

PART ONE

ENCOUNTERING JESUS CHRIST

“The Church’s closeness to Jesus
is part of a common journey.”

(Evangelii Gaudium, 23)

Baptised
and sent

October
2019



EXTRAORDINARY MISSIONARY MONTH OCTOBER 2019

Baptized and sent: the Church of Christ on mission in the world

OCTOBER 1, 2019

Tuesday of the 26th Week of Ordinary Time

Memorial of Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus

Zec 8:20-23

Ps 87:1b-7

Lk 9:51-56

The prophecy of Zechariah 8:20-23 nourishes the hope of the people of God, who await its fulfillment in the universal pilgrimage of peoples to Jerusalem at the end of time (see Zec 8:22). The book of Zechariah, located in the penultimate place among the Twelve Prophets, is attributed to one of the last active prophets, alongside Haggai, after the Babylonian exile during the time of the restoration of the religious and civil Jewish community in the “land of the fathers,” as the reconstruction of the temple in Jerusalem was completed.

The prophetic promise comes in the third part of the book (see Zec 8:12-14), but it is already anticipated in the first part, in Zec 2:10-11. It falls within a prophetic tradition that awaits the peaceful pilgrimage of all nations to Jerusalem, as we see in Is 2:1-4, a text that is almost completely identical to Mi 4:1-4. It is above all the tradition of the Isaian school to develop the theme of this hope, toward which Judaism definitively looks, together with the coming of the Messiah, at the end of time (see Is 49:22-23).

Regarding the final conversion of all the nations to the Lord, the prophetic tradition is unanimous in the conviction that this will not come as a result of missionary activity carried out by Israel. Such conversion will be a response to the action of the Lord himself in the hearts of all peoples at the end of time.

The Gospel reading on Jesus' journey to Jerusalem sheds new light on the prophets' words on the conversion of all peoples to the Lord using the image of the great pilgrimage to Jerusalem at the end of time. Luke's reference to "the days for his being taken up" (Lk 9:51) concerns not only Jesus' ascension into heaven (see Lk 24:50-51; Acts 7:46), but also the mystery of his passion and death in Jerusalem. Jesus had already said this to his disciples, when he explained to Peter the meaning of Peter's own profession of faith in him as Messiah. "The Son of Man," he said, "must suffer greatly and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed and on the third day be raised" (Lk 9:22). He repeated this to the disciples after his transfiguration (see Lk 9:44) and a third time to the Twelve, before his final ascent from Jericho to Jerusalem (see Lk 18:31-33). On each of these occasions, he told the disciples that they could not understand the meaning of his words.

God's plan for universal salvation – for Israel as well as for all the nations – passes through Jerusalem as the place where Jesus was "raised up" (Jn 12:32). It is the profound, irresistible, and divine attraction of the mystery of the cross lived, witnessed to, and transfigured by Jesus to arouse, promote, and accompany the movement of the conversion of the nations to Jerusalem, the place chosen by the Lord for the mystery of salvation. Jesus involved in his mission first the Twelve and then the Church, which he had established by specific call. The disciples cannot but follow Jesus, though they had a hard time understanding, judging by their own words and deeds: it is a journey of conversion, which begins with a call and continues throughout one's life.

Jesus' passage through Samaria during his journey to Jerusalem is an episode that is emblematic of the conversion that the disciples of Jesus must continually undergo if they are to accompany him and support him in his mission of evangelization and salvation. When he sends messengers ahead to prepare for his arrival in a Samaritan village (see Lk 9:52), Jesus is perfectly aware of the hostility that divides Jews and Samaritans (see Jn 4:20), but this does not dissuade him; even the disciples, moreover, must

learn to manage this deep hostility differently. The reaction of James and John – whom Jesus, with a hint of irony, had nicknamed “sons of thunder” (Mk 3:17) – to the negative response of the Samaritans of the village (see Lk 9:53) is angry and violent (see Lk 9:54). The two brothers are motivated by an imprudent conviction of being bearers, in some way, of a superior religious truth. Some early Gospel manuscripts, preserved in Greek, Syriac, and Latin, add a little explanatory note at the end of the question posed by the two disciples: “Lord, do you want us to call down fire from heaven to consume them, as Elijah did?” (see 2 Kgs 1:10-12, Sir 48:3). To Jesus, it was an improper request and an inappropriate appeal to the authoritative-ness of the Holy Scriptures: “Jesus turned and rebuked them” (Lk 9:55). The same ancient variant of this passage that mentions Elijah also deepens Jesus’ reproach, for he tells them, “You do not know of what Spirit you are, for the Son of Man has not come to destroy but to save” (Lk 9:55-56). This Christian catechesis reminds us of the nature of Jesus’ mission, which is not about inflicting divine vengeance; the reference to the Spirit that is moving James and John is significant in the theology of the school of Luke, which includes the Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles. In the Gospel story, Jesus simply moves on to a different village (see Lk 9:56). It is a pastoral strategy (see Lk 10:10-11) that will also guide Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey to Antioch of Pisidia (see Acts 13:46). Jesus says nothing about the rejection of the Samaritans of that village; rather, one of the first missions of the Church of Jerusalem will be to the Samaritans. The deacon Philip, moved by the Holy Spirit, will begin the work (see Acts 8:5), and Peter and John will complete it (see Acts 8:14-17).

The Church’s mission is to conform itself to the person and the mystery of Christ. It is a conversion that engages one’s whole life, leaving to the Lord the task of opening the doors of mission and moving people’s hearts. The times and ways of the conversion of the nations are the Lord’s work; the task of the Church is to convert itself to the Spirit and to the person of the Lord Jesus.

OCTOBER 2, 2019

Wednesday of the 26th Week of Ordinary Time

Memorial of the Holy Guardian Angels

Neh 2:1-8

Ps 137:1-6

Mt 18:1-5,10

The two readings of today's liturgy, Neh 2:1-8 and Mt 18:1-5,10, can be understood as fundamental expressions of a missionary spirituality for our time.

Nehemiah, previously introduced as the king's cupbearer (see Neh 1:11b) in the royal Persian court, bears in his heart a living and painful memory of the destruction of Jerusalem (see Neh 1:5-11); it is not a nostalgic patriotism, but a fundamental aspect of biblical prayer at the time of Babylonian exile and post-exile (see Ps 137:5-6). It is consistent with the message about the new exodus from this exile to return to the "land of the fathers" (see Is 40:9-11). It is part of the Lord's plan for his people, using even the authority of a pagan, Cyrus, king of Persia, one of the powerful of the earth at the time (see Ez 1:1-4). Nehemiah understands that in his position at the court of the Persian empire – around December 446 BC, during the reign of Artaxerxes I, almost a century after the edict of Cyrus – his vocation or mission must be to rebuild Jerusalem, in a broad understanding of that expression: to deal with the concrete problems of the Jews who must now rebuild the cultic and administrative community in the province of Judea with its epicenter in Jerusalem.

Nehemiah knows that while in the imperial court he cannot reveal his Jewish identity, because the Persian king might suspect his sorrow over the destruction and abandonment of Jerusalem to be the catalyst of a subversive

movement, a work in support of an ethnic-religious minority within the empire. The king's question to Nehemiah is direct: "What is it, then, that you wish?" (Neh 2:4), as though he is probing the reasons for Nehemiah's sorrow. This Jew in the Persian court is concerned he might say too much: "I prayed to the God of heaven" (Neh 2:4). The book of Proverbs, in fact, tells us: "Plans are made in human hearts, / but from the LORD comes the tongue's response (Prv 16:1). And in light of this faith, Nehemiah is able to ask permission to go to Judea to work to rebuild Jerusalem (see Neh 2:5).

In fact, everything now moves quickly in the way intended by the Lord. The king only asks Nehemiah how much time he needs for his mission in Judea; already his consent is clear (see Neh 2:6). Nehemiah continues in his prudent approach, necessary to carry out of his mission, but now it is the Lord who acts (see Neh 2:8).

This "missionary" acted with prudence in the hostile world in which he lived, but prudence and wisdom would not have been enough without the "guiding hand" of the Lord. He will now have to understand the Palestinian world within which he will have to move to carry out the mission to which the Lord calls him.

The Gospel passage, in which Jesus calls us to become like children, shines light on the depth of the work of conversion that is needed within the Church itself, in order to carry out our own mission. This mission can be spoiled from within the community of Jesus' disciples by the temptations of pride and power dressed up in religious language (see Mt 18:1). In the final lines of the same Gospel, which mention sins that prevent us from following Jesus in his ascent to Jerusalem, the last temptation and the hardest one to resist – after the disorderly use of sexuality (see Mt 19:1-12) and attachment to money (see Mt 19:16-26) – is power, which seems intractable even for the disciples of Jesus (see Mt 20:20-28).

To the spoiling of one's mission by sin, Jesus contrasts a meaningful gesture and a vital commitment: to make oneself small like children (see Mt 18:2-4). Anyone who feels called to mission needs of a profound conversion:

to become like a child. Not like children in the purely human sense. Nehemiah must have a specific and accurate awareness of both the world in which he moves and from which he departs, and the world he feels he must move into. In a similar way, every disciple of Jesus who feels called to a mission must have faith in God and trust fully in God. The missionary disciple must have the same immense trust that children have in their parents, sure of their love and their protection, and therefore confident in the present, that for them it is already the beginning of the future.

It is the same experience that Jesus has as the Son of his Father, fully aware of reality, totally confident and willing to surrender to him. Only in this way, conforming ourselves totally to Jesus, can we who are disciples approach the mission to which we are called. The Christian who has really become like a child, in the sense understood by Jesus, learns by experience that the fruitfulness of his mission is in the hands of the One who raised Christ from death and who sends him. Woe to that Christian community that considers such faith insignificant, despising or dismissing it: “See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that their angels in heaven always look upon the face of my heavenly Father” (Mt 18:10).

Becoming like a child gives the missionary disciple the form of her relationship with Jesus, the Master and Lord. In him, the disciple discovers her filial vocation as a child of the Father and her free obedience as the fruit of belonging in faith and mission. As a son or daughter in the Son, every disciple is missionary because she is sent to proclaim good news, supported and accompanied by angels, divine messengers who keep her open to contemplation as the foundation of mission and to the challenges of the world to which she offers witness. Like the guardian angel to whom each of us is entrusted, the child disciple always sees in Jesus the face of the Father to discover always and in anyone the face of a brother, the existence of a sister, to love and to save.

OCTOBER 3, 2019

Thursday of the 26th Week of Ordinary Time

Weekday

Neh 8:1-4a,5-6,7b-12

Ps 19:8-11

Lk 10:1-12

The books of Ezra and Nehemiah describe, in an epic of faith, important moments of the restoration of the community of the People of God in the ancient land of the fathers after the Babylonian exile. Amidst misfortunes and sufferings, the Lord's plan, already announced in Is 55:12-13, is carried out, even through the decisions of a pagan king, Cyrus of the Achaemenids of Persia; according to both 2 Chr 36:22-23 and Ezr 1:1-4, Cyrus's policy towards the Jewish ethnic-religious minority is the fulfillment of the word of the Lord himself. However, the return of even some of the exiles is not presented as an epic of cheap happiness. The Lord's plan is realized through the various caravans of exiles who return to the land of the fathers, in a "sacred history" that is modelled after the Israelites' return to the Promised Land centuries after their exodus from Egypt (see Neh 8:17). In the book of Nehemiah, the work of restoration of the temple and the city of Jerusalem finds its fulfillment in the reorganization of the community according to the precepts of the Law (see Neh 8:1-10, 40), in the broad participation of the members of the community (see Neh 11:1; 12:26), in the feast of the dedication of "the house of God" (see Neh 12:27-43), and in the people's rededication to the commitments of the covenant (see Neh 13:4-31).

The solemn celebration of the liturgy of the word for the Feast of Booths is a decisive step in the restoration of the worshipping community in the land of the fathers. On the first day of the feast, the liturgy of the word takes

place outdoors (see Neh 8:1-2), because the entire land of the fathers is a sacred space, especially the city of Jerusalem, and the Torah is even more significant than the temple and its sacrifices. Ezra, a priest and scribe, must be seen and listened to by all as he proclaims the Law of Moses (see Neh 8:4). Another group of people who are Levites have the task of reading the Law and explaining its meaning to the people (see Neh 8:7-8). Later Jewish traditions interpreted the meaning of the verb “to explain,” connected to “reading” the biblical text, as the beginning of the tradition of paraphrasing in Aramaic (the language best known by the exiles returned from Babylon) the biblical text read in Hebrew, that is, as the beginning of commenting (*midrash*) on the sacred text in order to seek the Lord through his word. The people respond to the word of the Lord with weeping (see Neh 8:9,11), a sign of true repentance, above all for the awareness of having sinned against the sanctity of the Lord himself, of having despised his love and mercy, according to the prophetic language. By a gift from the Lord, the Word has reached everyone’s hearts and moves them on the path of conversion. This liturgical celebration represents much more than the original historical event; it becomes an icon for every generation of believers. Sorrow and weeping are transformed into the joy of the rediscovered word of the Lord (see Neh 8:9); those who have explained that word to people can and must help transform repentance into joy (see Neh 8:11). According to the tradition of Dt 16:13-14, the occasion of the harvest festival – which becomes the Feast of Booths, celebrated in memory of the journey in the desert during the exodus – called for parts of the harvest to be offered to the poor people of the community. It is governor Nehemiah himself who, during the liturgy, calls for the festive banquet to be shared with those who have nothing prepared (see Neh 8:10). Sharing, as a sign of the communion of the feast, is a source of joy and testifies that the Word of the Lord has been understood in one’s mind, one’s heart, and one’s life (see Neh 8:12).

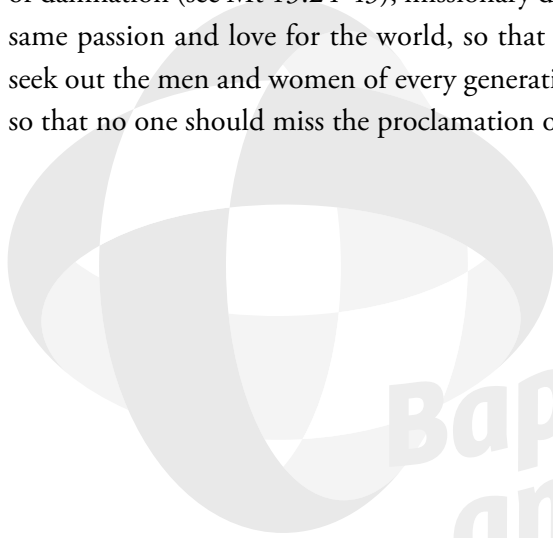
The call by Jesus of seventy or seventy-two disciples, who represent each of the twelve tribes of Israel, occurs after his call of the Twelve (see Lk 9:1-6).

Both missions are subsidiary and preparatory to Jesus' own personal journey. Preparation for mission consists in belonging to the community of the Jesus' disciples in the broadest sense of the term, even among non-Jews; the word of God is raised up in the very person of Jesus, as the Law of Moses was before the community at the time of Ezra and Nehemiah (see Neh 8:1). In the original community of his disciples, Jesus himself begins to explain the Scriptures as a Gospel (see Lk 24:44-48), making the function of reading and explaining the Scriptures essential in the community of Jesus' disciples (see Lk 24:25-35).

In entrusting the disciples with the mission of proclaiming the kingdom of God, Jesus also speaks of the methods of this mission: the equipment and the praxis (see Lk 10:1-11). He offers practical guidance, partly in keeping with the Judeo-Palestinian culture of the time, such as embracing the "protocol of hospitality" (see Lk 10:4-7; Gen 18: 1-8), but also insists on the urgency and the absolute priority of the mission with respect to the culture of the time (see Lk 10:4). The mission is carried out by a few, not by great numbers (see Lk 10:2), and they are exposed to dangers (see Lk 10:3). They bring a message of peace (see Lk 10:5, 24:36) that will prompt gestures in favor of both evangelizers and those being evangelized (see Lk 10:8-9a) and which has as its object the coming of the "kingdom of God" (Lk 10:9b): the arrival of the Lord Jesus, his journey (see Lk 10:1). As it was then in the Palestinian world, so it always shall be in every part of the world and in all times. Even Jesus' instructions about how the disciples are to behave when they are refused hospitality in their proclamation of the kingdom of God are guided by the priority of mission (see Lk 10:10-11); the same practice will be adopted by Paul and Barnabas when facing the opposition of the Jewish community (see Acts 13:44-51).

Jesus assures his missionaries that when they are rejected, it is not their concern but the Lord's (see Lk 10:12). Even the rejection and persecution of Jesus and because of Jesus can become opportunities for missionary disciples to conform themselves to the Passover of their Master, where the

message offered, the kingdom proclaimed, his divine-human person and his destiny as Messiah and Savior, become the only concern: to do the Father's will for the salvation of the world. The judgment regarding the salvation of the cities to which the saving coming of the Passover of Jesus Christ, the Kingdom of God made present in the person of the Son, is proclaimed remains the concern of God alone. No one can presume condemnation or damnation (see Mt 13:24-43); missionary disciples must burn with the same passion and love for the world, so that all may be saved, going to seek out the men and women of every generation, of every place and city, so that no one should miss the proclamation of the Gospel of salvation.



**Baptised
and sent**

October
2019

OCTOBER 4, 2019

Friday of the 26th Week of Ordinary Time

Memorial of St. Francis of Assisi

Bar 1:15-22

Ps 79:1-5,8,9

Lk 10:13-16

For a deeper understanding of the mission to which all Christians are called, it is useful to start from the words of Jesus in Lk 10:13-16, and then turn to the prayer of Bar 1:15-22, thus shedding light on the history of Israel of God, which is made up of those who belong to historical Israel and also those who join the Israel of God through faith in Christ and baptism.

The discourse with which Jesus sends off his disciples on mission is followed by a stern warning to the villages of Chorazin and Capernaum in Galilee (see Lk 10:13-15). These Palestinian villages had seen the miracles with which Jesus had accompanied his proclamation of the kingdom of God (see Mt 11:21). In Capernaum Jesus had taken the first steps in announcing his message (see Lk 4:23) and shown the power of the kingdom of God (see Lk 4:31-41), and it was there that he received the faith of the centurion of the Roman army (see Lk 7:1-10). From Bethsaida came Philip, one of the Twelve (see Jn 1:44, 12:21). The severe warning of Jesus to the Palestinian villages where he had worked miracles and where he had been met in response with a surprising lack of faith, was not a definitive, irreversible condemnation. At the end of his discourse to the disciples sent on mission, Jesus reaffirms the importance of the mission of evangelization: to evangelize and to be evangelized involves responsibilities that are inescapable before divine judgment, which is not anticipated in a precipitous condemnation without appeals, but points to the ultimate reference point

at the end of time (see Lk 10:14-15). Until then, the door to repentance and conversion is always open, through the mysterious paths of divine providence and mercy. Jesus identifies himself with those whom he sends and warns that rejecting them means rejecting God himself, whatever the reason or religious faith that may lead to it (see Lk 10:16).

The trauma of biblical Israel following the Babylonian exile is the context for understanding the long prayer attributed to Baruch (see Bar 1:15, 3:8) in the book bearing his name. Baruch's prayer starts from the observation that everything the prophet Jeremiah had announced to the exiles of the first Babylonian exile (see Jer 29:4-23) had been realized, and that this was the time to pray that the Babylonian rulers would live long lives, so that the Israelites might not to be subjected to further severe retaliation (see Bar 1:11-12), as Jeremiah himself had recommended at the time (see Jer 29:5-7). Fundamental here is to be aware of the history of sin that involved all generations of biblical Israel, since its liberation from Egypt (see Bar 1:15-22). Its obstinance in not wanting to listen to the voice of the Lord led to the disaster of Israel's exile and to God's silence, or its inability to hear God's voice. At the heart of the reconsideration are not the history and the condition of Israel, but the Lord. And this is true repentance, the true journey of conversion.

