dead. Why has the rain not come? I repeat this word that echoes often through the pages of the Bible: "The Lord waits..." (see Is 30:18; Lk 13:6-9). He wants the fruits of conversion (cfr. Mt 3:8), as He tells us through John, the fruits of the word that hides the listening, the welcoming and the self-control, as the synoptics say (cfr. Mt 13:23; Mk 4:20 e Lk 8:15), the fruits of the Spirit, as Paul explains (cfr. Gal 5:22). He wants us "to bear fruit in every good work" (Col 1:10), but above all, it seems to me, the Lord waits and desires "the fruit of the womb" (cfr. Lk 1:42), that is Jesus, in whom we are truly blessed. In fact, Jesus is the seed that, dying, bears much fruit within us in our life (Jn 12:24) and defeats every solitude, every closure, opening us wide to our brothers and sisters. This is the real fruit of conversion, planted in the earth of our bosom. This is to become His disciples and, finally, this is the true glory of the Father.

Pruning, a joyful purification

In this passage of the Gospel, the Lord shows me another way of following Him, together with Him. It is the way of purification, of renewal, of resurrection, and new life. It is hidden in the term "pruning", but I can better discover it thanks to the Word itself, which is the only sure guide. The Greek text uses the term "purify" to point to this action of the vine-dresser in His vineyard. Certainly, it is true that He prunes and cuts with a knife sharpened by His Word (Heb 4:12) and sometimes, wounds us, but it is even truer that it is His love that penetrates ever deeper in us and thus purifies, washes, and refines. Yes, the Lord sits as washer to purify, to make splendid and luminous the gold in His hand (cfr. Mal 3:3). Jesus brings a new purification, the one promised for so long by the Scriptures and in waiting for the Messianic times. It is no longer the

purification that took place by means of cult, by means of the observance of the law or sacrifices, a temporary purification, incomplete and figurative. Jesus brings about an intimate, total purification. One of the heart and conscience, the one sung by Ezekiel: "I shall purify you of all your idols, I shall give you a new heart...When I shall have purified you from all your iniquities, I shall bring you back to your cities and your ruins will be rebuilt..." (Ez 36:25ff. 33). I also read Eph 5:26 e Tt 2:14, beautiful and rich texts, which help me better enter into the light of grace of this work of salvation, of this spiritual pruning that the Father works in me.

There is a verse in the Song of Songs that can help my understanding more. It says, "This is the time for singing" (Sgs 2:12), however, it uses a verb that means also "pruning, cutting" as well as "singing". Thus pruning is the time for singing and for joy. It is my heart that sings before and in the Word. It is my soul that rejoices for my faith, because I know that through this long but magnificent pilgrimage in the Scriptures, I too will take part in Jesus' life. I too will be united with Him, the pure, the holy, the immaculate Word and that thus, united to Him, I shall be washed and purified with the infinite purity of His life. Not for me alone, not in order to be alone, but to bear much fruit. To grow leaves and branches that do not wither. To be a branch together with many other branches in the vine of Jesus Christ.

6. A moment of silent prayer: Psalm 1

A meditation on the joy of one who lives by the Word and, thanks to the Word, bears fruit.

Res. Your Word is my joy, Lord!

Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,
nor stands in the way of sinners,
nor sits in the seat of scoffers;
but his delight is in the law of the Lord,
and on His law he meditates day and night. Res.

He is like a tree planted by streams of water,
that yields its fruit in its season,
and its leaf does not wither.
In all that he does, he prospers.
The wicked are not so,
but are like chaff which the wind drives away. Res.

Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;
for the Lord knows the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked will perish. Res.

7. Closing prayer

Lord, I still see the light of Your Word. The healing force of Your voice still rings in the depth of my being! Thank you, O my Vine, my sap. Thank You, O my dwelling where I can and wish to remain. Thank You, O my strength to do, to carry out every task; thank You my Master! You have called me to be a fruitful branch, to be fruit of your love for humankind, to be the wine that makes the heart rejoice. Lord, help me to realize this blessed and true Word of Yours. Only thus can I live truly and live truly as You are and remain. Lord, let me not err so that I wish to remain a branch in Your vine without the other branches, my brothers and sisters. It would be indeed the sourest and most displeasing fruit.

Lord, I do not know how to pray. Teach me Yourself and let my most beautiful prayer be my life, transformed into a bunch of grapes for the hunger and the thirst, for the joy and company of those who come to the vine, that is, You. Thank you for being the wine of Love!