What happened in history should not be seen as the result of the Lord's absence; though it may also be due to the arrogance, cruelty, and ruthlessness of international politics, it must be understood fundamentally as an expression of his "justice" (Bar 1:15) and his desire to call Israel back to the center of its vocation. The discovery of this righteousness of God is a gift of the Lord himself, because it cannot be confused with the sense of guilt or with the resignation to which one abandons oneself in order to come to terms with life; it is also the opposite of rebellion and of definitive desertion of the Lord. The prayer starts from the present and reaches to the origins of biblical Israel (see Bar 1:15-16); the catastrophe and the trauma of exile involve its entire history, explained above all in the light of sin against the

Lord and against his word (see Bar 1: 17-18). To “sin in the Lord’s sight” is to fail in one’s relationship with him. It is a structural tragedy, which happens concretely, consciously, but also carelessly, in “disobeying” the Lord daily, in “not heeding his voice,” which is heard also in his “precepts.” Biblical Israel cannot invent for itself a way by which to pretend to have a relationship with God. The words of Baruch suggest that the disaster experienced in the history of sin and exile has compromised, in the eyes of the pagans, even the credibility of the kings, rulers, and prophets of the Israelites (see Bar 1:16). This history of sin and punishment is not the last word; the teaching of Moses had foreseen that, by welcoming the call to conversion, biblical Israel would be gathered by the Lord (see Dt 30:1-4).

The story of biblical Israel becoming again the Israel of God is also the story of the Church that, through faith in Christ, becomes part of the Israel of God. Just as the harsh admonition of Jesus to the Galilean cities is not a definitive sentence of abandonment, so also the exile of biblical Israel does not mark the conclusion of the story. The journey of conversion, which should be characterized by the recognition of personal and structural sin, is certainly always a gift from the Lord, but risks being dissipated in a hasty self-assertion, or in a merely formal and fundamentalist recovery of gestures, rites, formulas, and phrases that will never have the strength of an evangelizing mission.

October
2019

OCTOBER 5, 2019

Saturday of the 26th Week of Ordinary Time

Weekday

Bar 4:5-12,27-29

Ps 69:33-37

Lk 10:17-24

In the Gospel for today, the seventy (or seventy-two) disciples return from the mission with joy, to give account to their master Jesus of their pastoral success: “even the demons are subject to us because of your name” (Lk 10:17). And Jesus shares in the joy of his disciples: “I have observed Satan fall like lightning from the sky” (Lk 10:18). As disciples of Christ, we have received the power to walk over serpents and scorpions and over all the power of the enemy and nothing can harm us (see Lk 10:19). This is the same promise that Jesus brings to all his disciples in Mk 16:18: “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.” Jesus thus warns us that the mission will be arduous and difficult, but with his Spirit and his grace we will always be victorious over the forces of evil in the world. “Do not rejoice because the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice because your names are written in heaven” (Lk 10:20). It is legitimate for the disciple of Christ to be proud and happy with the successes of his own work of evangelization, but the main reason for this joy should be eschatological. We must have the joy of salvation, the joy of hope: “Good and faithful servant... Come, share your master’s joy” (Mt 25:21.23). It is the joy of the useless servant (see Lk 17:10) who did what he had to do.

What really matters for the disciples is that their names are “written in heaven” (Lk 10:20). In the Hebrew idiom of the time, this means that the

seventy (seventy-two) returned from the mission are recognized by God as citizens of heaven. This is their true home, the kingdom to which Jesus asks them to invite others to whom they are sent. Then, suddenly, in the middle of his conversation with the missionary disciples, Jesus addresses another interlocutor, his Father in heaven. As newly confirmed citizens of the kingdom of God, the seventy – and we, observing them – are privy to a divine conversation. We are witnesses to a moment of profound prayer between Jesus and his Father. Jesus gives thanks to the Father for his merciful will: great mysteries have been revealed “to the childlike” rather than to “the wise and the learned,” from whom they remain hidden.

In the historical context of Jesus, the disciples sent on mission are “children” not only because they are carrying out their first missionary experience, but also because they probably had not received formal education in the things of God equal to that of the learned rabbis, scribes, and other Jewish leaders of the time. This does not mean denying the value of theological formation, but recognizing that the encounter with God is always a gift of God, that faith in him is the foundation of every mission.

Jesus then reflects aloud, so to speak, on the nature of the relationship between himself and the Father. Here, in a passage similar to another in Matthew (see Mt 11:25-30) and to many others in John (see Jn 3:35, 13:3, 14:9-11), Jesus reveals the complete mutual knowledge between Father and Son and the absolute openness to one another that they share. It is a source of joy and communion, the cause of fruitfulness and mission.

It is by virtue of this relationship that Jesus has the power to invite others into relationship with God, to enter into his divine communion. In this intimacy, we come to know the Son as the one who is known and loved by the Father, and the Father as the one who is known and loved by the Son. The seventy, called to alleviate suffering and oppression in the name of Jesus, find the meaning of their mission in the Father and the Son and in their communion of love. Hearing this Gospel message today, we continue to be invited more deeply to enter this same relationship. It is, of course,

only on the basis of an encounter with the Father, as Jesus revealed it to us, that we have the gift of God's love that we can offer in mission to others.

The word of God today calls us not only to consider the different aspects of the mission, but also to actively discover what these realities reveal to us of God. When we recognize with faith the ways in which God comes and works in us, we can allow his Spirit to carry out his mission to others through us. The profound communion of missionary disciples with Jesus, in his loving, divine unity with the Father, gives joy, passion, and zeal for the missionary effort. Rather than rejoicing in their own success, missionary disciples rejoice in love, in communion with their Master and Lord, and in the vocation of being sons and daughters of God whose names are written in heaven.

This is the sense in which Pope Francis writes, in his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, in section 21:

The Gospel joy which enlivens the community of disciples is a missionary joy. The seventy-two disciples felt it as they returned from their mission (cf. Lk 10:17). Jesus felt it when he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and praised the Father for revealing himself to the poor and the little ones (cf. Lk 10:21). It was felt by the first converts who marveled to hear the apostles preaching “in the native language of each” (Acts 2:6) on the day of Pentecost. This joy is a sign that the Gospel has been proclaimed and is bearing fruit. Yet the drive to go forth and give, to go out from ourselves, to keep pressing forward in our sowing of the good seed, remains ever present. The Lord says: “Let us go on to the next towns that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out” (Mk 1:38). Once the seed has been sown in one place, Jesus does not stay behind to explain things or to perform more signs; the Spirit moves him to go forth to other towns.

OCTOBER 6, 2019

Sunday of the 27th Week of Ordinary Time

Year C

Hab 1:2-3; 2,2-4

Ps 95:1-2,6-9

2 Tm 1:6-8,13-14

Lk 17:5-10

Today's Gospel offers a significant account of faith and a brief parable of our role as servants of God. These two different teachings follow in Luke's Gospel a demanding precept from Jesus on sin and forgiveness, and they lead to the story of Jesus' healing of ten lepers. There is no clear, logical connection between the teachings of Jesus in Luke 17, nor between the teachings and the healing story that follows. However, in contemplating the Christian call to mission, we become companions with the disciples (here called apostles) while they implore Jesus: "Increase our faith" (Lk 17:5).

To the request for greater faith (apparently, a holy request for spiritual growth), Jesus responds by making a comparison between two extremes, combining the image of a proverbially small seed, that of mustard, with that of a large tree, the mulberry. Using an original image, he urges us to go beyond ordinary logic, suggesting that faith does not operate according to normal human criteria but rather appears to the incomprehensible human gaze like a mulberry tree in the middle of the sea. Faith, at its base, is profound trust in God and in the ways God works. Perhaps every missionary with some experience has seen the fruits produced by the action of God in circumstances that seemed completely hostile to any result. Today's Gospel challenges us to believe in God beyond the limits of human logic and the

sense of the possible, thus becoming one with the mind, the imagination, the logic, and the heart of God.

“The apostles said to the Lord, ‘Increase our faith’” (Lk 17:5-6). Here Saint Luke calls the twelve who Jesus chose at the beginning of his ministry (see Lk 6:12-16) “apostles.” The word means “sent.” While the other Gospels use this term only once to designate this particular group of disciples of Jesus, Luke uses it six times in his Gospel and twenty-eight times in the Acts of the Apostles. The early Church was aware of the non-transferable privilege of those Twelve; the authenticity of their mandate and their mission was based on the personal choice of Jesus himself. He chose and sent them. Those apostles are therefore the official witnesses to the Good News of the Risen Lord! And in this sense, they will have to have sufficient faith in him. They are the privileged witnesses of the teachings and miracles of Jesus (see Lk 18:31), and at the same time they are fragile people like all of us, gripped by doubt and lacking in faith (see Lk 24:11,25,38-39). This is the motivation for their prayer addressed to Jesus in today’s Gospel: “Increase our faith,” in the certainty that he is God.

What does this mean for all of us who are “sent” today? We must humbly recognize that we lack much faith in our mission of evangelization of the world. Perhaps the Lord does not tell us, “If you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you would say to [this] mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it would obey you” (Lk 17:6). It is therefore not possible to have faith to move mountains if we lack that essential faith in Jesus the Lord, Jesus risen and living in us his Church. What is the use of wanting to possess a faith that works miracles before the crowds, or powers of healing, or exceptional powers to mystify pagans and Christians of today? Jesus himself worked many, many miracles in the presence of his contemporaries and his apostles, and this did not increase their faith. The essential thing is to have the humility of the apostles to ask the Lord unceasingly to come to their aid. “I do believe, help my unbelief!” This is what the father of the demoniac epileptic of the Gospel cried out (Mk 9:24, see Lk 9:37-43).

At each Eucharist, an encounter with the Risen Lord, let us ask him for the faith necessary to meet him in our lives and in our world. Only incessant prayer, the soul of the mission, makes faith possible.

Immediately afterwards (see Lk 17:5-10), the Gospel account of Luke confronts us with a scenario taken from daily domestic life to offer a teaching on the apostolate: however marvelous the results of our work may be, we are simply fulfilling the task assigned to us by God. In everyday life in the time of Jesus, the expectations of master and servant regarding their respective roles are well established. The master commands and the servant carries it out. The servant is expected to move from farm work to household tasks without even taking a break. From the servant there can be no objections like tiredness, hunger, or thirst. Certainly, Jesus' words should not be interpreted as a justification for the economic institution of ancient slavery; he is simply using an ancient social reality as a metaphor, to suggest a similarity between this reality and our service to God.

When he asks the rhetorical question, "Is he grateful to that servant because he did what was commanded?", Jesus addresses an audience, including us, from whom an answer – obviously "no" – is expected. Jesus goes on to say that when we have done for God all that has been asked of us, we should say, "We are useless servants; we did what we had to do." The exaggeration of this image is intended to pedagogically convert the missionary disciple to the logic of faith – not the efficacy and utility of service, but the fruitfulness of faith as communion with Jesus.

Through our own words and through the experience of daily life, Jesus confronts us with the fact that the expectation of reward is disproportionate to reality. What is proportionate, however, is the understanding of who God is and what we owe him. Jesus wants us to recognize that God expects from us a serious and sincere commitment to the work to which God calls us, the mission of making Christ known in the world.

The other two readings of today reflect on these themes of faith and service to God, but from different perspectives. The prophet Habakkuk,

writing shortly before the Jewish people were exiled from their native land in the sixth century BC, invokes God's help in the midst of destruction and violence. In response, the Lord declares that some people feel proud, even though they do not have "integrity," while "the just one, because of his faith, shall live" (Hab 2:4). Habakkuk insists that, in contrast to those who use violence and cause conflicts, some people trust in God. This is faith, pure and simple; this is what makes them right with God.

When Paul met Jesus, the Risen Lord, the understanding of faith of which Habakkuk speaks was transformed. He came to know the extraordinary ways in which God loved us, the distances God has traveled to bring us back to a right relationship with Him. Paul saw that trust in God's creative power also works on us, in Christ. It is freedom and faith in our relationship with God that Paul has discovered, and which drive him and every believer after him to go out into the world to make known the good news of God's regenerating love, to announce the redemptive Easter of Jesus.

Faith's new way of seeing things is centered on Christ. Faith in Christ brings salvation because in him our lives become radically open to a love that precedes us, a love that transforms us from within, acting in us and through us. This is clearly seen in Saint Paul's exegesis of a text from Deuteronomy, an exegesis consonant with the heart of the Old Testament message. Moses tells the people that God's command is neither too high nor too far away. There is no need to say: "Who will go up for us to heaven and bring it to us?" or "Who will go over the sea for us, and bring it to us?" (Dt 30:11-14). Paul interprets this nearness of God's word in terms of Christ's presence in the Christian. "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?' (that is, to bring Christ down), or 'Who will descend into the abyss?' (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead)" (Rom 10:6-7). Christ came down to earth and rose from the dead; by his incarnation and resurrection, the Son of God embraced the whole of human life and history, and now dwells in our hearts through the Holy Spirit. Faith knows

that God has drawn close to us, that Christ has been given to us as a great gift which inwardly transforms us, dwells within us and thus bestows on us the light that illumines the origin and the end of life.

We come to see the difference, then, which faith makes for us. Those who believe are transformed by the love to which they have opened their hearts in faith. By their openness to this offer of primordial love, their lives are enlarged and expanded. “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Gal 2:20). “May Christ dwell in your hearts through faith” (Eph 3:17). The self-awareness of the believer now expands because of the presence of another; it now lives in this other and thus, in love, life takes on a whole new breadth. Here we see the Holy Spirit at work. The Christian can see with the eyes of Jesus and share in his mind, his filial disposition, because he or she shares in his love, which is the Spirit. In the love of Jesus, we receive in a certain way his vision. Without being conformed to him in love, without the presence of the Spirit, it is impossible to confess him as Lord (cf. 1 Cor 12:3). (Pope Francis, *Lumen Fidei*, 20-21).

October
2019

OCTOBER 7, 2019

Monday of the 27th Week of Ordinary Time

Memorial of Our Lady of the Rosary

Jon 1:1-2:2,11

Jon 2:3-5,8

Lk 10:25-37

Luke presents this parable within the context of a larger episode, in which Jesus encounters a lawyer who believes he can put him to the test. Jesus has already been tested at the beginning of his public ministry, when he was led by the Holy Spirit into the desert and tempted by the devil. Three times in the course of this temptation (see Lk 4:2,12,13), the devil pushed Jesus to prove that he really was the Son of God and to see whether he would remain faithful to the will of God. In the third “test,” Jesus turned away the devil, uttering the last words of his battle with Satan: “You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test” (Lk 4:12).

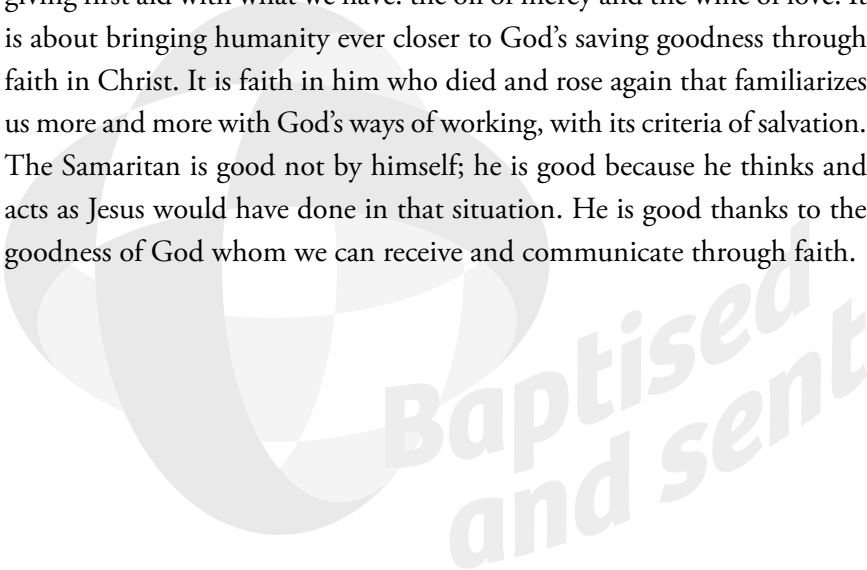
Now the Gospel passage from Luke states, “There was a scholar of the law who stood up to test Jesus” (Lk 10:25). So the attentive reader who has seen Jesus prove himself to be truly the Son of God knows that the scholar of the law is trying to do something that even the devil failed to do and that Jesus has explicitly forbidden; it is much more likely that it is the scholar who will find himself tested.

The parable of the Good Samaritan is famous and easy to imagine, but today’s Gospel begins with the announcement that a scholar of the law is approaching to put Jesus to the test. There are many experts in the science of happiness in our world who try to test today’s apostles of the Gospel. What must we do to have eternal life? How can we achieve happiness? Our answer must be nothing other than the teaching of the Master. To achieve

happiness, we must love God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our strength, with all our spirit, and love our neighbor as ourselves. Love God and neighbor. Love God through others. Love the neighbor as God wants! But how to do it, concretely?

Jesus gives us an example through the story of the good Samaritan. Luke is the only evangelist to pass on this extraordinary story from the teaching of Jesus. “A man ... went down from Jerusalem to Jericho”: that is, he left the sphere of the temple, of the sacred, of the holy city, and headed for the periphery, towards the “bottom” of the earth. Jericho, not far from the Dead Sea, was in fact one of the humblest cities in the world. The man leaves the mountain of Zion to descend into the abyss, a place of worldly insecurity and chaos. And predictably, he falls into the hands of robbers. It is exactly the situation of the contemporary person who no longer believes, who deserts the sacred to sink day after day into the depths of uncertainty and finitude. And there are thieves along the way who rob him of everything, leaving him stunned, alone, and abandoned. Unfortunately, a priest coming down the path passes by the dying man and continues on. Then a Levite comes by, sees the man, and goes on. The text does not tell us his place of origin; like the priest, he lacks a heart for the dying man. “But a Samaritan traveler who came upon him was moved with compassion at the sight. He approached the victim, poured oil and wine over his wounds and bandaged them. Then he lifted him up on his own animal, took him to an inn, and cared for him” (Lk 10:33-34). The Samaritan delays his journey to take care of a stranger, his own brother in humanity. Jesus did the same, in a sublime way, through his redemptive death. He washed us in the blood and water that flowed from his open side on the Cross. The next day, the Samaritan provided the innkeeper two silver coins, asking him to take care of the patient. Jesus paid on the cross the price of our healing, our redemption. He is ready to repay all the debts we incur by our daily sins. Of the three, the neighbor of the one who fell into the hands of the robbers is the Samaritan who had compassion on him.

What does this have to teach us who are called to mission? Only love evangelizes effectively. It is not a matter of developing a religion of worship, of morality, of legalistic prescriptions; it is a matter of making neighbors of Christ the wounded women and men that we meet on our roads to Jericho. It is a question of making sure that our meticulously planned programs give priority to caring for the wounded we encounter on our roads. It is about giving first aid with what we have: the oil of mercy and the wine of love. It is about bringing humanity ever closer to God's saving goodness through faith in Christ. It is faith in him who died and rose again that familiarizes us more and more with God's ways of working, with its criteria of salvation. The Samaritan is good not by himself; he is good because he thinks and acts as Jesus would have done in that situation. He is good thanks to the goodness of God whom we can receive and communicate through faith.



Baptised
and sent

October
2019

OCTOBER 8, 2019

Tuesday of the 27th Week of Ordinary Time

Weekday

Jon 3:1-10

Ps 130:1b-2,3-4ab,7-8

Lk 10:38-42

“Set out for the great city of Nineveh, and announce to it the message that I will tell you” (Jon 3:2). After some digressions, Jonah finds himself having to face the insistent call of God. The Lord has not forgotten him and renews his missionary call: this time Jonah can not escape it. How often we are like Jonah, ready to find excuses to avoid our missionary duty. The world in which we live and to which we are sent on a mission is so often pagan that Nineveh is found at every door, every city, every crossroad we encounter. Jonah stood up and, according to the word of the Lord, left for Nineveh, an extraordinarily large city: it took three days to cross it. The world to be evangelized also seems enormous to us and we are faced with seemingly impenetrable unbelief. The modern lifestyle, the consumerist society, the mad rush to money and a fictitious happiness are a great Nineveh.

“Forty days more and Nineveh shall be destroyed” (Jon 3:3). We understand the reticence of the prophet, since he is talking to those “bad pagans” whom he would like to see punished by God. But God is God, full of mercy for his children and, although the prophet did not trust in the possibility of their conversion, the Ninevites radically turned to God. “The people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast and all of them, great and small, put on sackcloth” (Jon 3:5). The preaching of the prophets over many centuries had not been enough to convert the people of Israel, but here the preaching of a single day is enough to change the hearts

of the despised Ninevites. This is the wonder of God: he always surprises us in our pastoral expectations. Jesus himself refers to it in the Gospel: “At the judgment, the men of Nineveh will arise with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and there is something greater than Jonah here” (Mt 12:41). And God showed them mercy; in simple words, this means that God does not desire the death of the sinner, but conversion (see Ez 33:11). Even when God seems to threaten a punishment, it is love and only love that prevails and that saves in faith. The world needs to hear this proclaimed again today.

Jonah is sent to enter the city of Nineveh, to encounter the Ninevites with his prophetic presence and his preaching of conversion. Jesus is sent by the Father to enter the heart of the city, the home of Martha and Mary. The joy of the unexpected conversion of the Ninevites arouses resistance in the heart of Jonah. The joy of service and listening in the presence of the Master make Martha and Mary true sisters in Jesus’ missionary discipleship.

Crossing the threshold of a house means entering the heart of relationships and discovering, together with joy and affection, the wounds and the fragility of living as a family. We are made of flesh, and this reveals to us every profound relationship interwoven with those whose needs we seek to address; Jesus, both human and Lord of our history, has the traits of one who can be extremely close to our hearts. Close enough to enter our home. Jesus – on his way to Jerusalem, on his way to the Mystery of his death and resurrection – by entering Martha and Mary’s home crosses the threshold of their hearts.

That house in Bethany, a home of friendship and love, reveals to us the humanity of Christ, refusing to remain a stranger to human suffering and difficulties: he cries, listens, consoles, preaches, wipes tears, and offers himself as food and drink (eucharist). This is what “entering a home” means. Jesus enters the house of Bethany intimately. He does so as a friend, bringing into play his heart and his relationships with the living and the dead (see Jn 11). In the mission entrusted to him by his Father, Jesus lets

himself be totally involved. Jesus calls us to overturn the way we think and act: through the key figure of the woman who is all wrapped up and agitated with service, new rules are proposed about the hospitality to be reserved for Christ by missionary disciples, about the salvation that we live and communicate.

The vocations of Martha and Mary are two different and complementary ones, driven by the same intention: to recognize the uniqueness of the One who knocked on the door (see Rev 3:20). These two women, then, do not represent an antithesis, as has too often been suggested. Serving and listening are shown to be reciprocal rather than opposing actions in the mission that Jesus entrusts to the Church for the salvation of the world. The presence of Jesus calls us to take up the journey to enter the heart of every person by listening to the Word and by fraternal service, by proclaiming Easter resurrection and by the Eucharistic banquet of reconciliation that creates communion and unity. All this happens in the house of Bethany, where the death of Jesus' friend Lazarus is an opportunity for us to purify and to strengthen our own listening, our own service, our own faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus, Friend and Lord.

October
2019

OCTOBER 9, 2019

Wednesday of the 27th Week of Ordinary Time

Optional Memorial of Saint Dionysius, Bishop, and Companions, Martyrs

Optional Memorial of Saint John Leonardi

Jon 4:1-11

Ps 86:3-6,9-10

Lk 11:1-4

The Our Father is more than a prayer; it is, as Tertullian said, “the compendium of the whole Gospel,” because in it we find the fundamental principles, the deepest hopes, and the most decisive needs of the disciples of Jesus.

The Gospel of Luke presents, first of all, the gift of calling the God of Jesus Christ “Father.” To consider God a Father is not something absent from the Old Testament (see Dt 32: 6, Mal 2:10, Jer 3:19, 31:9, and Ps 103:13). But to address God, as Jesus does, with the particular tenderness and intimacy of a child who exclaims “Father!” is new. The Lord rightly calls God “Abba,” for he is the Son of the eternal Father. In faith, Jesus, while teaching his disciples how to pray, invites them to turn to God as an eternally merciful and infinitely loving Father. He opens to them his filial communion. In the third Gospel, the Our Father is the point of arrival from the question that a scholar of the law asks Jesus about what one must do to inherit eternal life (see Lk 10:25ff): openness to listening is decisive, as is treating all people, without exception, mercifully. The mission of Jesus in faith and prayer opens us to the fatherhood of God as the foundation of a relationship with one another as siblings.

One of the most profound hopes highlighted by the Our Father is the sanctification of God’s name. It is true that the name of God is holy in itself (see Lv 11:44, 19:2, Ps 33:21). Still, the hope of the sanctification of

the name of God indicates the commitment to live as people who belong to him: “Be careful to observe my commandments.... Do not profane my holy name, that in the midst of the Israelites I may be hallowed” (Lv 22:31-32). According to the Old Testament tradition in which the Our Father is rooted, the best way for the name of God to be sanctified is precisely that those who claim to be God’s people live according to his will.

The second element of hope that the Our Father offers is the coming of the kingdom. Jesus is clear that the kingdom of his Father is present and active in history. He proclaims that God is entering the history of humanity to open a new era, in which no one will feel alone and in which we can build a more just world, a peaceful and fraternal society where the dignity of each person is respected. When we say “your kingdom come,” we express the hope that God’s will is realized among us, as grace and at the same time as the permanent task of human freedom and responsibility.

The first petition in Luke’s version of the Our Father is expressed in these words: “Give us each day our daily bread” (Lk 11:3). This request can have two connotations. On one hand, in light of the danger of forgetting our awe and gratitude, the Our Father reminds us of the need to ask God for food every day. On the other hand, we are not instructed to say “my bread” but “our bread,” probably to emphasize the need to share it in charity with others: true life is the fruit of communion and sharing.

The second petition is for forgiveness. Luke presupposes that to ask forgiveness, it is necessary to recognize honestly that everyone, without exception, makes mistakes and that we are all in need of divine mercy (see Lk 5:8, 6:39-42). Starting from this assumption, the third evangelist introduces an awareness that the efficacy of God’s forgiveness leads us to forgive others in turn (see Mt 6:14-15). God’s forgiveness is always given to us, offered for free. Its effectiveness in each of us depends on our willingness to let it act in our lives, our relationships, and our affections.

And finally the Our Father introduces a third petition: “and do not subject us to the final test” (Lk 11:4, see Jn 17:15). First we recognized

our sinfulness, and now our Father helps us to grow in the awareness of our fragility, our weakness. We do not ask God to avoid temptations, but to help us overcome them.

Prayer is always an experience of relationship with God, an encounter with Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit. The Our Father, as a summary of the Gospel, offers us the fundamental criteria for this encounter and the mission that flows from it. The grace to turn to God as Father enables us to live as sisters and brothers. The duty to sanctify the name of God involves us, with his grace, in the construction of his kingdom. The blessing of forgiveness offered us by the God of Jesus Christ makes us aware of the enormous need to initiate and encourage authentic processes of reconciliation, which lead not only to the experience of forgiveness, but also, gradually, to the eradication of sins.

The fatherhood of God, fully revealed in Jesus Christ (see Jn 12:45, 14:9), makes the community of missionary disciples a true family, to whose table of Word and Eucharist everyone is invited. In his movement of being sent from the Father and returning to the Father, Jesus makes his own mission ours. It is the mission of his Church for the salvation of the world (see Jn 8). If all fatherhood has its origins in God (see Eph 3:14-21), in the Church of his Son the Spirit of the Risen Lord regenerates all as sons and daughters of the same Father through baptism. The kingdom of God, accomplished by Jesus in his Passover, finds its beginning and seed here on earth in his pilgrim Church, a universal sacrament of salvation offered by God the Father to all.

OCTOBER 10, 2019

Thursday of the 27th Week of Ordinary Time

Weekday

Mal 3:13-20b

Ps 1:1-4,6

Lk 11:5-13

In today's Gospel (Lk 11:5-13), the theme of friendship is prominent. The Gospels are rich in examples of Jesus approaching others in friendship. St. Luke shows a compassionate Jesus who approaches the lepers, paralytics, sinners, tax collectors, centurions, widows, those possessed by demons, epileptics – the list is long. Jesus himself is the good Samaritan (Lk 10:29-37) and the compassionate father (Lk 15:11-32). He extends his merciful hand of friendship generously and spontaneously.

The Gospel of John also provides profound insights on Jesus and friendship. The friendship-love of Jesus for Mary, Martha, and Lazarus is described in the eleventh chapter: "Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus" (Jn 11:5). When Jesus is informed of the death of Lazarus, he says, "Our friend Lazarus is asleep" (Jn 11:11), and later Jesus weeps at the death of his friend; "the Jews said, 'See how he loved him'" (Jn 11:36).

At the Last Supper, offering us the commandment to love one another, Jesus says: "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I no longer call you slaves, because a slave does not know what his master is doing. I have called you friends, because I have told you everything I have heard from my Father. It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you" (Jn 15:13-16). Thus, Jesus manifests the depth of his friendship-love by dying on the cross for us. As St. Paul notes, "God

proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us” (Rom 5:8).

Everyone is called to experience that Jesus is the friend, indeed the personal friend, of every human being. Friendship with Christ means growing in intimacy with the Master, as well as an existence in Christ. Such a profound dimension of friendship revitalizes the Holy Spirit within us. Friendship with Christ, even in sickness and frailty, offers us a strength that prevails over bitterness, the fatigue of life, and all despair. Friendship is a “matter of heart,” in which one reveals to the other what is in the depths of one’s heart, with trust and reciprocity. Growth in friendship happens through mutual self-revelation. In this process, we find ourselves involved in a deeper relationship with God and our neighbor. People will be encouraged to follow Christ when they see how his friendship has personally transformed the missionary disciple who proclaims and witnesses.

The friendship described to us by today’s Gospel seems insufficient to obtain what we seek. Our need must be supported by the insistence of the request, by the certainty of the faith of the one who asks, and in the ability to give by the one who is asked, even at inopportune moments. The insistence on praying always, without ever tiring (see Lk 18:1), tests and reinforces faith as a relationship of friends, or even of parent and child. The loaves and the Holy Spirit clearly mentioned in the prayer offer clear eucharistic and baptismal connotations of friendship with Jesus and of the relationship with his Father. “The Spirit comes to the aid of our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit itself intercedes with inexpressible groanings. And the one who searches hearts knows what is the intention of the Spirit, because it intercedes for the holy ones according to God’s will” (Rom 8:26-27).

The insistence of the request for three loaves to share with a guest underlines the communion that nourishes and takes care of one’s neighbor. Prayer, if authentic, opens the relationship of friendship with God towards the neighbor and pushes us to mission. We ask for our own needs as well

as for those of others, through the Church that we become through the Spirit of the Father and the Eucharistic bread that we share. We never ask for ourselves alone; that would not be prayer. We ask because it increases our communion with others and expands the boundaries of the community of Jesus.

In his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, Francis emphasizes, “The joy of the gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus” (n. 1). Francis continues, “Thanks solely to this encounter – or renewed encounter – with God’s love, which blossoms into an enriching friendship, we are liberated from our narrowness and self-absorption.... Here we find the source and inspiration of all our efforts at evangelization” (n. 8). We are “those whom Jesus summons to friendship with himself” (n. 27). Pope Francis believes that “we were created for what the Gospel offers us: friendship with Jesus and love of our brothers and sisters” (n. 265). Our missionary faith “has to be sustained by our own constantly renewed experience of savoring Christ’s friendship and his message” (n. 266).

Pope Francis often uses a simple and useful description of the mission: “Mission is at once a passion for Jesus and a passion for his people” (EG 268). This means that every missionary who experiences a profound encounter with Jesus through personal friendship will want to share with others the fruits of this encounter. Starting from a personal encounter with God, we then desire to be friends with others in sharing their friendship with the Lord Jesus.

OCTOBER 11, 2019

Friday of the 27th Week of Ordinary Time

Optional Memorial of St. John XXIII

Jl 1:13-15; 2:1-2

Ps 9:2-3,6,16,8-9

Lk 11:15-26

Today's Gospel sheds light on the theme of our relationship with God and introduces a double conviction: first, that neutrality is impossible, and second, that there are no definitive states in the life of a disciple, except fidelity to God.

One's relationship with God is manifested in the rejection of and victory over evil. The Gospel links the previous theme of prayer (see Lk 11:1-13) with the activity of Jesus as exorcist. In the previous passage, he taught us to pray for the coming of the kingdom of God; now Jesus says that kingdom is already coming and that a key sign of this is the casting out of demons. The most interesting thing is that following the previous verses' emphasis on Jesus' relationship with the Father, now his adversaries misrepresent what he said earlier and accuse Jesus of acting in collusion with Beelzebul (see Lk 11:15). However, the Gospel continues to affirm that Jesus, because of his profound communion with God, is able to curtail and eradicate the evil that exists in people and among them.

Neutrality is not possible. Faced with the hope of a real diminishment and vanquishing of evil, no one can be neutral, because, as Jesus says, "Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters" (Lk 11:23). In our commitment to make the kingdom of God present, therefore, we must make the decision to be on the side of Jesus, to gather with him; because not to do good in the way of Jesus means that one

is already allowing, in a certain sense, evil. There are no definitive states in the fight against evil except in the paschal victory of Jesus over death. For disciples, the fundamental condition for being able to join in the building of the kingdom is the conviction that in the pilgrimage of earthly life there are no definitive states. To explain this concept, Luke introduces the story we find in verses 24 through 26. Here it becomes clear, for example, that the transformation of reality takes place not simply by doing something good, but by doing good consistently; conforming oneself is a way to allow evil to grow. Indeed, when the unclean spirit returns, that person becomes worse than before, because he believed he was freed forever.

The missionary disciple must, like Jesus, be involved in the struggle against evil. This should be one of our main concerns, because it genuinely demonstrates our filial relationship with God and our communion with Jesus. Curiously, however, being witnesses demands that disciples confront their own humanity. On the one hand, they must be aware of being able, by virtue of grace and effort, to participate in the Lord's mission (see Lk 9:1-6; 10:1-16). But along with these great possibilities, disciples must also be aware of their limitations: they are represented in the person of Peter, as sinners (see Lk 5:8), or even as people who are vulnerable to the blasphemous criticism of the religious leaders. It is being with Jesus, belonging to him, that determines and supports our struggle against every form of evil.

We can say, then, that Luke is not afraid of reality. In his depiction of the disciples, he emphasizes their virtue and commitment, but also their weaknesses and failures. The evangelist, but above all the Lord Jesus, know that our greatness lies in our recognition of this limitation, because every disciple must understand that he will always be growing; he will never achieve, at least in the present life, definitive victories. The missionary disciple will always live in the gerund: converting, engaging, learning. It is precisely when we try to live in the participle – converted, committed, educated – that we begin to be full of ourselves, eager to save ourselves.

OCTOBER 12, 2019

Saturday of the 27th Week of Ordinary Time

Weekday

Jl 4:12-21

Ps 97:1-2,5-6,11-12

Lk 11:27-28

In today's brief Gospel reading, we hear the word "blessed." It refers to a state of spiritual well-being, in which true joy is experienced in the soul, but it can also be used to mean "respected" or "revered." So who are the people who deserve to be called "blessed"? Jesus' response is clear and direct: "Blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it" (Lk 11:28). These words open the way for a profound reflection on our Christian missionary vocation. The deeper meaning of listening to the word of God is revealed to us through an extraordinary image offered by some Old Testament prophets. Ezekiel is ordered: "Eat what you find here: eat this scroll.... So I opened my mouth, and he gave me the scroll to eat" (Ez 3:1-2). Jeremiah says: "When I found your words, I devoured them; your words were my joy, the happiness of my heart" (Jer 15:16).

Authentic listening to the word of God means "eating it," meditating upon it, dwelling in it, taking it to heart. This allows it to take root in our heart, to grow in our consciousness, to challenge our values and attitudes. Our life and the love of God intertwine. This requires constant abandonment to God, which is neither simple nor automatic. The prophetic eating of the word of God refers to the eating of the Eucharistic banquet.

The second part of Jesus' warning focuses on living the word of God. This requires a firm commitment to put it into practice, to observe its commands, to put God's love into action concretely, to translate the message

of God into everyday life. Although this task has a personal dimension, it also involves a strong social commitment. How do we show that we really listened to the word of God and responded with faith? We can take inspiration from St. James who says, “I will demonstrate my faith to you from my works” (Jas 2:18), and we can add: and I will show that I have listened to the word of God.

In recent times, the Popes have underlined the importance of integrating “hearing” the word of God and “putting it into practice”; we must be “hearers” and “doers” at the same time. Evangelization requires both contemplation and concrete action. We should recall the challenge presented by Pope Paul VI in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*: “Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses” (EN 41).

A careful examination of the New Testament reveals that the first person to receive the honor of being called “blessed” is none other than Mary herself. Luke, describing the scene of Mary’s visit to Elizabeth (1:41-45), notes that “Elizabeth, filled with the holy Spirit, cried out in a loud voice and said, ‘Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.... Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled.’” Mary is blessed precisely because she believes. She believes in the word of God spoken through the angel. She believes and offers her unconditional *fiat* to the Lord.

It is clear that the words of Jesus refer to the Virgin Mary. Verses 27 and 28 are a clear allusion to his Mother, as an indisputable example of this attitude that a disciple must have of welcoming the Word (see Lk 2:16-21), since just a few verses earlier, the Gospel of Luke says that Mary “kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart” (Lk 2:19). “Keeping” here means preserving, protecting, guarding in memory, and always involves attention and responsibility. But the Virgin Mary, besides “keeping” these things, meditates on them in her heart; that is, she tries to grasp the true meaning of what is happening.

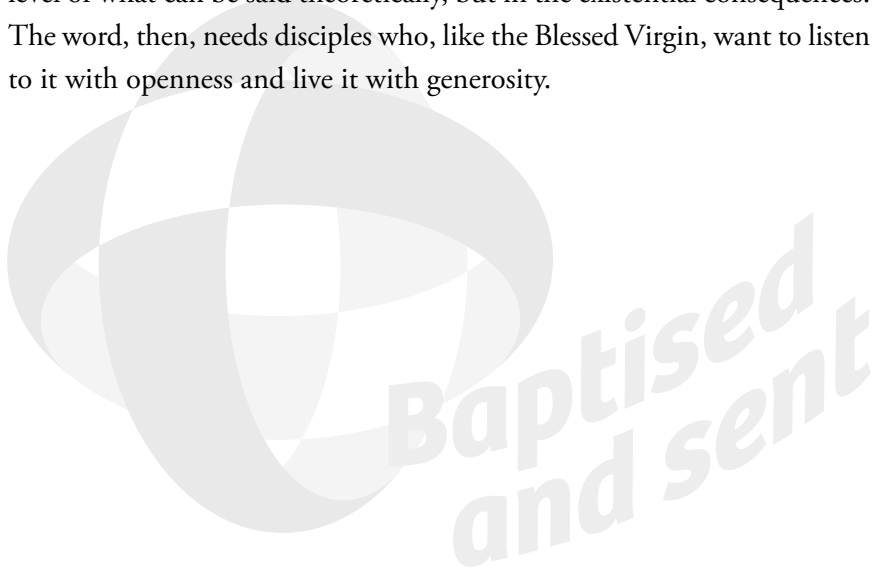
Today's Gospel should not be interpreted as a repudiation of the mother of Jesus; rather, it stresses that attention to the word of God, by reason of faith, is more important than a biological relationship with Jesus. This same affirmation is found in other Gospel passages (see Mt 12:48, Mk 3:33, and Lk 8:21) in which Jesus asks, "Who is my mother and who are my brothers?" Jesus is clearly indicating the importance of receiving and obeying the word of God.

A passage from the Second Vatican Council's *Lumen Gentium* observes, "In the course of her Son's preaching she received the words whereby in extolling a kingdom beyond the calculations and bonds of flesh and blood, He declared blessed those who heard and kept the word of God, as she was faithfully doing. After this manner the Blessed Virgin advanced in her pilgrimage of faith, and faithfully persevered in her union with her Son unto the cross, where she stood, in keeping with the divine plan" (LG, 58).

The image of Mary as a faithful disciple who lives a pilgrimage of faith engages the sensibility of modern people and the understanding of the Church in its call to discipleship. Pope Francis writes in *Evangelii Gaudium*, twice quoting John Paul II's Encyclical *Redemptoris Mater*: "Mary is the woman of faith, who lives and advances in faith, and 'her exceptional pilgrimage of faith represents a constant point of reference for the Church.' Mary let herself be guided by the Holy Spirit on a journey of faith towards a destiny of service and fruitfulness. Today we look to her and ask her to help us proclaim the message of salvation to all and to enable new disciples to become evangelizers in turn.... 'This is the way that Mary, for many years, lived in intimacy with the mystery of her Son, and went forward in her pilgrimage of faith'" (EG 287).