Lectio Divina: Monday, April 30, 2018

Easter Time

1) Opening prayer

Lord God, loving Father,
we look for Your presence
in the temple of nature
and in churches built by our hands,
and You are there with Your people.
But above all, You have made Your temple
right in our hearts.
God, give us eyes of faith and love
to recognize that You live in us
with Your Son and the Holy Spirit
if we keep the word of Jesus Christ,
Your Son and our Lord for ever.

2) Gospel Reading - John 14:21-26

Jesus said to his disciples: "Whoever has my commandments and observes them is the one who loves me. Whoever loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and reveal myself to him." Judas, not the Iscariot, said to him, "Master, then what happened that you will reveal yourself to us and not to the world?" Jesus answered and said to him, "Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; yet the word you hear is not mine but that of the Father who sent

me. "I have told you this while I am with you. The Advocate, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name -- he will teach you everything and remind you of all that I told you."

3) Reflection

- Chapter 14 of the Gospel of John is a beautiful example of how the catechesis was done in the communities of Asia Minor at the end of the first century. Through the questions of the disciples and the responses of Jesus, the Christians formed their conscience and found an orientation to address their problems. In chapter 14, we find the question of Thomas and the answer of Jesus (Jn 14:5-7), the question of Philip and the response of Jesus (Jn 14:8-21), and the question of Judas and the answer of Jesus (Jn 12:22-26). The last phrase of the answer of Jesus to Philip (Jn 14:21) forms the first verse of today's Gospel.

- John 14:21: I shall love Him and reveal myself to Him. This verse presents the summary of the response of Jesus to Philip. Philip had said: "Show us the Father and then we shall be satisfied!" (Jn 14:8). Moses had asked God: "Show me your glory!" (Ex 33:18). God answered: "My face you cannot see, for no human being can see Me and survive" (Ex 33:20). The Father cannot be shown. God lives in inaccessible light (1 Tim 6:16). "Nobody has ever seen God" (1 Jn 4:12). But the presence of the Father can be experienced through the experience of love. The First Letter of Saint John says: "He who does not love does not know God because God is love". Jesus tells Philip: "Whoever loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I shall love him and reveal Myself to him". By observing the commandment of Jesus, which is the commandment to love our neighbor (Jn 15:17), the person shows his love for Jesus. And whoever loves Jesus, will be loved by the Father and can be certain that the Father will manifest Himself to him. In the response to Judas, Jesus will say how this manifestation of the Father will take place in our life.

- John 14:22: The question of Judas is the question of all. The question of Judas: "Lord, what has happened that You intend to show Yourself to us and not to the world?" This question mirrors a problem which is real even today. Sometimes, among us, Christians, there arises the idea of being better than the others and of being loved by God more than others. Do we attribute to God distinction among people?

- John 14:23-24: The answer of Jesus. The answer of Jesus is simple and profound. He repeats what He had just said to Philip. The problem is not if we, Christians, are loved more by God than others, or that the others are despised by God. This is not the criteria for any preference by the Father. The criteria of the Father is always the same: love. "If anyone loves Me, he will observe My word, and My Father will love him and We shall come to him and make a home in him. Anyone who does not love Me does not keep My words". Independently of whether the person is Christian or not, the Father manifests Himself to all those who observe the commandment of Jesus which is love for neighbor (Jn 15:17). In what does the manifestation of the Father consist? The response to this question is engraved in the heart of humanity, in the universal human

experience. Observe the life of the people who practice love and make their life a gift for others. Examine their experience, independently of religion, social class, race or color. The practice of love gives us a profound peace and it is a great joy that they succeed to live and bear together pain and suffering. This experience is the reflection of the manifestation of the Father in the life of the person. It is the realization of the promise: “I and the Father will come to him and make our home in him.

- John 14:25-26: The promise of the Holy Spirit. Jesus ends his response to Judas saying: I have said these things to you while still with you. Jesus communicates everything which He has heard from the Father (Jn 15:15). His words are a source of life and they should be meditated on, deepened, and updated constantly in the light of the always new reality which surrounds us. For this constant meditation on His words, Jesus promises us the help of the Holy Spirit: “The Consoler, the Holy Spirit that the Father will send in My name will teach you everything and remind you of all I have said to you.

4) Personal questions

- Jesus says: We will come to him and make our home in him. How do I experience this promise?
- We have the promise of the gift of the Spirit to help us understand the word of Jesus. Do I invoke the light of the Spirit when I prepare myself to read and meditate on Scripture?
- Do I keep His word in a way that allows the Father and the Son to dwell in me continuously, or is it only on good days or certain times?

5) Concluding Prayer

Day after day I shall bless You,
I shall praise Your name for ever and ever.
Great is Yahweh and worthy of all praise,
His greatness beyond all reckoning. (Ps 145:2-3)