We know that a necessary and even indispensable part of sharing the word as Good News is to provide information. But it is not the first thing, or even the most important thing. Sharing the word primarily consists not in speaking, but in giving witness. Luke presents this conviction in a very coherent way in the story in which John the Baptist sends two of his

disciples to ask Jesus if he is the Messiah (see Lk 7:18ff.). Jesus, instead of giving an answer, offers irrefutable proof, pointing to the consequences of the coming of the kingdom of God. The Gospel says, following the question: “At that time he cured many of their diseases, sufferings, and evil spirits; he also granted sight to many who were blind” (Lk 7:21). The deepest goodness of the Good News that Jesus Christ brought is not at the level of what can be said theoretically, but in the existential consequences. The word, then, needs disciples who, like the Blessed Virgin, want to listen to it with openness and live it with generosity.



October
2019

OCTOBER 13, 2019

Sunday of the 28th Week of Ordinary Time

Year C

2 Kgs 5:14-17

Ps 98:1,2-4

2 Tm 2:8-13

Lk 17:11-19

“Gratitude is the memory of the heart.” It is shocking to read that only one of the ten lepers healed by Jesus came back to say “thank you.” Being grateful is not just a social duty that we share, but an expression of our interiority that also becomes a spiritual act.

The Gospel story of the healing of the ten lepers may have been modeled on the Old Testament story of the cure of Naaman. The commander of the Syrian army, Naaman, is a great man, a trusted advisor of the king and a brave warrior, but he is afflicted by leprosy, the most feared disease in the ancient world. It takes a little girl, an Israeli prisoner of war, to help this “great man” discover how to heal. He will be cured, the unnamed girl tells Naaman’s wife, if he goes to “the prophet in Samaria” (2 Kgs 5:3). Naaman must first ask permission from the king of Aram, who tells him to present himself to the king of Israel with his letter. Taking with him some gifts, Naaman travels to Israel with the letter, which the king of Israel misunderstands. Thinking that the king of Aram intended to provoke him, the king of Israel tears his clothes in anger. The prophet Elisha, hearing of this, invites the king to send him the sick man: “Let him come to me and find out that there is a prophet in Israel” (2 Kgs 5:8). Personal encounter and recognition are essential for the commander’s recovery. Naaman arrives at the home of Elisha, with an impressive retinue. And in keeping with his

status as army commander, he expects a more elaborate healing ritual than Elisha calls for. But the prophet, without going out to meet him, sends him a messenger to indicate what to do: wash seven times in the river Jordan (a prophetic sign of our baptism). It is too simple for Naaman to believe. Should he not meet the prophet personally? Do not they have better rivers in Damascus? The narrative suggests that one part is being cured while another is being healed. The cure is physical; the healing is internal. Naaman, though indignant, obeys. When he realizes he is healed, he comes back to Elisha to thank him, offering gifts as a sign of gratitude. This is where he finally meets the prophet in person. Total healing, true conversion, is the result of his obedience to the word of the prophet, of his personal encounter with him, and of the sacramental mediation of the water of the river Jordan. It is an encounter that leads him to recognize the God of Israel.

In the Gospel reading, Luke allows us to encounter again the figure of the stranger, as we follow Jesus on his journey. This journey has as its geographical goal Jerusalem, but its existential end is the offering of his life on the cross, the sign of the limitless availability of the Son for the Father and his work of universal salvation. Jesus is headed for Jerusalem, the “holy city,” but to get there he passes through territories that the Jews considered too close to foreigners (the so-called “Galilee of the Gentiles”) or even impure because they were inhabited by heretics (the population of Samaria).

It is precisely along this risky route that Jesus meets a group of people who were among the most marginalized of the time: lepers (such as Naaman the Syrian). Leprosy was a skin disease that was considered a punishment for sinners (see King Uzziah in 2 Chr 26:20). It was believed to make its victims unfit for worship or for living among the community, so they were forced to live apart from the rest of society (see Lv 13:46). Lepers were excluded, forced to wander in solitude, accompanied only by other lepers, always calling out ahead of them when they approached inhabited areas. They were also humiliated by the fact that they had to wear ragged clothes with their heads uncovered.

A group of ten lepers goes to meet Jesus. They ask for help, approaching as they would have been expected to: from a distance. All they had were their voices, and they used them to call out to Jesus: “Jesus, Master! Have pity on us!” (Lk 17:13). In calling Jesus “Master,” they address him as disciples would. Jesus sees them and gives them his attention, asking them to carry out a specific action: “Go show yourselves to the priests” (Lk 17:14). In Israel, it was the priests were responsible for diagnosing both the appearance and the disappearance of the disease (see Lv 13:9-10; 14:2).

Approaching Jesus, the ten lepers kept their distance. This was because of the quarantine based on the purity laws (see Lv 13:45-46). It can also be to show us that these sick people – who, like the Gentiles, were considered “far off” (Acts 2:39) – despite the traumatic shame of their condition, are about to receive the call of God. It is a detail aimed at teaching us that God is the one who takes initiative and bridges distances. The lepers turn to Jesus as “Master” rather than with the title “Lord,” and this can reveal that their faith in Jesus is at this point only preliminary. They beg him for mercy and they obey his command, but they fail to perceive the true meaning of their healing.

Luke emphasizes the fact that Jesus “saw” the ten lepers as he responded to their plea. Luke, elsewhere in his Gospel, also links “seeing” to “saving” (see, for example, Luke 13:12). In this initial encounter, healing does not take place immediately, as in the case of Naaman. Faithful to the Torah, Jesus orders the lepers to present themselves to the priests (see Lk 17:14). Healing, therefore, would imply listening to the word of Jesus and, as in the case of Naaman, also being grateful to the healer. Nine of the lepers, although they had the good intention of obeying Jesus’ instruction and the privilege of meeting him in person, are unable to take the greatest risk: to return to Jesus. Only one of them does, a Samaritan who is therefore an “enemy.” But “realizing” (or as some translations put it, “seeing”) that he is healed, he returns to Jesus (see Lk 17:15). For Luke, his “seeing” means that the eyes of the Samaritan’s faith have been opened. Now it is a matter

of making a personal decision towards that faith, and this happens when he decides to “return” to Jesus. The impassioned glorification of God by the stranger, who throws himself at the feet of the Master to thank him, indicates that in this second personal encounter with Jesus the Samaritan is not simply paying a debt of gratitude, but experiences a total healing and an inner transformation. Gratitude is normally expressed to God; this is the only instance in the New Testament where such gratitude is addressed to Jesus. In the end, the stranger, whose faith in Jesus transformed him, is ready to be sent on a mission: “Stand up and go” (Lk 17:19, see also Lk 10:3).

The healing of Naaman and that of the ten lepers are both stories anchored to the theme of inner conversion that happens through a personal encounter with God. This encounter takes place starting from a personal crisis, as a serious illness can be, and it is a divine initiative. It is up to the person to take the next step of recognizing and welcoming the meaning of this meeting that will lead to conversion.

Healing is possible only for those in whom physical cure and gratitude intertwine; healing of the body and conversion of the heart intersect. The water of the Jordan River and the reference to the priests highlight the importance of sacramental action in the work of salvation. This is not a simple cure, individual and abstract in nature. From being separated and excluded, we are reconciled integrally with ourselves, in our bodies, and with the community, because we are reconciled in the depths of our hearts with God, by God in Jesus Christ through the action of the Church. As with Naaman and the leprous Samaritan, only those who undergo this experience of purifying and reconciling communion can be reintegrated into the community and sent on mission.

The mission of the Church brings and communicates the saving grace of God because it recreates men and women from the destruction of sin, from the separation of death. Welcoming the Gospel means entering into the Paschal Mystery of Christ, accepting his re-creating death and contem-

plating his fidelity in the resurrection. Reborn in the baptismal font, the Church's new Jordan River, and grateful for the undeserved salvation, we are made missionaries in the ordinary experiences of life: get up, go your way, return to your home. Others will be chosen to be missionary disciples in foreign, and perhaps hostile and pagan, lands: the Galilee of the Gentiles, the Samaria of the heretics, and the Syria of the pagans.



OCTOBER 14, 2019

Monday of the 28th Week of Ordinary Time

Optional Memorial of St. Callistus I

Rom 1:1-7

Ps 98:1-4

Lk 11:29-32

The Liturgy of the Word today focuses on the power of the proclamation of the Gospel. The proclaimed word of God is pregnant with salvation; we must be willing to welcome it and to listen to it. Listening is the Gospel, which recalls the invitational Psalm: “Oh, that today you would hear his voice: / Do not harden your hearts” (Ps 95:8).

In the first reading, Paul presents himself and his apostolate to the believers of Rome, a community he didn't establish, but which he deeply cherishes and wishes to ask for help in carrying out his project of evangelizing Spain. To make himself better known there and establish a good spiritual understanding with this community that he has not yet met in person, the Apostle stops to talk about his ministry and his call. His service to Christ and his apostolate with the Gentiles are rooted in the extraordinary mystery of the election in virtue of which Christ Jesus designated him to proclaim the Gospel of God. Paul's service is based on the word of Christ, nourished by the word of Christ, and communicates the word of Christ. His life is Christocentric. The opening lines of the letter depict the dynamism of God's salvation, which turns from particularism to universality: in Christ salvation no longer has privileged recipients, but is addressed to everyone, even to those who are far away.

The Gospel reading speaks to us of strangers and their relationship with God. The Master is surrounded by the crowds who crowd in upon him, and

he denounces a deforming attitude that degrades the experience of faith: the spasmodic search for signs. The generation Jesus addresses is “evil” (Lk 11:29) because it continually asks for external demonstrations, as if to shut God and his saving will within the narrow parameters of an automatic, magical, cause-and-effect relationship that is regulated and controlled by human power.

Jesus does not want to give a sign, except that of Jonah. The book of Jonah is found in the Old Testament between the prophetic and the sapiential books. It is the account of a prophet who is sent to preach outside Israel, in Nineveh, capital of the Assyrians, who were bitter enemies of the covenant: truly foreigners in every sense and those are “far off” *par excellence*. This unexpected mission teaches Jonah about God’s ardent desire to call those who are distant, to announce his forgiveness to the unbelievers, to save them through penance and conversion. Rebellious and reluctant before the divine Word, Jonah becomes a sign of saving action for the Ninevites.

The Son of Man, too, becomes a sign for his generation, the only credible sign. Already in the synagogue of Nazareth (see Lk 4:25-27), Jesus had recalled that God sent his prophets Elijah and Elisha to bring healing not only to non-Jews, but even to pagans. Now he shows that his coming is intended to bring salvation not only to Israel, but to everyone. Through his Son made flesh, God opens up the exclusive election of Israel to all the world. With the eloquent sign of his own humanity, Jesus, in whom God became one with every person, calls us to a true conversion of mentality, a new heart willing to hear and accept the divine logic that wants all people to be saved. Jesus shows to his generation, to his own people, that the Queen of Sheba, though pagan, recognized in the wisdom of King Solomon the traces of the love of the Lord, and that the Ninevites, those strangers and hardened sinners, faced with an oracle of misfortune pronounced by the prophet Jonah, seized the invitation to conversion.

The people of God, on the other hand, resists the coming of its Lord, and this will be judged by those who are far off, by that “non-People” rep-

resented by the Queen of the South and the Ninevites. One sees here the tragedy of Israel's failure to listen, its refusal to recognize the presence of God, the favorable time of salvation, the visit of the Lord (see Lk 19:44, Rom 9-11). The special election of Israel and God's promises to his people do not create exclusive superiority and privileges. The logic of divine election consists in the historical concreteness of salvation and in its vicarious representativeness of all those who, in their own humanity, share the same origin and the same creational destiny.

Jonah, whose experience of burial in the belly of the whale is a clear reference to the Passover of Jesus, represents the effective opening of the mission to salvation for all, which is found in the Church, in its universality, and in its sacramentality. Thanks to the death and resurrection of Jesus, the chosen people and the pagans become one redeemed people (see Eph 2:11-19) which in baptism is united with the Passover of the Lord (see Rom 6). Their presence in the world participating in the mission of Jesus is a visible and effective sign of salvation taking place today in the hearts of people, without discrimination or refusal on the part of God. His Church, the universal sacrament of salvation, in a permanent state of mission, is sent to everyone, calling together everyone to Christ. In persecution it relives the redemptive passion of its Lord; in being received it experiences the effectiveness of his Easter; and in the baptismal growth of its children it sees the generous fruitfulness of the mercy and forgiveness of its Lord, Master, and Spouse, Jesus Christ.

OCTOBER 15, 2019

Tuesday of the 28th Week of Ordinary Time

Memorial of Saint Teresa of Jesus

Rom 1:16-25

Ps 19:2-5

Lk 11:37-41

In the first reading, the loss to which humanity has condemned itself against the will of God is re-read by St. Paul through a sort of history of sin that he offers to the believers of Rome. Created by God for truth and justice, the human person turned to impiety and injustice. While contemplating the world and having the ability to grasp through the work of creation the invisible perfections of the Creator, humanity became lost in its own reasonings and ended up in the blind alleys of impurity, subjecting the body to all sorts of pleasures until the body itself became an object, and of idolatry, worshiping and serving creatures instead of the Creator. It seems that this loss has been permitted by God so that humanity learns to trust not in itself but in the One who alone makes right. Paul re-reads this story of sin to show that, although humanity was worthy only of God's wrath because of our prideful foolishness, God chose to love humanity anyway and therefore to justify us, to save us. The righteous will live by faith; the human creature has no trial to undergo before God, but an undeserved love to receive, a love that initiates an extraordinary transformation because it makes the sinner righteous and the perverse redeemed. This Gospel, heard and received, is a true *dynamis*, a power that expands the heart, opens it to faith, and communicates salvation. It propagates itself in an irresistible way. It is contagious to the ends of the world, like the witness that the heavens

give to the earth and to the whole cosmos, to reach every space and every time, as the responsorial psalm recalls. Even the heavens, full of this redemption, sing the glory of God.

The Gospel reading, taken from Luke, invites us to contemplate, further, an obstacle to the spread of the living and energetic word of the Master: the excessive attachment of the Pharisees to traditions, an attitude that prevents them from grasping the universal salvific reach of the presence and actions of Jesus.

While Jesus teaches the crowds, a Pharisee invites him to lunch. Being invited to someone else's table is a gesture of acceptance, as well as esteem and approval. Between two who share a meal together, there can be no barriers, only familiarity and intimacy. Jesus accepts the invitation of the Pharisee, as he had that of publicans, and sits at the table, but he scandalizes his host by neglecting the practice of ablutions that the Pharisees performed before lunch. In fact, the relationship of Jesus with the Pharisees was always very difficult. In Lk 7:36-50, a Pharisee is offended because Jesus lets himself be touched by a sinful woman, whom he praises her for her love. In Luke 14:1-6, he rebukes the formalistic observance of the Pharisees who, while respecting the Law, ignored the demands of love, which is the synthesis and compendium of the Law (see Mt 22:37). In Lk 20:45-47, Jesus warns against the hypocrisy of the Pharisees who flaunt their justice by carrying out sterile and meaningless gestures.

Traditions, practices, and customs, when they are imposed and observed in an inflexible way, move away from their secondary and instrumental finality to educate our weak and impressionable hearts to do good and to love. But they can become real barriers of separation and opposition. Only the recovery of conversion to loving dialogue with Christ, who is not afraid of overcoming barriers, sterile precepts, and empty traditions, can generate life and new relationships of communion, within which even the law and its precepts can help us live well and in a manner ordered to the newness of salvation. From the exteriority of

preservation, one passes to the interiority of the heart in love with God, united with Christ, who is not afraid of risking anything, even life, to remain in communion with him and to invite anyone to this banquet of life and joy.



OCTOBER 16, 2019

Wednesday of the 28th Week of Ordinary Time

Optional Memorial of St. Hedwig

Optional Memorial of St. Margaret Mary Alacoque

Rom 2:1-11

Ps 62:2-3,6-7,9

Lk 11:42-46

In the first reading, Paul, addressing the believers of Rome, insists that the Jews, like the pagans, commit evil. Indeed, he points to how easily the Jews accuse the pagans of immorality, basking in the conviction of being better than others because of their total observance of the Law. To show his fellow Jews how they have lost their way, the Apostle tries to demolish some of their false certainties, which he himself had shared before he came to know the Risen Lord. After previously trusting in the flesh and in his membership in the people who had received the Law, Paul was converted to Christ through faith, which justifies and works through love, not through the ritual observance of precepts. It is not enough to believe with the mouth, with the exterior practice of the Law; one must live in faith. We will be judged, in fact, on love, the fruit of our adhesion in faith to Christ, who died and rose again. Faith is participation in the divine nature and in the divine love of Jesus.

Paul denounces the sin of hardness of heart and of the obstinacy of a people who believe they are the only ones to deserve salvation. The time of privileges is over; the time has come for each person to make a decision about who Christ is. It is a time when each person must surrender to the mercy of God, discovering that he wants to pour out his goodness even upon those who have been far from him. God is the only judge of people;

we are all subject to his judgment, without exception. The certainty of being right and the arrogance of thinking oneself to be the sole defender of truth and morality (the Law) can lead to contempt for God, considering his mercy as weakness, and to the false exclusion of others from salvation.

Today's Gospel passage, a prophetic denunciation of the Pharisees and the scholars of the law, is a warning to Christian communities of yesterday and today of the temptations of legalism, formalism, and ritualism, which nourish that great enemy of the saving work of Christ, a prideful and impenetrable self-referentiality. The perversion of the Law into an external formalism and the reduction of the call of the chosen people to an exclusivist privilege that the pagans can never have undermine the universality of salvation and the mission of the disciples of Jesus.

Jesus begins by denouncing the abuses of the Pharisees regarding offerings. They are capable of observing minimal and marginal norms, such as the tithe on mint, rue, and herbs. Jesus does not want to eliminate these practices (the annual offering of tithing at the temple was called for by Deut 14:22), but to place them in the right context within a true relationship of faith in God and love of neighbor. Making an offering without a personal involvement in a journey of conversion can become the excuse to neglect fundamental precepts, such as justice and the love of God, realities that demand a decisive and continuous transformation of one's heart and the world.

Jesus' other accusation regards the tendency to seek honors, to pursue gratifications, and to take care of appearances of power, taking seats of honor. The insistent concern over appearance is the result of an inner corruption that makes a person like a sepulcher, perhaps sumptuous outside, but full of rot inside. While the interior remains invisible to the eyes of others, the exterior is carefully tended for selfish ends.

The words of Jesus resound with force and they anger not only the Pharisees but also the scholars of the Law, who are deeply offended by him. Jesus continues then by offering a harsh rebuke for them as well, against

their practice of imposing on others the heavy burden of observances in which they are not personally involved, revealing the profound inconsistency between their teaching and their own lives. The law is given to serve life, to preserve it and promote it. Faith never dehumanizes a person; on the contrary, it encourages every person toward his or her fullest growth.

We find here a truly apostolic point of view: faced with the universality of God's salvation and the mission of Jesus and his disciples, the Pharisees and scholars of the Law must reconsider their way of thinking about a relationship with God and salvation. The occasion for Jesus' critical reaction is his taking a seat at the table without having carried out the traditional ablutions before a meal.

The first severe criticism of the scene (Lk 11:39-44), just prior to where our reading begins, is directed toward the Pharisees' offering a false conception of life and of the relationship with God. The Pharisee is amazed (Lk 11:38) by Jesus' behavior, and he receives an immediate and hard answer from Jesus (Lk 11:39). The importance that Luke attributes to the discussion, the tone of Jesus' criticism, his reference to the prophets and to the apostles in the context of the wisdom of God (Lk 11:49) all demonstrate his seriousness. What is at stake in the problematic attitude of Jesus' interlocutors is the restriction of salvation to the outward observance of the Law, which endangers the universal mission founded on the saving will of the God of the Covenant.

The question arises first of all on the level of distinguishing between pure and impure, in terms of internal and external, of rules imposed on others and not practiced by those who impose them. This recalls Peter's vision before his meeting with the centurion Cornelius, who insisted puritanically that "nothing profane or unclean has ever entered my mouth" (Acts 11:8). In the gospel passage from Luke, Jesus' response is clear: God has made the inside and the outside, everything is the work of his hands, so that everything is pure (see Acts 10:15, Mk 7:15). No one can be declared profane or impure, Peter understood (see Acts 10:28). The apostolate and

mission are the manifestation of the goodness of the Father, God the creator of all, who ignores all barriers of ritual or formal separation. The missionary is called to be close to all people (see Acts 10:46-47), because God has no favorites (see Acts 10:34).

Luke uses a formula full of meaning to express the universal openness of salvation offered by God in Jesus and the mission of his Church: “You fools! Did not the maker of the outside also make the inside? But as to what is within, give alms, and behold, everything will be clean for you” (Lk 11:40-41). To be pure, practice mercy and live charity. In the kingdom of God, what determines relationships between people, overcoming barriers of discrimination and separation, is the mystery of the goodness of God who, in Jesus, unites himself to every person and offers mercy to all. Missionary disciples of Jesus are called to give what they possess within. Not only to give material goods in alms, but to offer themselves first of all: their own lives and their own hearts. No simple external acts are required, nor the execution of ritual precepts; the missionary disciple is asked to give all of himself or herself to Jesus, offering soul and body, inside and outside, heart and emotions, relationships and norms, for the cause of the salvation of all in the mission.

October
2019

OCTOBER 17, 2019

Thursday of the 28th Week of Ordinary Time

Memorial of St. Ignatius of Antioch

Rom 3:21-30

Ps 130:1b-6ab

Lk 11:47-54

Paul brings his presentation in Rom 1:18-3:20 to a close with a dramatic statement: “Jews and Greeks alike . . . are all under the domination of sin” (Rom 3:9). If this is so, it seems that there is no possibility of salvation for anyone, relying only on human capacities. But Paul believes that the intervention of the God of Jesus Christ has overcome this desperate situation of humanity: “But now the righteousness of God has been manifested” (Rom 3:21). Thus Paul contrasts the saving power of God with the slavery of sin. The Father’s powerful liberating work takes place in the present time, for his free initiative has taken historical form in Christ who died and rose again (see Rom 3:24-25, 4:25). When a person adheres to it in faith (see Rom 3:22-28:30), her existence changes completely: she is freed from subordination to the power of sin and death (see Rom 3:24) and lives as a faithful companion of God and neighbor, according to the logic of solidarity proper to the covenant, that is, as “righteous” (Rom 3:26).

Here Paul presents a theology totally opposed to that of the mentality of his time. Late Judaism had reduced the divine Law to absolute domination, disconnecting it from its constitutive and original relationship with history and the divine covenant, assuming it to be valid in itself. The result was that it substituted obedience to Yahweh with the meticulous and scrupulous observance of prescriptions and prohibitions. This way of thinking led to a bloated self-sufficiency of humanity before the destiny of one’s

life. Redemption on the basis of “works of the Law,” typical of rabbinic Judaism, in fact made humanity a sort of religious autocrat, oblivious of divine and self-referential grace. The resulting sectarian and exclusivist attitude drew a clear line of distinction between Jews, who understood and observed the Law, and pagans, who were destined for perdition because they lacked the Law.

The Apostle presents us with a theological understanding of justification as an alternative to this Jewish teaching of his day. He appeals to God’s salvific justice and points to faith as the only possibility of redemption from the dominion of sin and from the destiny of eternal death. In practice, Paul rejects the severe image of a God without mercy, revealing instead God’s true face, that of a Father who acts and intervenes out of love on behalf of sinful humanity. Before this extraordinary initiative of God, Jews and pagans stand on level ground; both need salvation as a gift and are constantly called to faith because both are under the law of sin. In this universalizing process of conversion, Israel is saved and regains its rightful place in the divine election (see Rom 9-11). It will be saved together with all the peoples of the earth. The election of Israel becomes an effective sign of the historical beginning of salvation for Israelites and pagans together.

Pope Francis writes:

On the basis of this sharing in Jesus’ way of seeing things, Saint Paul has left us a description of the life of faith. In accepting the gift of faith, believers become a new creation; they receive a new being; as God’s children, they are now “sons in the Son.” The phrase “Abba, Father,” so characteristic of Jesus’ own experience, now becomes the core of the Christian experience (cf. Rom 8:15). The life of faith, as a filial existence, is the acknowledgment of a primordial and radical gift which upholds our lives. We see this clearly in Saint Paul’s question to the Corinthians: “What have you that you did not receive?” (1 Cor 4:7). This was at the very heart of Paul’s debate with the Pharisees: the issue of whether salvation is attained by faith or by the works of the law. Paul rejects the attitude

of those who would consider themselves justified before God on the basis of their own works. Such people, even when they obey the commandments and do good works, are centered on themselves; they fail to realize that goodness comes from God. Those who live this way, who want to be the source of their own righteousness, find that the latter is soon depleted and that they are unable even to keep the law. They become closed in on themselves and isolated from the Lord and from others; their lives become futile and their works barren, like a tree far from water. Saint Augustine tells us in his usual concise and striking way: “*Ab eo qui fecit te, noli deficere nec ad te*,” “Do not turn away from the one who made you, even to turn towards yourself.” Once I think that by turning away from God I will find myself, my life begins to fall apart (cf. Lk 15:11-24). The beginning of salvation is openness to something prior to ourselves, to a primordial gift that affirms life and sustains it in being. Only by being open to and acknowledging this gift can we be transformed, experience salvation and bear good fruit. Salvation by faith means recognizing the primacy of God’s gift. As Saint Paul puts it: “By grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God” (Eph 2:8).

(Lumen Fidei, 19)

Paul proposes to the Romans the universal horizons of the grace of God, which are at the base of the mission entrusted to him and communicated to the Church, born of the Passover of Jesus and sent to the world by the Spirit of the Risen Lord.

OCTOBER 18, 2019

Friday of the 28th Week of Ordinary Time

Feast of St. Luke, Evangelist

2 Tm 4:10-17b

Ps 145:10-13,17-18

Lk 10:1-9

On this Feast of St. Luke, we listen to Paul's letter to his trusted emissary Timothy, in which he complains that he has no one to travel with, except for Luke. In Luke's account of Paul's travels in the Acts of the Apostles, we find at several points a sudden change in the narrative: the so-called "we passages" in the Acts of the Apostles (see Acts 16: 10-17; 20:5-15; 21:1-18; 27:1-28). Up to Acts 10:16, Luke remained out of the picture, writing in the third person. In verses 1 to 9, he reports Paul's trips to Phrygia, Galatia, Mysia, Bithynia, and Troas. But starting at verse 10, Luke writes in the first-person plural: "We sought passage to Macedonia at once, concluding that God had called us to proclaim the good news to them." Luke embarks with Paul and, through his skillful narrative, invites his readers along on the missionary journey.

Luke reveals a detail about himself at the beginning of his Gospel. He writes that he is presenting the events "that have been fulfilled among us" just as he had received them from "those who were eyewitnesses," those who were with Jesus from the beginning of his public ministry (see Lk 1:1-2). In this introductory section, Luke reveals to his audience that even he is not a direct witness to the account he offers. The evangelist is part of the emerging Christian community thanks to the personal witness of those who had personally heard the preaching of Jesus and witnessed the crucifixion and resurrection.

Matthew (10:1), Mark (6:7), and Luke (9:1) each describe Jesus' calling of "the Twelve" and, after a series of instructions, his sending them on a mission to announce the Good News. But only Luke reports that Jesus later commissioned the larger group of seventy-two disciples, whom we hear about in today's Gospel. According to Luke, many more missionaries than the Twelve were involved in the first evangelization. Just before choosing and sending them, Jesus had begun his journey to Jerusalem (see Lk 9:51). He sent the seventy-two ahead of him, to prepare for his arrival in various cities. This prefigures Luke's personal experience traveling with Paul.

This sending of the seventy-two (or seventy, according to some manuscripts) both anticipates and provides a model for Christian missionary activity to all peoples. In the Jewish tradition, the nations of the earth that heard the promulgation of the Sinai law numbered seventy (see Gen 10, Dt 32:8); Jesus' disciples, then, are sent to all peoples.

The passage proclaimed in today's liturgy presents the apostolate as revelation of the kingdom and of the judgment already present in the world. For Luke, it is not a matter of announcing to Israel the greatness of the kingdom, but of proclaiming to the nations that the kingdom is near. The evangelist writes at a time when there are already, "in all nations," witnesses of the resurrected one. This is the decisive moment in history, in which everyone is offered the opportunity to become part of the kingdom of God.

The method, character, and perspectives of the missionary work carried out by the seventy-two disciples are similar to those of the Twelve. Jesus' instructions open with a description of the situation; abundant harvests and few workers stand side by side in significant contrast. Hence the categorical recommendation: "so ask the master of the harvest." "Prayer is the soul of mission," Pope Francis wrote in his October 22, 2017, letter to Cardinal Filoni. God, who is the master of the harvest, takes the initiative; he calls and sends. It is an invitation to join the prayer of Jesus and his exodus to the Father, which is expressed in his delivering himself into the hands of people: "I am sending you like lambs among wolves." Missionaries can

never rely on force, power, or violence. They are rich only in the faith and prayer that keeps them rooted in the personal relationship of love with Jesus, the master who sends them.

Poverty of beginnings becomes the foundation and sign of their freedom and of full dedication to the one task that frees them from any impediment or delay. All this is precisely defined in a series of norms: free from any obstacle, those who are sent aim directly at the goal, without stopping, not even for the greeting that, according to Eastern custom, would have required a lot of time (see 2 Kgs 4:29). The true greeting, on the contrary, is reserved for those to whom the mission is directed. This greeting is not a simple prophecy or proclamation, but an effective word that gives joy and happiness. In short, it is messianic “peace,” which comes with salvation (see Lk 10:5-6). Those who are sent, like the Lord, establish with those who receive them relationships in which living the peace of the kingdom has begun. Their behavior leads them to depend on those who welcome them, to whom they entrust themselves and their very lives. Missionaries are therefore fully exposed, even as regards their livelihoods, to the risks of the mission: welcome or rejection, success or failure. “House” and “city” symbolize private life and public life. Those who are sent depend on the hospitality of those who accept the message, but nothing can stop or hinder them from carrying out their mission; they are missionaries who bring the last and urgent appeal of the possibility of salvation, which must reach the ears of all, the hearts of all, whatever the cost.

OCTOBER 19, 2019

Saturday of the 28th Week of Ordinary Time

*Optional Memorial of Saints John de Brébeuf and Isaac Jogues, Priests,
and Companions, Martyrs*

Optional Memorial of St. Paul of the Cross

Rom 4:13,16-18

Ps 105:6-9,42-43

Lk 12:8-12

In today's Gospel, Jesus foresees the various contexts in which his apostles will be witnesses to him, including the possibility that they will encounter hostile reactions. Appearing in the synagogues and before the civil authorities, they will bear their witness of faith both in religious and secular circles. His words are fulfilled in the Acts of the Apostles when Paul preaches in the synagogue of Salamis (see Acts 13:4-17) and when he witnesses to Jesus before the Roman authorities (see Acts 21:33-22,29). Jesus assures his followers that their earthly testimony will reach the heavens; just as they recognize the Son of Man in earthly settings, civil or religious, so the Son of Man will recognize them before the angels of God.

Immediately before this, Jesus had encouraged his disciples to have courage and confidence in times of persecution. As can be deduced from the rest of the missionary discourse, he doesn't promise them serenity or immunity from violence and rejection, but he indicates to them the true root of freedom: the victory over fear whose source is found in Jesus' victory over death. Easter will be, for Jesus and his disciples, the experience of this victory.

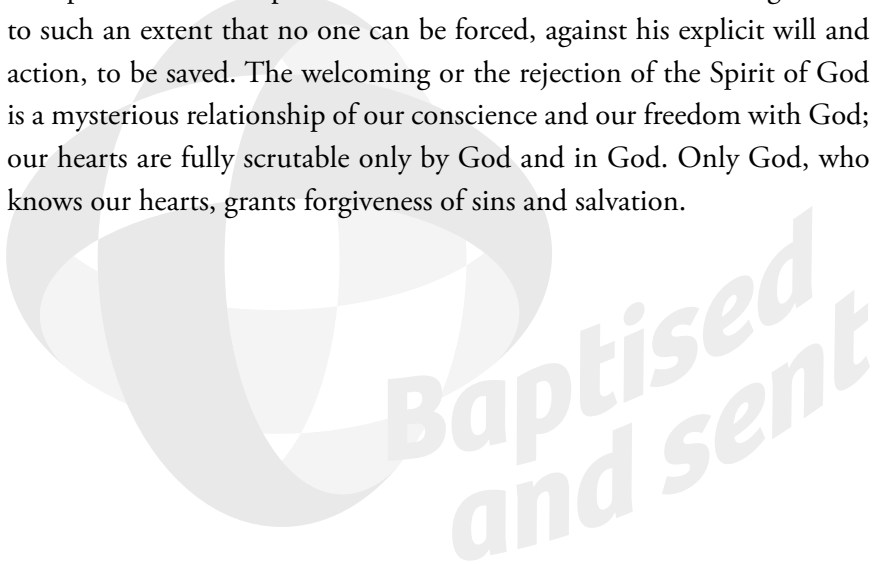
The moments in history, when the disciples are called upon to publicly acknowledge Jesus as Lord and Messiah, harken forward to the final judg-

ment before God, when Jesus himself, as Son of Man, will act as advocate and defender. In the image of the juridical process (see Isa 50:8-9; Rom 8:33), one thinks of the Risen Lord, who lives with God, but who is present in his Church in an effective way, through his Spirit, in the public clash with the leaders and the powerful of this world that the disciples continue to face (see Lk 11:11-12).

Jesus' statement that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit can never be forgiven is rather surprising, in light of the parable of the prodigal son (that comes just three chapters later in Luke), which emphasizes the forgiveness of sins. But this teaching should be interpreted in the context of the particular understanding of Luke's notion of Christian mission. The followers of the Son of Man will reject him, as we see even Peter, the first among the apostles, did on the night Jesus was arrested. Peter failed to acknowledge and remain faithful to Jesus because he had not yet witnessed his passion and resurrection and he had not yet received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. But Peter is forgiven in the greeting from the Risen Lord, "Peace be with you" (Lk 24:36), and in love (see Jn 21:15-9). After receiving the Holy Spirit, the experience of the Gospel is complete and Peter, renewed, is now filled with the power of the Risen Christ, certain of the gift of faith. His own Christological profession was the fruit of the Spirit in him (see Mt 16:18).

Of course, Luke is well aware of the experiences of the primitive Church of Acts – the courageous testimony of the apostles (see Acts 4:5ff; 5:32), but also the commitment of Christian communities exposed to the risk of apostasy or lack of faith in the face of threats and repression from outside. He then recalls a saying of Jesus that ought to cause Christians to reflect, making them more aware and strengthening them: a word against the Son of Man can be forgiven, but the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit does not seem to allow forgiveness. He who has rejected the Son of Man during his earthly ministry will be forgiven and will have a new opportunity through the gift of the Spirit at Pentecost; therefore, he will receive a possibility of conver-

sion and forgiveness. That was the case for Paul and for many converted Jews. But how can anyone who rejects the Spirit – who is the very source and agent of the forgiveness, repentance, and renewal of the disciples – be forgiven? Luke sees this confirmed in the experience of the hardening and blindness of those who have rejected the witness of the apostles (see Acts 28:25-28). It is a total, free, and conscious closure to the action of the Spirit and to the Spirit's movement of reconciliation and forgiveness, to such an extent that no one can be forced, against his explicit will and action, to be saved. The welcoming or the rejection of the Spirit of God is a mysterious relationship of our conscience and our freedom with God; our hearts are fully scrutable only by God and in God. Only God, who knows our hearts, grants forgiveness of sins and salvation.



Baptised
and sent

October
2019

OCTOBER 20, 2019

Sunday of the 29th Week of Ordinary Time

Year C

World Mission Day 2019

Ex 17:8-13

Ps 121:1-8

2 Tm 3:14-4:2

Lk 18:1-8

*Message of His Holiness Pope Francis
for World Mission Day 2019*

BAPTIZED AND SENT:

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST ON MISSION IN THE WORLD

By falling on the Sunday dedicated by the Church to its evangelizing mission in the world, today's first reading, which narrates the battle between Amalek and Israel, might cause some embarrassment to those who want to talk about the importance of this Christian call. The text can be misinterpreted as a spur to holy war or a fanatic proselytism. On the contrary, mission aims at the proclamation of the Passover of Jesus and of the divine reconciliation he offers. Its purpose is to witness to Jesus Christ, to communicate his Gospel, to build up his Church, in a climate of sincere fraternity and authentic and respectful religious freedom in the common search for greater communion and justice in the world. Not to mention the fact that the Gospel also teaches us, through to the example of Jesus, to love enemies and pray for persecutors. The baptized and sent Christian does not have a product to sell to or impose upon the world. As the Church of Christ in mission, the believer receives divine life to

proclaim, witness, and communicate for his own salvation and that of everyone else.

The biblical text of Exodus 17:8-13 offers the memory of an episode in which Israel, a fugitive people in search of a land to settle in, is threatened with annihilation and engaged in a struggle for its own survival. Certain to achieve victory, as well as liberation from Egypt, thanks only to God's help, the people of Israel keep the memory of this battle, and of the others that will follow, as a testimony of its faith in the true God, the Lord of heaven and earth, the God of hosts, who comforts the weak and frees the oppressed. This is the praise that the psalmist, with trust and gratitude, raises to the Lord, the guardian of Israel:

I raise my eyes toward the mountains.
 From whence shall come my help?
 My help comes from the LORD,
 the maker of heaven and earth. (Ps 121:1-2)

The elements of aggression, hatred, and revenge that historically accompanied this Old Testament mode of interpreting the faith had to be gradually purified over the centuries by holy people, such as the prophets and the sages, and ultimately, by the Lord Jesus, the Prince of Peace and Justice, who was foreseen by their prophecy and awaited for centuries. What was meant by the force and violence of the extermination of idols and pagans, in Jesus becomes a burning passion and fiery love for the salvation of all.

The Cross of Jesus is the place where evil is defeated by the love of the One who dies for us, who dies in our place, making the experience of our death his own. He also dies for the salvation of his persecutors and enemies. All vengefulness is annihilated by the God of Jesus Christ in whom hatred and death provoke, in the Trinitarian communion, ever greater love and ever more efficacious mercy. God has destroyed our sin, injustice, and death by making them his own, and has annihilated them through his boundless

love. “Christ’s death on the Cross is the culmination of that turning of God against himself in which he gives himself in order to raise man up and save him. This is love in its most radical form. In the Paschal Mystery, our deliverance from evil and death has taken place” (Pope Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, 9). The New Testament and all the Holy Scriptures introduce us to and educate us in this saving action of God in the world.

In this perspective, the second reading shows us how Paul teaches Timothy the importance of the Scriptures: “From infancy you have known the sacred Scriptures, which are capable of giving you wisdom for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (2 Tm 3:15). Timothy, in fact, has studied them since childhood, like every Jewish boy; since then, Christian children, too, learn them, with the help of their parents and the community. Timothy is a young man who, together with his family, embraced the faith during the first missionary journey of the apostle Paul and who later becomes a member of his missionary group. The son of a Jewish mother and a Greek father, Timothy received from his childhood a deep and firm religious education from his grandmother Lois and mother Eunice, who introduced him to the knowledge of the Holy Scriptures. This is necessary because the Scriptures are inspired by God and, if they are explained well (rather than manipulated and distorted, as the Second Letter of Peter reminds us; see 2 Pt 1:19-21), they encourage us to practice good works and build us up in righteousness and holiness. Genuine missionary zeal is not violent proselytism; it is the desire for a fraternal heart full of Christ and driven by the Holy Spirit to cooperate for the salvation and happiness of all people, of all ethnic groups, sharing ethical and cultural values, hopes and joys, in search of a full life and true peace, which is Jesus Christ who died and rose again. For this reason, Paul exhorts Timothy vigorously so that, while waiting for the Parousia of the Lord, he dedicates himself body and soul to the teaching of the Word.

The Apostle often mentions in his letters the service rendered by Timothy to the work of evangelization. Always available and attentive, he accompa-

nies the ecclesial communities with generosity and affection. Paul reminds the Philippians of his testimony and fidelity: “I hope, in the Lord Jesus, to send Timothy to you soon.... You know his worth, how as a child with a father he served along with me in the cause of the gospel” (Phil 2:19,22). Writing to the Thessalonians he highlights his courage and missionary charisma: “We ... sent Timothy, our brother and co-worker for God in the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you in your faith, so that no one be disturbed in these afflictions” (1 Th 3:2-3). Timothy, then, travels with readiness and diligence to put himself at the service of the newly founded churches, whenever they need clarification of their doubts or support in their struggles. The word of God is his strength and his companion.

The Alleluia verse offers us, with splendid lyricism and refined language, a sublime hymn dedicated to the word of God, which it describes as “living and effective,” because it penetrates our conscience just like a double-edged sword. The Lord, as the psalmist says, probes our hearts and minds and sees all our paths. Also in the Letter to the Ephesians we find the metaphor of the sword; attributed to the Spirit, it represents the intense and penetrating power of the word of God (see Eph 6:17). And so a cruel instrument of war bends to symbolize another struggle, that spiritual conflict that produces repentance and conversion, joy and new life, goodness and faithfulness. These are the fruits of the divine, spiritual, living, and personal Word, the fruits of Wisdom that sees everything and knows everything, that pervades everything and judges everything, that is present in the deepest part of the conscience and shines in such a way that no one can hide from its light. The Gospel of Jesus, Divine Wisdom, is spirit and life. It makes the dead rise again, restores dignity to the excluded, gives joy to the afflicted, renews every creature, transforms, sanctifies, and offers eternal life. When the Word illuminates, however, at the same time it judges, because it strips the soul of its masks, revealing the truth that is exposed in the conscience. In the heart where the Spirit of the Risen One was poured, the judgment of the penetrating Word is always for forgiveness and purification.

The parable of Jesus in the Gospel this Sunday portrays a woman who has been denied the right to express herself by a corrupt judge, an experience that many people all over the world suffer today. The parable is set “in a certain town” (Lk 18:2), a city without a name since what is told seems to take place everywhere – for the judge’s enemies, the law must be applied; for his friends, it need only be interpreted.

The widow in the parable is not a friend of the judge, so she does not receive an audience. This widow lost her husband’s support, and in the first-century Palestinian world, she could not inherit his property. Widows were economically vulnerable and could be exploited, as Jesus reminds us sharply when he accuses the religious leaders of devouring the houses of widows (see Lk 20:46-47). Not being able to afford a lawyer, the widow presents herself to offer her case against her opponent. Jesus exposes the inner reasoning of the corrupt judge, who is uninterested in her complaints and indifferent to who she is. He doesn’t fear God and doesn’t care for the good of people. The widow is determined not to remain invisible or unheard, even before a dishonest judge, until the case is definitively resolved in her favor.

Jesus uses the parable to teach about the necessity of urgent and continual prayer. If prayer is the heart of the Church’s mission, it is because within this personal and ecclesial relationship with God (liturgy), persons and communities are renewed through the salvation offered to us by Jesus. His question about faith when he will return seems to indicate a preoccupation by Jesus about the efficacy of the mission that will be carried out and the authenticity of the witness of the missionary disciples. These disciples, incorporated into the Paschal Mystery through baptism, are sent into the world as the Church of Christ, the community of the redeemed, to be the seed and beginning of the kingdom so that all history and all humanity may be transfigured and redeemed. The efficacy of continuous prayer, of constant supplication, of the insistent search for love for truth and justice, forges the disciple’s capacity for mission. Only those who insistently pray

put Christ at the center of their lives and of the mission entrusted to them, growing in faith. Only those who insistently pray become attentive and able to listen, to realize and discover the needs and requests for material and spiritual redemption so present in the heart of today's humanity.



OCTOBER 21, 2019

Monday of the 29th Week of Ordinary Time

Weekday

Rom 4:20-25

Lk 1:69-75

Lk 12:13-21

The common thread in the Scripture readings for today is the great theme of life. To Abraham – at the sunset of his earthly journey, according to the story of Genesis, without hope of seeing the promise of a descendant realized – God confirms that biological barriers will not get in the way of his divine plan. Abraham and Sarah, a couple of “biological retirees” afflicted by the torment of infertility, receive Isaac, whose name literally means *laughter*, the joy of life. Believers who persevere in faith “against all hope” are assured of the same gift of life and joy granted to Abraham.

The apostle Paul, intending to support the doctrine of justification by faith with biblical arguments, points to the story of God’s covenant with Abraham, in which God takes the initiative and commits himself faithfully. God promises him descendants as numerous as stars of the sky, and Abraham, despite his wife being sterile, believes in the word of the Lord. And this, Paul comments, was credited to him as righteousness. The circumcision, the covenant, the Law – all this comes later, observes Paul. Ultimately, faith in God and in his word has primacy and obtains for us, freely, the promised gift, through pure and free divine goodness.

Abraham’s experience is important, since it clearly shows the gratuitousness of the spontaneous initiative of God in manifesting his mercy, without any credit previously earned by those who receive divine grace. In fact, Abraham’s story simply begins with the words: “The LORD said

to Abram: Go forth from your land, your relatives, and from your father's house to a land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you" (Gen 12:1-2). It mentions no good action by Abraham to suggest that he earned anything. The people of Israel did not lack the warnings of the prophets to learn to accept with faith the universal generosity of God, not as a due reward, but as the free gift of his goodness. We all must recognize that the good that happens in our life is totally and purely a gift from God; it must encourage us to reciprocate with the same generosity and love, making our actions like God's. As for the evils, the story of Abraham shows us they have other causes: human error, lies, greed, war, or natural calamities. God, however, always intervenes to transform these evils into their opposite and to do good for his beloved creatures.

The same theme of life is central in the Gospel reading. The context is a conflict between brothers for the division of an inheritance – a situation as old as humanity, which is confirmed in Genesis's account of the first murder, a fratricide provoked by the fact that for Cain, it is not enough to be the firstborn and to have inherited the father's trade; he is jealous of God's care for Abel. The family dynamics of conflict that develop between brothers are masterfully illustrated, in their crudeness, in the parable of the merciful father in Lk 15:11-32. In both of these stories, the woodworm that eats away at fraternal relations is greed, the desire to have everything for oneself. Here Jesus offers a bit of fundamental advice, useful guidance for anyone's life: "Take care to guard against all greed, for though one may be rich, one's life does not consist of possessions" (Lk 12:15). Visceral attachment to money is the root of all evil (see 1 Tm 6:10). The foolishness rebuked by Jesus in today's Gospel consists precisely in this: to forget that life, in all its dimensions, is a gift. It is a grace to be shared, not squeezed for all the advantage it can yield. The fruits of the earth are a blessing from God (see Dt 28:1-14), but they can be transformed into the opposite, when one decides to seize them and control them.

The compulsive accumulation of wealth blinds a person, which is why Jesus refers to the man in his parable as a “fool.” It makes us forget that just over the horizon, death is looming. Yet the Scriptures warn us:

Every man is but a breath.

Man goes about as a mere phantom;

they hurry about, although in vain;

he heaps up stores without knowing for whom. (Ps 39:6-7)

The rich man is a fool because he goes about life forgetting completely that it is a gift that can be lost at any time (see Wis 15:8). One cannot go through life fearing death, but it is equally true that those who decide to lock themselves in the cage of their own selfishness are walking dead.

“What must I do?” is a recurring question in Luke’s writings (see Lk 3:10,12,14; 16:3-4; Acts 2:37; 16:30). The choice between life and death is the crossroads that each person faces. For Israel, and before Israel even for Adam, the gift of life (of the highest value) is strictly bound to obedience to God. When humanity chooses to enjoy material things, to the exclusion of God, we condemn ourselves to flight, to exile, and finally to misery and death. “You have so many good things stored up for many years, rest, eat, drink, be merry!” (Lk 12:19). In themselves, material goods, starting from creation itself, are an abundant table prepared by God for the benefit of people. The problem arises when the people, who should be wise administrators of these gifts, make presume the right to be exclusive and excluding masters of these gifts. We live in an age that is crippled by anxiety. The problem is that anxiety over what will happen does not prevent tomorrow’s pain, but only robs us of today’s happiness. The concerns of this world are listed in detail in the Sermon on the Mount (see Mt 5-7). “I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat [or drink], or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?... But seek first the kingdom [of

God] and his righteousness, and all these things will be given you besides. Do not worry about tomorrow; tomorrow will take care of itself. Sufficient for a day is its own evil” (Mt 6:25,33-34). Only faith as eternal life provides the proper measure to everything, to our time, to our relationships.



October
2019

OCTOBER 22, 2019

Tuesday of the 29th Week of Ordinary Time

Optional Memorial of St. John Paul II

Rom 5:12,15b,17-19,20b-21

Ps 40:7-10,17

Lk 12:35-38

The passage from Paul offered in today's liturgy is at the very heart of his Letter to the Romans. Behind the statement that the human person needs to be redeemed, there is the conviction that guilt taints our relationship with God. After having demonstrated, with the help of experience and the Scriptures, that the redemption of humanity comes from God through faith in Jesus Christ and not from circumcision, the Apostle begins to deal with "our" Christian experience.

If someone damages a friendship, hurting their friend, a disorder is created in his own heart, which will be overcome only when the friend welcomes him and embraces him again, accepting his apology. Redemption, says Paul, is the reason and condition of our living in peace with God. But for friends to return to friendship, it can be necessary for someone to mediate between the two, telling the guilty one that the other no longer bears a grudge and waiting with an open heart. And when everything is over, the bond will be stronger and the joy will be greater than before. Now, Paul continues, knowing that the mediator, Jesus, had to undergo many humiliations and sufferings to find and convince me to trust in the goodness of the Father, for whose love I had contempt, my heart is deeply grateful and ready to collaborate joyfully with him in the work of reconciliation, participating in his sacrifices to bring the message to others.

How can we doubt this love, asks the Apostle to the nations, after the

extraordinary demonstration that God has given us? The historical event of Jesus' death has a theological meaning of substitutionary suffering: he died for us, in our place and the place of all, for us who had turned away from God. In other words, he who received the mission of mediation is revealed to be our great friend, taking upon himself the weight of all the evils of which we were guilty when we were alone and lost. This incomparable demonstration of divine love for us will shine in history forever, illuminating the path of peoples.

Paul goes far and wide through the world, without rest and with great joy, giving his very self to spread this good news. Jesus did not sacrifice himself because we were Jews or Greeks, slaves or free, educated or ignorant, rich or poor, men or women, but simply because we were sinners in need of forgiveness. And his gift was dispensed without our having any merit. What most pleases God is not to inflict punishment, but to give without measure his sublime mercy.

After God has accomplished this ineffable mystery of love, absolutely gratuitous and universal, it is impossible, adds the Apostle, that God will not complete the work of our salvation! The fullness of salvation, therefore, concerns future goods, eschatological goods: glory and eternal life. In this way, the peace and reconciliation that we receive "now," and which our hearts savor, point toward a future fulfillment, since they are the pledge of the gifts we will receive later.

To demonstrate the triple nature of this liberation – that is, from sin, from the Law, and from death – Paul describes the situation of the human being before and after Christ, showing the consequences of the disobedience of Adam – a "figure" of the one who was to come – and those of the obedience of Christ, the new Adam. Reflecting on the story of the fall of humanity (Adam) offered by Genesis, Paul uses the theological truth it presents, that the cause of humanity's tragic condition of slavery is sin. The etiological character of the Genesis account points to sin as the cause of the general misery of humanity (pain, affliction, discord, violence, and

death). Adam's disobedience – both individually and collectively (see Gen 1:27) – has introduced an active and disastrous force into the world.

But Jesus Christ is the liberator. Through him came redemption and eternal life for all. Jesus is the “second” Adam, antithetical to the first. The first human being had no faith in his Creator; he disobeyed and broke his friendship with him. But Jesus is the new Adam, absolutely faithful and perfectly obedient, who gives his life to restore our friendship with God. The antithesis underlines the immeasurable superiority of the benefit brought by Jesus as opposed to the damage inflicted by Adam. “For if, by the transgression of the one, death came to reign through that one, how much more will all who receive the abundance of grace and the gift of justification come to reign in life through the one Jesus Christ” (Rom 5:15). The contrast between “one” and “all” highlights the universal scope of the new bond of friendship brought by the Lord Jesus.

The central theme of the Gospel reading is the second coming of the Lord in glory, to judge the living and the dead, as we profess in the Creed: “He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead.” The period that separates believers from this inevitable appointment is a time of active expectation. The most important idea of the Gospel passage is the absence of the master who, after having entrusted a patrimony to be cultivated and put to good use, steps away, without abandoning his own to whatever may come. In suggesting this as God's way of working, Jesus also includes the mystery of the freedom given to humanity; we can choose how to manage the gift of life without physical pressure, without feeling a manipulative presence.

In the Sacred Scriptures the request to “gird your loins” is found for the first time in Exodus 12:11. The context is the preparation for the Passover meal before the coming of the angel of death and the escape from the land of slavery. Following this, the phrase became a common formula to indicate a call to service, exemplified by Jesus: “Before the feast of Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to pass from this world to the Father...

[H]e rose from supper and took off his outer garments. He took a towel and tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet" (Jn 13:1,4-5). In this gesture, service in the name of God has been elevated to the rank of the sacrament of love, within the Eucharist which allows the recipient to participate in the life of Jesus (see Jn 6:30-58). It is not by chance that the fourth Gospel makes the Last Supper the context for the washing of the feet. To Peter who tries to shield himself from that encounter, "unworthy" of the Master, Jesus says, "Unless I wash you, you will have no inheritance with me" (Jn 13:8). Washing the feet of others is a gesture that the Master entrusts to his disciples as an emblem of the lifestyle to be brought to all nations. After the resurrection of Jesus, in fact, the disciples are dissuaded from continuing to look to heaven; rather, they are encouraged to go on mission to fulfill all that Jesus had said and did, with the promise that the Master would return to his own in the same way he had left (see Acts 1:11). We wait in hope for the return of the Master, with our loins girded, that is, serving our neighbors in the faith, proclaiming and helping them to participate in the salvation offered to us as a pledge in the Eucharist.

The metaphor of the lamps to be kept burning (as in Ex 27:20 and Lev 24:2) qualifies the waiting as a time of careful attentiveness. The apparent absence of the master can lead to the temptation to replace him, pretending to become the absolute arbitrators of life – one's own and that of others – and by doing away with the assets entrusted to one's care. From God's perspective, waiting responds to the law of love. For us who live, the long period of waiting only increases our desire to meet God face to face. We must be strong to bear the burden of holding to a promise with no deadline. It is important to be aware that all the seasons of a life well lived, seeking and doing God's will, are a *kairos*, a time favorable to being called home. Our being ready for this moment will make our lives successes.

OCTOBER 23, 2019

Wednesday of the 29th Week of Ordinary Time

Optional Memorial of St. John of Capistrano

Rom 6:12-18

Ps 124:1b-8

Lk 12:39-48

Throughout his Letter to the Romans, Paul maintains that it is useless to rely on the Law of Moses, since it does not free humanity, but rather enslaves and condemns humanity. In fact, before the coming of the Law of Moses, sin and death were already in the world, because of Adam. But since the Law had not yet been revealed and there were still no precepts, it was not possible to impute to sinners their failings, in their formal aspect of transgressions, nor could the sanctions provided for by the Law be applied to them. However, according to the natural law written on the hearts of all, personal responsibility for sin remained the same for everyone. Therefore, after receiving the Law, the Jews only saw their responsibility increase and, with it, their faults.

The Jewish expectation was that in the last days, when the Messiah arrived, he would bring a new law or a reinterpretation of the Law. This third period, which Paul calls “the fullness of time,” was inaugurated by the birth and the Paschal Mystery of Christ, the Anointed One of God. Paul teaches that with his coming, then, we were freed from the Law, because the grace of the Lord Jesus began to reign.

Paul leaves aside the account of Noah and what it could mean with regard to the covenant, sin, and the law, and he passes directly from Adam to Moses. He intends to face the problem exclusively in terms of the Mosaic Law, because it was with this argument that some of the Jews, or Jewish-Chris-

tians, the false brothers, were disturbing the Christian communities he had founded, trying to impose circumcision as something necessary for one to be redeemed and saved by God.

Now, when Paul states that the Law was involuntarily the cause of the proliferation of sin and that, even if indirectly, this caused the overflow of God's grace overpowered by sinful humanity, he opens himself to many questions and criticisms. Anticipating the objections that he would have received, Paul affirms that the Christian, once joined to the Paschal Mystery of Christ, who died and rose again, wants nothing more to do with sin and its terrible consequences. The fact that the justification of Christ brings redemption, life, and freedom to all does not mean that the sinner can continue to sin in the same way as before or even more, abusing his freedom in Christ or provoking God to manifest even more his grace. The authentic Christian considers himself dead to sin and lives exclusively for God in Christ Jesus. Therefore, being no longer subject to the Law, but under the protection of grace, the Christian is exhorted to offer his body and all his being to practice only good, mutual love, and justice; he is called to consecrate himself entirely to the service of God for the benefit of others. This is the great evangelizing mission of the Church. Indeed, redemption makes us born again through a bond of filial adoption and implies the beginning of a new life in the light of the Holy Spirit.

This teaching of Paul in relation to the Law is perfectly in tune with that of Jesus. The administrator who has made a mistake, disobeying an explicit order of his master, will be punished more severely than the servant who committed the same mistake, but without being aware of the law in force. This is very simply the teaching that the Apostle explains in his letter. The Law has increased the responsibility and, therefore, the guilt for the transgression. All those who have received authority and means of a religious, social, political, economic, juridical, or military nature will receive a serious punishment if they use their power to abuse, exploit, or oppress the people of God or destroy their home, God's creation.

Peter's question, "Lord, is this parable meant for us or for everyone?" (Lk 12:41), opens the horizon to the community dimension of vigilance. The parable of Jesus is addressed to all the members of the ecclesial community, each of whom is invited to carry out her task with fidelity, daily, without postponing anything until tomorrow. Those who are called to watch, the holders of leadership roles within the community, have a greater responsibility. The great challenge of serving Jesus Christ and his Gospel, rather than using it, concerns primarily the leaders of communities. Those sitting at the head of the table must make sure that others have had their share before serving themselves. Jesus praises the honest and wise administrator, the one who is not ensnared by the fascination of power and who manages resources with proper detachment. "Blessed is that servant whom his master on arrival finds doing so. Truly, I say to you, he will put him in charge of all his property" (Lk 12:43-44). The management of the earth's goods in fairness, justice, and transparency are issues of great relevance in the contemporary world, a world scourged by predatory greed on a global scale and in which human beings are often worth less than products and things. "But if that servant says to himself, 'My master is delayed in coming,' and begins to beat the menservants and the maidservants, to eat and drink and get drunk, then that servant's master will come on an unexpected day and at an unknown hour and will punish him severely and assign him a place with the unfaithful" (Lk 12:45-46).

It is important to pay attention in these words to the attitude of the unfaithful servant, who in his heart is convinced that the Lord's arrival is far away, and to the final reference to "the unfaithful." In the Psalms, foolishness and atheism appear as a pair: "The fool says in his heart, / 'There is no God'" (Ps 14:1; see also Ps 53:2). Those who decide to exclude God from their hearts will not find it easy to welcome their neighbors and to recognize the divine plan for them. The Gospel declares that the Lord will come again as a judge and all people will have to account for their own lives. It is not a threat. It is not part of God's pedagogy to force himself on

us with the specter of punishment. The Christian community is the home of the Father where life and love are celebrated. It is the choices of each us of that will result in reward or exclusion.

In the vision of St. Paul and of the Gospel, the seriously considered evil, in the light of the certainty of Christ's victory over death, represents a serious provocation for the Christian mission. The struggle begun by Christ in the heart of the missionary disciple, thanks to the action of the Spirit in baptism, represents a central dimension of Christian proclamation and witness. The mission of the Church, precisely because it is moved by the certainty of victory and merciful love, does not fear the struggle against evil in all its forms. To believers, to whom much has been given, much is required – offering, proclaiming, and sharing thanks to the explicit and confident announcement that salvation from evil and death comes only from Jesus Christ.

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October
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OCTOBER 24, 2019

Thursday of the 29th Week of Ordinary Time

Optional Memorial of St. Anthony Mary Claret

Rom 6:19-23

Ps 1:1-4,6

Lk 12:49-53

The biblical texts of this liturgy offer a common theme: the freedom granted by God to every human person, the use that we make of it, and the responsibilities that follow from it. The passage from the Letter to the Romans traces a clear line between a life in service of sin and a life under the lordship of Christ. It also points to the endpoint of each path. The final result of sinful works is death, and death represents a separation without possibility of return. Such separation is the self-inflicted fate of those who obstinately choose to exclude God from their lives. The scenario presented by Paul corresponds perfectly to that of the Gospel. Together with the dark possibility of rejection of the Gospel and consequent condemnation, there is also the broad horizon of eternal life founded in Christ Jesus. To Paul, a veteran of living in strict observance of religious precepts as a path to salvation, it is important to stress repeatedly that communion with God through the person of Jesus Christ is an undeserved gift. No one can claim to be owed anything by God. Salvation is grace, and humanity is invited to welcome it and cultivate it.

Even in its brevity, the reading from the Gospel of Luke contains a vibrant message, so strong in tones and images that no listener can leave indifferent. First of all, it conveys a sense of imminence before which one must take a position. The manifestation of God in the person of Jesus Christ has ignited a flame in the history of humanity and of individual

people. In the Bible, fire symbolizes the word of the Lord proclaimed by the prophet (see Jer 5:14, 23:29, Sir 48). It is connected to the image of a hammer that, when it hits a rock (see Jer 23:29), causes a thousand sparks to burst forth. “I have come to set the earth on fire” (Lk 12:49). In the reading, the focus is on the contrasting responses that the person and the message of Jesus arouse: division, not only among strangers but even among the members of the same family. One is reminded here of Simeon’s prophecy that this child would become a sign of contradiction (see Lk 2:34). But the image of fire is also used in Scripture to offer a message of comfort: “When you walk through fire, you shall not be burned” (Is 43:2). John the Baptist baptized with water, but Jesus will baptize with fire (see Lk 3:16). It is under the form of tongues of fire that the Holy Spirit will descend upon the Church gathered in the upper room on the day of Pentecost (see Acts 2:2-4). Fire is also used as an image to express the judgment of God. Everything will be subjected to the test of fire that will separate the chaff from the grain. Hence the exhortation of the apostle Paul:

Each one must be careful how he builds upon it, for no one can lay a foundation other than the one that is there, namely, Jesus Christ. If anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, or straw, the work of each will come to light, for the Day will disclose it. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each one’s work. If the work stands that someone built upon the foundation, that person will receive a wage. But if someone’s work is burned up, that one will suffer loss; the person will be saved, but only as through fire. (1 Cor 3:10b-15)

The fire that Jesus came to bring to earth is clearly connected with his baptism. When his baptism, or his passion, takes place, then also the fire that he has come to bring, that is, the gift of the Spirit, will be lit. Thus, with two figures of speech, Jesus describes both the paschal mystery and the fruit that it bears for us. John the Baptist, in fact, had announced that the

one who was coming was more powerful than him, someone whose sandal straps he was not worthy to untie. If he baptized with water to prepare the way of the Lord, inviting people to repentance and conversion, the Son of the Most High came to baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire, so that every creature would see God's salvation and his great wonders. The fulfillment of this promise is described by Luke in the Acts of the Apostles, with the story of Pentecost, when the Spirit, a, Easter gift, descended upon the Church in the form of tongues of fire, infusing it with prophetic strength to begin the evangelizing mission.

Luke must have been witness to many family conflicts during his missionary travels all over the world, constantly evangelizing with Paul on some occasions, and also with other companions. Many of these conflicts occurred in the synagogues, as the stories in Acts tell us, due to the acceptance of the Good News by some and its refusal by others. It is obvious that members of the same family took part in the rites in the synagogue. This brings to mind another teaching of Jesus, which requires from his disciples a love greater than the love they have for their relatives. The reason is very simple: he is the source of love. It is he who teaches us to truly love, giving our lives for the people we love. Love motivated only by family ties is very fragile. On the other hand, when I become a follower of Jesus, I not only learn to truly love my own family, but I abandon all greed and hypocrisy, every selfishness and discrimination, opening my heart to universal fraternity, welcoming with sincere love people different from my own religion, ethnicity, culture, skin color, social status – people who were previously foreigners to me. But this can cause enmity on the part of the family and the community that do not like what is different and that refuse to accept news that can undermine their traditions and beliefs. They do not understand this new way of life – which is a real revolution, both spiritual and social – and reject it. As Luke himself says: “The law and the prophets lasted until John; but from then on the kingdom of God is proclaimed, and everyone who enters does so with violence” (Lk 16:16).

Peace is a constant in the discourses of Jesus (see Mt 5:9) and also in his reactions, even in the face of provocation and violence. He is the Prince of Peace; he is “our peace” (Eph 2:14). It is up to those who are called by Jesus to decide where their commitments lie. The fire that Jesus offers warms hearts, especially those who do not know where to go. May he accompany us, as he did in a hidden way the disciples of Emmaus, who at the end of a tiring and disheartening day asked, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he spoke to us on the way and opened the scriptures to us?” (Lk 24:32). And it was a new beginning, the renewal of a call that, despite the wavering of the apostles, the Lord had never revoked. “For the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable” (Rom 11:29).



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OCTOBER 25, 2019

Friday of the 29th Week of Ordinary Time

Weekday

Rom 7:18-25a

Ps 119:66,68,76,77,93,94

Lk 12:54-59

Mention was made above of Paul's assertion that the Law was a reason for the proliferation of sin, and of the criticisms brought against Paul by his adversaries. The Apostle's goal, however, is simply to point out that the Law does not have, in itself, the power to transform and save a person; it only shows what is right and what is wrong, and so ends up highlighting all one's shortcomings. This is why Paul says without a shadow of doubt that the Law is good and holy, but the problem is that through it sin, the transgression of the commandments, manifests itself in all its gravity. The Law places before the people the way of life and the way of death.

Paul knows very well the inner drama that every person lives, especially when we strive to follow the path of perfection. Through reason and will, the human being understands and wishes to do good, according to the commandments, but encounters a tendency, an impulse, to do evil. This shows that we are slaves and need a liberating force that we do not possess. We are not born in personal guilt, but we bear the signs of sin and cosmic disorder, and we suffer its consequences. In fact, says Paul, "I do not do the good I want, but I do the evil I do not want" (Rom 7:19). The human being experiences this dramatic contradiction and asks: who can free me from my own puny, carnal "I," to experience the new, healed "I" that pleases God? Paul knows that Jesus is the only source of grace and redemption. Therefore, he exhorts us to praise and give thanks to God, together with

him, so we can pray with the psalmist, saying: “Let your kindness comfort me / according to your promise to your servants.... / Let your compassion come to me that I may live” (Ps 119:76-77).

Whoever observes the law faithfully must be very careful not to fall into the grave sin of pride, like the Pharisee in the temple who, despising others, considered himself right before God, contradicting what the Scriptures say: “Before you no one can be just” (Ps 143:2). It may also be that he does not have the courage to proceed to the next step, where the Law itself leads. The one who observes the commandments is on the path that leads to eternal life, as shown by the episode of the person who asked Jesus, “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” (Lk 18:18). The Lord confirmed that the young man was on the right path. The point is that this journey had led him to Jesus to continue his search, since Jesus himself was the “way” to life (see Jn 14:6) and the “door” to enter the kingdom (see Jn 14:6). When Paul, through the light of grace, understood this, he did not hesitate to follow the way of Jesus with all his strength, all his heart, and all his mind. But the young man, who was very rich, did not have the same courage.

When Jesus speaks to the crowds, who know how to discern the signs of nature with their experience and intelligence, he reproaches two shortcomings: the inability to discern the present time and the inability to judge what is right. They can interpret chronological and meteorological time, but they cannot perceive the presence of saving time. In his programmatic speech in the synagogue of Nazareth, quoting the prophet Isaiah, Jesus had declared that he was inaugurating the year of the Lord, the “today” of salvation, in which the promises of the Scriptures reach their fulfillment (see Lk 4). Starting from there, all that Jesus said and did was a tireless mission of evangelization. Many people who listened to him and saw his works were astonished and, giving glory to God, said, “We have seen incredible things today” (Lk 5:26). To the disciples of the Baptist, who asked him if he really was the Messiah or if they needed to wait for another person, Jesus responded by pointing to the fruits of his evangelizing work: “the

blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the good news proclaimed to them” (Lk 7:22). And if, on one hand, Jesus is troubled by the persecution and opposition from the political and religious authorities, from the powerful and the landowners who know no repentance and refuse any opportunity for conversion, on the other hand he is delighted to see the joy and the simplicity of the humble who welcome the light of his word and become his disciples to enter the kingdom. Therefore, exulting in the Holy Spirit, Jesus bursts forth in praise and thanksgiving to the Father, who has hidden these things from the learned and the wise and has revealed them to the little ones.

Given that the stakes are high, one should be less concerned about interpreting natural phenomena and take greater care to discerning the time of history and the time of God. This latter approach would be less harmful than the one criticized by Jesus. Since it is essentially a matter of the grace of the messianic revelation, it is urgent and decisive to welcome it at the very moment it presents itself, to open oneself as fully as possible to the fruits of the salvation it bears. This can only happen by responding in freedom and obedience to the special appeals for conversion, addressed by the Lord on his way to Jerusalem. It is also necessary to pay due attention to the particular signs of this time that the presence of Christ enriches with an absolute novelty, giving it an incredible historical and providential significance for our salvation.

OCTOBER 26, 2019

Saturday of the 29th Week of Ordinary Time

Weekday

Rom 8:1-11

Ps 24:1b-4ab,5-6

Lk 13:1-9

The teaching of Jesus in today's Gospel begins with a story that is reported to him by some people about a group of Galileans massacred by Pilate while offering a sacrifice in the Temple. Not only was the outrage committed within the walls of the Temple, but human blood was mixed with that of the sacrificed animals, which provoked further shame and indignation. It is not clear why these people tell Jesus about the episode. Perhaps it's because Jesus himself was a Galilean and they wanted to warn him, just as they did a bit later regarding the persecution of Herod Antipas, who wanted to kill him. Or maybe they were subtly threatening him, suggesting that if he were reported to the Roman prosecutor, he would suffer the same fate. Or maybe they're just passing along some gossip about the tragedies of others; as the psalm says, people who rejoice in the troubles of others should be ashamed.

But Jesus' answer suggests the presence of something even more serious: a condescending judgment towards the victims, as if they deserved to die so violently while they were at prayer, and as if the brutality of the Romans was a judgment of God on those who were killed. Jesus does not comment on the event, but draws a lesson from the attitude of those who report the sad episode. No one, he says, is authorized to interpret the suffering, illness, accidents, or tragedies of others as a divine punishment for sins committed, but everyone must consider their sins as the worst misfortune and try to

convert with sincere repentance. No one has been given the authority to judge and divide people between “good” and “bad.” Only the Lord knows all the truth of our hearts.

As soon as the news is communicated to him, Jesus immediately rejects the suggestion that there is a causal link between violent death and the gravity of sin. Jesus wants to underline that the incidents do not necessarily reveal the gravity of some hidden sin of the victim. Rather, they are like warnings that remind us that death can always knock, even when we least expect it. This is why we must awaken in everyone the necessity and the urgency of interior conversion, to be accepted and carried out before it is too late. This is why Jesus, rejecting the idea that the Galileans slaughtered by Pilate and the eighteen people crushed by the collapse of the tower of Siloam may be considered more sinful than anyone else, continues his discourse by suggesting that if those who listen to him do not convert their hearts, they might perish in the same way. They should convert not because their repentance would protect them from death, but rather because conversion puts them in a good spiritual and human disposition to meet the Lord of life, in total serenity and peace of heart. The death from which conversion frees us is the eternal one, not the physical one. The image of God at the base of the idea that violent death reveals a serious sin in the victim does not correspond to the Father God revealed by Jesus. This is not a God who takes revenge on sinners, but a patient God who hopes that, given the necessary time, humanity will come to realize how radical is the love with which it is loved, and that this will bear the fruits of fraternal love and solidarity that it should.

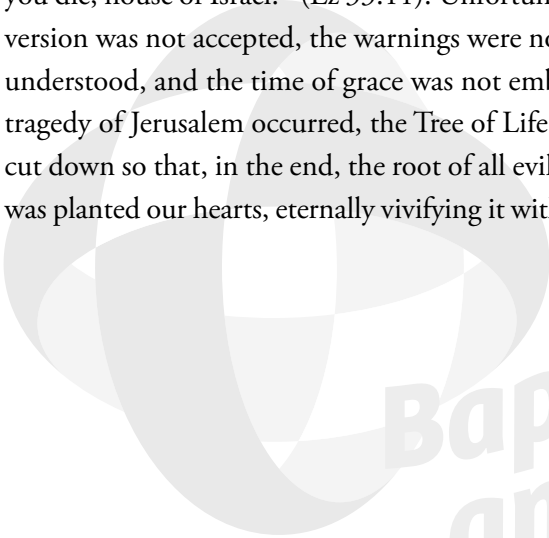
In any case, this is the perspective suggested by the parable, the theological point that is dramatized in the story of a landowner, his fig tree, and his gardener. Disappointed by not receiving the fruit that he expected after so many years of care and work, the man decides to cut down his fig tree rather than let it waste the space it was planted in. But, surprisingly, his gardener intervenes, asking to give the fig tree more time, enough to

see whether working the land and adding more fertilizer might help. Jesus doesn't conclude the story, but he seems to suggest that the verdict is suspended, opening the way to hope. If we see ourselves reflected in the image of the fig tree, the good news is that the time of our lives given to us by the Master of the universe gives us an opportunity to let divine grace act and produce its fruits of peace, joy, justice, and love in us. It's a gift, a sort of second chance that leaves little room for error. On the other hand, if we see ourselves in the figure of the gardener, it's a reminder that we must intercede and make efforts toward the conversion of others. As an ecclesial community, it goes without saying that we are called to a two-fold commitment: first, to convert ourselves without ceasing, becoming ever more transparent to the Word of God and docile to the Spirit of love that gives life, and second, to work for the conversion of the world, never obscuring the merciful and patient face of God, Father of Jesus Christ, whose first and only desire is to save and not to condemn. Experience shows that hearts respond more generously when they are shown trust; we do not conquer people for divine love with fear, imprisoning them in their misfortunes. May this pedagogy guide our missionary activity without diminishing its prophetic acuteness or the profound understanding of human nature and the content of salvation.

The image of the fig tree planted in the vineyard suggests, perhaps, that the kingdom of God (the vineyard) is much larger than either Israel or Jerusalem (the fig tree), and that Jesus the Messiah, the divine gardener, came to seek in the Holy City the fruits of mercy, justice, and faithfulness. These are the fruits that God likes, the fruits expected by the "owner of the orchard." But time is running out and the decision to cut down the fig tree is made, because these fruits have not been found. This is also the meaning of the episode of the barren fig tree of Mark (Mk 13:28) and Matthew (Mt 21:18-22; 24:32), which conclude with the curse of the tree.

But surprisingly, in the parable of Luke, it is the gardener who intercedes with the owner, asking him to have a little patience with his fig tree, that

is, to have mercy on Jerusalem. And as if this were not enough, he commits himself to doing everything possible to make this very expensive tree fruitful. Because surely, as the prophet Ezekiel declares in today's Alleluia verse, God takes no pleasure for the death of a wicked person; rather, it is their conversion that he desires, so that they may abandon their wrong path and their life of sin. "Turn, turn from your evil ways! Why should you die, house of Israel?" (Ez 33:11). Unfortunately, the invitation to conversion was not accepted, the warnings were not heard, the signs were not understood, and the time of grace was not embraced. But before the final tragedy of Jerusalem occurred, the Tree of Life itself, Jesus, accepted to be cut down so that, in the end, the root of all evil was torn out and that Tree was planted our hearts, eternally vivifying it with the sap of the Holy Spirit.



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October
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OCTOBER 27, 2019

Sunday of the 30th Week of Ordinary Time

Year C

Sir 35:15b-17,20-22a

Ps 34:2-3,17-19,23

2 Tm 4:6-8,16-18

Lk 18:9-14

The teaching of the sage Ben Sirach, heir to the age-old prophetic doctrine of justice and God's preferential love for the poor and the oppressed, leads us to the summits of true biblical spirituality. Deuteronomy warned that God "has no favorites [and] accepts no bribes" (Dt 10:17), as opposed to people, who play favorites based on social, racial, or ideological prejudices at the expense of the lives of the humble. This doctrine was applied broadly by Jesus in his preaching and his work of liberation, as well as by the apostles and evangelists, who featured it in their writings and spread it universally. God, in his infinite mercy, never fails to be present to all those who, aware of their own faults and weaknesses, seek his help and forgiveness. The proud, however, he allows to wander confused in the haughty thoughts of their hearts.

Jesus' parable about the tax collector and the Pharisee demonstrates his way of seeing people, which is God's way of seeing people. He does not judge by appearances, nor according to prejudices, but by what he sees with clarity in the depths of the human heart, discerning the true motivation that generates people's actions and their prayers.

In fact, in the Gospels we first encounter the idea that God has no favorites on the lips of Jesus' adversaries, who, though they were plotting against him, had to publicly acknowledge his perfect moral integrity, saying,

“Teacher, we know that what you say and teach is correct, and you show no partiality, but teach the way of God in accordance with the truth” (Lk 20:21; see Mt 22:16). This is the path of God, which Jesus practiced and taught. It is a practice he demonstrated not only in his approach to humble people and those who were excluded and marginalized because they were judged to be sinners, such as prostitutes and publicans, or the impure and accursed, such as lepers, but also in all his work of evangelization, breaking down all barriers of discrimination, whether religious, social, or racial. Jesus, in fact, agreed to listen to the humble request of the Roman centurion and went to his house to heal his servant. Moreover, in his continuous travels as an itinerant Teacher, he visited the Samaritan region and often praised its inhabitants. Going into the pagan territories, he reached the region of Tyre and healed the daughter of a Syro-Phoenician woman. Crossing to the other side of Lake Tiberias, he headed towards the Decapolis and healed people afflicted by various diseases. His repeated crossings of the Sea of Galilee demonstrate Jesus’ lordship over reality, symbolically represented by the sea; he is able to calm its menacing strength and walk over its abyss. The terrifying sea, a negative symbol, no longer functions as a force of separation, but becomes a bridge, and through the ministry of Jesus, it serves as a path toward the reconciliation of the two parts, the Jewish and the pagan.

In the synagogue of Nazareth, where he had presented the program of his ministry, Jesus had challenged his listeners on Israel’s position with regard to the other peoples considered chosen by God. In fact, those present had reacted negatively, condemning his statement about the fulfillment of the prophecies. The examples of Elijah, who was sent to the Phoenician widow, and Elisha, who healed the Syrian leper Naaman, were sufficient to show that God doesn’t play favorites; all creatures are precious in his eyes. As the psalmist says, the Lord is good to all, and his tenderness embraces every creature. He is close to all those who sincerely call upon him. The psalmist does not mention any specific race or nationality, nor status or color of skin. If the love of God permeates all creatures, it is because they are all

his work and, therefore, his is a universal love, full of care for all human beings, without any discrimination.

This does not negate the fact that Israel was chosen by God to enter a special covenant with him. But this election was a function of a specific mission for the good of all peoples, reflecting the presence of the living God in history as the liberator of the oppressed and savior of the human person in all its reality:

You are my witnesses – oracle of the LORD –
 my servant whom I have chosen
 To know and believe in me
 and understand that I am he.
 Before me no god was formed,
 and after me there shall be none. (Is 43:10)

God, in fact, has not only chosen his servant but has also formed and instructed him:

I, the LORD, have called you for justice,
 I have grasped you by the hand;
 I formed you, and set you
 as a covenant for the people,
 a light for the nations,
 To open the eyes of the blind,
 to bring out prisoners from confinement,
 and from the dungeon, those who live in darkness. (Is 42:6-7)

Looking more closely at the teaching of Jesus in his parable of the tax collector and the Pharisee in the Temple, we realize that the difference between the two is precisely what is found in the human heart, laid bare by the presence of God in prayer.

In any case, it is with the intention of praying that the tax collector and the Pharisee go to the Temple, thus finding themselves sharing for a few moments the same sacred place. But the particular way each of them will go about their prayer is what will determine their respective destiny and final spiritual state. The tax collector, having had the humility and sincerity to recognize his unworthiness and sin and to implore God's forgiveness, returns home a better man, transformed inwardly, reconciled. In response to his authentic prayer, divine grace is not withheld. Once again, we learn the truth that "everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be exalted" (Lk 18:14b).

On the other hand, the Pharisee is a prisoner in his tower of spiritual pride. Too aware of his own meritorious works and of the excellence of his socio-religious class, he believes himself superior and better than all the others, erecting barriers between himself and them, insulting them and despising them. He was perhaps good and pious up to that moment, but the attitude he shows reveals the arrogance in his heart, undermining his alleged virtue from within.

Moreover, we do not approach God in the Temple in order to celebrate and contemplate ourselves in a self-referential pose, looking down at others from above. We stand before God for an encounter of love, and to meet others in him. In this sense, prayer is contemplation of the Lord, a celebration of the wonders that his grace works every day in the bosom of human frailty, and of his indefatigable mercy that lifts up those who have fallen and who want to get up again.

Listening to this parable, the immediate temptation would be to identify ourselves with the tax collector, simply because he occupies the positive place in the story. It's a sign of the subtle human desire to get rid of our conscience. But the parable invites us to look inward to remove all sense of self-sufficiency and contempt for others, in order to find a simple, humble, and fraternal heart that knows how to look upon oneself and upon others with a merciful and hopeful gaze. In this regard, it is often necessary to

question the way we pray. What does it reveal to us about the depth and quality of our hearts? What does it reveal to us about ourselves, about the way we relate to others and the way we perceive them spontaneously in relation to us? What does it reveal to us about our relationship with God and his salvation?

Pope Francis constantly reminds us of the centrality of prayer in relation to the Church and its mission. Prayer is the soul of mission, for the efficacy of one's personal encounter with Christ, the right measures of one's relationship with oneself and with the world in the light of the Holy Spirit, are at the root of the experience of truth that saves. The missionary disciple, thanks to prayer, always includes himself among those in need of the salvation that he is called to announce and, in the sacraments, to communicate. What is certain is that the mission of evangelization entrusted to us as a Church could not be conducted in truth if we adopted a domineering attitude in the ways we relate to others, confident and convinced of our own moral and religious superiority. Mission must be a humble proposal of friendship with Christ, with a profound respect for the religious freedom of the men and women of our age, for their cultures, and for their history. True humility is never the absence of truth. It is rather an effective presence of a truth that judges, forgives, and saves those who proclaim it and those who hear it proclaimed.

October
2019

OCTOBER 28, 2019

Monday of the 30th Week of Ordinary Time

Feast of Saints Simon and Jude, Apostles

Eph 2:19-22

Ps 19:2-5

Lk 6:12-19

The liturgy continues the series of feasts of the apostles, reminding us today of two who are almost unknown and whose relics are venerated in the Basilica of St. Peter, near the altar of St. Joseph. Those Twelve, symbol of a whole new people, were called by Jesus not out of consideration for their quality and merit, but, Luke says, from a night of prayer, of intense communion with the Father, as though to draw abundantly from him that Spirit who would be given to those who would be called, making them apostles. Luke, in his Gospel accounts, shows us on numerous occasions how important for Jesus was prayer, that encounter of intimate and loving dialogue with his Heavenly Father.

On some occasions, Luke stops to describe these episodes and even the content of Jesus' prayers, so that each disciple can learn to pray, listening to what the Lord has to say and doing what he commands, rather than merely multiplying useless words to ask God to satisfy all his selfish demands. Authentic Christian prayer is born in God. It motivates our action, transforms our existence, and turns us back to God with feelings of gratitude, filial obedience, self-offering, and solidarity with others. Luke underlines how all the crucial decisions of the life of Jesus were made in a context of prayer, from baptism – or we could even go back to his infancy – up to Gethsemane and the cross.

In today's Gospel reading, we contemplate Jesus spending the whole

night in prayer, because he is about to make a choice that will forever strengthen his bond with his disciples. It is a definitive commitment, because with the Twelve he will establish his messianic community. He will choose the twelve pillars on which he will build, as promised by the prophets, the people of the new covenant, the Church. For this people, and for all humanity, he will shed his blood, consciously and freely, for the forgiveness of sins. The “apostles” – the word that means “sent” – are chosen before Christ’s Passion-Death-Resurrection, but it is only after Easter and Pentecost that their mission will unfold its full potential, fulfilling itself completely. Before this time, though, they are called to be formed and prepared for what awaits them when the Master will be made present in the Spirit. Prayer therefore reveals itself as the soul of mission, that is, the faithful and effective presence of God in the action of his Church for the salvation of the world to which it has been sent.

Pope Benedict XVI had this to say about the faith and vocation of the holy apostles Simon the Cananaean and Jude Thaddaeus in his General Audience of October 11, 2006:

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Today, let us examine two of the Twelve Apostles: Simon the Cananaean and Jude Thaddaeus (not to be confused with Judas Iscariot). Let us look at them together, not only because they are always placed next to each other in the lists of the Twelve (cf. Mt 10:3,4; Mk 3:18; Lk 6:15; Acts 1:13), but also because there is very little information about them, apart from the fact that the New Testament Canon preserves one Letter attributed to Jude Thaddaeus.

Simon is given a nickname that varies in the four lists: while Matthew and Mark describe him as a “Cananaean,” Luke instead describes him as a “Zealot.”

In fact, the two descriptions are equivalent because they mean the same thing: indeed, in Hebrew the verb *qanaʿ* means “to be jealous, ardent” and can be said both of God, since he is jealous with regard to his Chosen People (cf. Ex 20:5),

and of men who burn with zeal in serving the one God with unreserved devotion, such as Elijah (cf. 1 Kgs 19:10).

Thus, it is highly likely that even if this Simon was not exactly a member of the nationalist movement of Zealots, he was at least marked by passionate attachment to his Jewish identity, hence, for God, his People and divine Law.

If this was the case, Simon was worlds apart from Matthew, who, on the contrary, had an activity behind him as a tax collector that was frowned upon as entirely impure. This shows that Jesus called his disciples and collaborators, without exception, from the most varied social and religious backgrounds.

It was people who interested him, not social classes or labels! And the best thing is that in the group of his followers, despite their differences, they all lived side by side, overcoming imaginable difficulties: indeed, what bound them together was Jesus himself, in whom they all found themselves united with one another.

This is clearly a lesson for us who are often inclined to accentuate differences and even contrasts, forgetting that in Jesus Christ we are given the strength to get the better of our continual conflicts.

Let us also bear in mind that the group of the Twelve is the prefiguration of the Church, where there must be room for all charisms, peoples and races, all human qualities that find their composition and unity in communion with Jesus.

Then with regard to Jude Thaddaeus, this is what tradition has called him, combining two different names: in fact, whereas Matthew and Mark call him simply “Thaddaeus” (Mt 10:3; Mk 3:18), Luke calls him “Judas, the son of James” (Lk 6:16; Acts 1:13).

The nickname “Thaddaeus” is of uncertain origin and is explained either as coming from the Aramaic, *taddà*, which means “breast” and would therefore suggest “magnanimous,” or as an abbreviation of a Greek name, such as “Teodòro, Teòdoto.”

Very little about him has come down to us. John alone mentions a question he addressed to Jesus at the Last Supper: Thaddaeus says to the Lord: “Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us and not to the world?”

This is a very timely question which we also address to the Lord: why did not the Risen One reveal himself to his enemies in his full glory in order to show that it is God who is victorious? Why did he only manifest himself to his disciples? Jesus' answer is mysterious and profound. The Lord says: "If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him" (Jn 14:22-23).

This means that the Risen One must be seen, must be perceived also by the heart, in a way so that God may take up his abode within us. The Lord does not appear as a thing. He desires to enter our lives, and therefore his manifestation is a manifestation that implies and presupposes an open heart. Only in this way do we see the Risen One.

The paternity of one of those New Testament Letters known as "catholic," since they are not addressed to a specific local Church but intended for a far wider circle, has been attributed to Jude Thaddaeus. Actually, it is addressed "to those who are called, beloved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ" (v. 1).

A major concern of this writing is to put Christians on guard against those who make a pretext of God's grace to excuse their own licentiousness and corrupt their brethren with unacceptable teachings, introducing division within the Church "in their dreamings" (v. 8).

This is how Jude defines their doctrine and particular ideas. He even compares them to fallen angels and, mincing no words, says that "they walk in the way of Cain" (v. 11).

Furthermore, he brands them mercilessly as "waterless clouds, carried along by winds; fruitless trees in late autumn, twice dead, uprooted; wild waves of the sea, casting up the foam of their own shame; wandering stars for whom the nether gloom of darkness has been reserved for ever" (vv. 12-13). . .

It is easy to see that the author of these lines lived to the full his own faith, to which realities as great as moral integrity and joy, trust and lastly praise belong, since it is all motivated solely by the goodness of our one God and the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore, may both Simon the Cananaean and Jude Thaddeus help us to rediscover the beauty of the Christian faith ever anew and to live it without tiring, knowing how to bear a strong and at the same time peaceful witness to it.



OCTOBER 29, 2019

Tuesday of the 30th Week of Ordinary Time

Weekday

Rom 8:18-25

Ps 126:1b-6

Lk 13:18-21

The psalmist, fascinated by the beauty of creation, asked himself:

When I see your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and stars that you set in place –
What is man that you are mindful of him,
and a son of man that you care for him? (Ps 8:4-5)

How many times have we been fascinated by the beauty of creation, while contemplating a starry night, sitting along the banks of a river caressed by a light breeze, admiring a sunset or rainbow, or watching children play together happily without regard for race, color, or social class? How many times have we asked ourselves: Why must this marvelous world, which welcomes us and takes care of us only for a short period, suffer such violence at our own hands? Why can't we live in peace and harmony, making our common home a haven of fraternal coexistence, a pleasant place for everyone? How much nonsense in human projects!

In today's passage taken from the Letter to the Romans, Paul seems to indicate a deep and mysterious bond that unites humanity to all other creatures, a bond that makes humanity the spokesperson of the whole divine work of creation, and also its caretaker. The whole universe finds in humanity its consciousness and through humanity makes itself known

and gradually reveals its countless magnificent secrets. The Apostle relies on the long biblical tradition that sees humanity as the interpreter of the praise that all creation raises to its Lord, nature, living beings, and all the elements of the whole world, including time and space.

The biblical writers, women and men who followed each other over the centuries, used many literary forms to talk about the world and its creatures, as they were known, of course, in their time. They expressed themselves poetically, with psalms or hymns, songs and doxologies, personifications and stories, but always with a gaze of faith, with awe and gratitude for the goodness of all that God called into existence through the power of his Word. For this reason, all creation is imprinted with the Word of the Creator and manifests something of divine glory and its infinite beauty, something of its tender and innocent love, something of its wisdom and intelligence, which pervades the whole, uniting harmoniously in one silent symphony of multifaceted life!

But the creative activity of God is not yet finished, for the Creator Father has never ceased to be present in the world and in the history of humanity, giving life and hope, guiding the destiny of nations and preparing for them a marvelous future, a world with new heavens and a new earth. In all the major events in the history of Israel (the promise to the patriarchs, the liberation from Egypt, the kings, the prophetic preaching, the exile, the return, the messianic hope, the study of the word by the sages) we perceive the presence of God and the initiative God has undertaken to make these events happen. We can therefore say that the water of God's grace flows in the river of human history. It is with immense love, paternal pedagogy, and maternal sweetness that he progressively reveals, through facts and words, his plan of salvation that involves the whole creation. Thus Isaiah describes the joy of the universe in the liberation of his people:

Raise a glad cry, you heavens – the LORD has acted!
Shout, you depths of the earth.

Break forth, mountains, into song,
 forest, with all your trees.
 For the LORD has redeemed Jacob,
 shows his glory through Israel. (Is 44:23)

The liberating intervention of the Lord makes history, despite the stubbornness and rebellion of humanity, a history of salvation, which will surely succeed because it depends on his eternal love, his infinite power, and his proven faithfulness. This is authentic Christian hope.

Though humanity turns away from God and wants to get rid of him, trying to take God's place and to possess the world, sowing war, hatred, and destruction in a continuous attempt to prevail over others, God continues to guide the world, bringing order from chaos, fertility from sterility, communion from solitude, and unity from division. He does this by choosing people, illuminating their hearts, distributing gifts and talents to them, and strengthening their will to do good. Throughout their history, God's people have nurtured their trust in the love of God and in the plan for salvation. It is Isaiah, once again, who revives this hope:

See, I am creating new heavens
 and a new earth;
 The former things shall not be remembered
 nor come to mind.
 Instead, shout for joy and be glad forever
 in what I am creating.
 Indeed, I am creating Jerusalem to be a joy
 and its people to be a delight. (Is 65:17-18)

Starting from the Paschal Mystery, in which all the light of God's power and faithful love shines, Paul can contemplate in hope the glorious end of history, with the participation of all creation. Sown in our hearts, it is

the dynamism of the kingdom that develops towards its fullness. Mixed with our humanity, it is the leaven of the Word that makes us act like a new creation. The Spirit help us to desire, to be actively engaged, and to await with perseverance the manifestation of the glory promised to the children of God.

Sister Earth, Pope Francis writes in *Laudato Si'* (n. 2),

now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her. We have come to see ourselves as her lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will. The violence present in our hearts, wounded by sin, is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and in all forms of life. This is why the earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor; she “groans in travail” (Rom 8:22).

A serious and proactive Christian critique of modern anthropocentrism, usurper of God’s creative role, destroyer of the communion between man and woman and of the peaceful relations between human communities and peoples, is the real concern of the Holy Father’s encyclical letter on creation. To reduce it to a generic invitation to protect nature and the planet is to empty it of its critical and constructive force, which comes from faith in Jesus Christ, center of the cosmos and of history. The renewing fulfillment of creation in the Passover of Jesus manifests how much care and love God pours upon his works, which he will never allow to fall into the void of the destruction by our sin.

And if the contemplation of nature is fascinating, it is even more enchanting to contemplate this story of salvation, the story of a divine love that never surrenders, that conquers our sin and makes us proclaim with joy: “The LORD has done great things for us; / Oh, how happy we were!” (Ps 126:3).

OCTOBER 30, 2019

Wednesday of the 30th Week of Ordinary Time

Weekday

Rom 8:26-30

Ps 13:4-6

Lk 13:22-30

It is the Holy Spirit who gathers us into the cry of all creation and of all humanity thirsting for salvation. Distracted by the daily concerns of life, we do not know what is really essential to ask. And so the Spirit nourishes in us the question and hope of the true good that God has prepared for us. The Christian opens her heart to the Spirit, who transforms the entire universe's thirst for salvation into urgent invocation and expectation. The Father will not impose himself as a necessary solution, but he will fulfill this powerful desire of our hearts, which is like a long-awaited meeting of love. Created with such a longing, its satisfaction happens through invocation and free adhesion.

Our sin and our death are brought by the Holy Spirit into the divine communion of the Father and the Son. God, in his infinite and superabundant love, burns up within himself every form of evil, brings it back to its creaturely origin of good and truth, opening the door of salvation for all. "For those who stand by Jesus, evil is an incentive to ever greater love," Pope Francis wrote in his Message for World Mission Day 2018. Salvation, the fruit of Christ's victory on the cross thanks to the Easter of resurrection, becomes the content, the motive, the endpoint, and the method of every missionary commitment of his Church sent into the world.

Are there few who are saved (see Lk 13:23)? This was a very controversial question in Jesus' day and, perhaps, even today. And will we, whether

simple or great, be among the blessed? The theme of salvation is central to Luke and is in the foreground in his Gospel. In fact, it is present even in the stories of Jesus' childhood: in the Magnificat, Mary rejoices in the Lord, whom she calls her savior (see Lk 1:47); to the shepherds, the angel announces, "Today in the city of David a savior has been born for you" (Lk 2:11); he is the "horn for our salvation" warmly welcomed by Zechariah in his Canticle, for he came to save his people from their enemies and to bring them the forgiveness of sins (see Lk 1:7-79). Jesus himself is the salvation that Luke announces with joy in his Gospel, the "a light for revelation to the Gentiles" (see Lk 2:32), as he likes to call him, citing Isaiah (Is 42:6; 49:6). This title corresponds perfectly to the new dawn of humanity, which begins when "the daybreak from on high" appears (Lk 1:78).

Human life is exposed to many threats: time, sickness, discrimination, oppression, hunger, death. Did Jesus have the power to save humanity? Paradoxically, Jerusalem closed her eyes so as not to see its light and the signs of God's salvation. These signs, in fact, were present in the evangelizing work of Jesus, as Luke emphasizes by using the term "save" even when referring to physical healing, as in the case of the woman who suffered from hemorrhages ("Daughter, your faith has saved you; go in peace," Lk 8:48), the leper ("Stand up and go; your faith has saved you," Lk 17:19), the blind man of Jericho ("Have sight; your faith has saved you," Lk 18:42), and the daughter of Jairus ("Do not be afraid; just have faith and she will be saved," Lk 8:50).

This characteristic is found in two other episodes: in the case of the forgiven sinner, to whom Jesus says, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace" (Lk 7:50) and in the conversion of the rich and corrupt Zacchaeus, after which Jesus says, "Today salvation has come to this house because this man too is a descendant of Abraham" (Lk 19:9). All these signs, however, require that the sick person, the sinner, and each person open themselves in faith to the ultimate dimension of salvation. Cures reveal the integral salvation brought by Jesus and accomplished in his Paschal Mystery. So the evangelist

speaks of a salvation that requires a change in the heart; repentance and conversion are necessary, accepting the Good News.

Jesus' response to the person who questions him on whether only a few people will be saved is remarkably complete and revealing, while opening a window on the horizon of human history. The Lord uses the metaphor of the narrow door to indicate the challenge facing those who want to enter into the promised salvation and the parable of the banquet of the kingdom to designate the criteria that allow the guests to enter the house of God.

To those who declare, "We ate and drank in your company and you taught in our streets" (Lk 13:26), the "master of the house" replies, twice, that he does not know where they come from. It is a terrible and unexpected condemnation against those who practice injustice with the claim of being his own and to have the right to salvation. The urgency of conversion in the "today" of our life is made clear in an extremely dramatic way. Many rich people have found Jesus, listened to his preaching, talked with him, and even invited him to dinner at home. But how many of them have accepted his request for conversion and solidarity with the poor, as did Zacchaeus?

The parable warns about the end result of the life choice of the insensitive and corrupt rich. "Woe to you who are rich" (Lk 6:24), Jesus had warned. Alerted, then, to the danger of wealth, which can prevent entry into the kingdom, the listeners ask, "Lord, will only a few people be saved?" The evangelist leaves no room for ambiguity. Those who imagine that the mere knowledge of the historical Jesus and his doctrine, or participation in his meals and liturgical practices, are a guarantee of salvation, even if they live in the sins of rejecting God, corruption, exploitation, or any kind of injustice, are very deceived. There is no compatibility between lack of faith, injustice, and salvation. All are called, Jews and pagans, but for all there is the same need to go through the narrow door. The violation of justice and human rights can close to us the door of the kingdom. The doorway is narrow, but it has not been closed yet. The door may yet be narrow

(see Lk 13:24), but since Christ himself is the door of the Father (see Jn 10:7,9), the hope of being able to enter and be saved becomes stronger.

Luke warns us that this also applies to Christians. In fact, the title “Lord” given to Jesus in the parable is used only by those who recognize the saving power of this name. Jesus’ warning is therefore also addressed to the ecclesial community, so that it does not make the mistake of presuming the guarantee of election, rather than following Jesus on the path of faith, hope, love, and justice. The rule remains valid: even those who are far from home, the last ones, the marginalized, the sinners, those of different culture and religion can become, with the practice of love and justice, the guests of honor at the feast of the kingdom.



Baptised
and sent

October
2019

OCTOBER 31, 2019

Thursday of the 30th Week of Ordinary Time

Weekday

Rom 8:31b-39

Ps 109:21-22,26-27,30-31

Lk 13:31-35

As we approach the end of the liturgical year, the word of God accompanies us in the ascent of Jesus to Jerusalem, where the Lord will celebrate his “exodus,” that is, the Paschal Mystery of his death and resurrection. He had already encountered and bravely overcome many obstacles and dangers along the way, from the attempt of his fellow citizens of Nazareth to push him down from the top of the hill to the threat of death by Herod Antipas. Being sought by Herod in Galilee is just another persecution, and it will not be the last. Knowing that something even more terrible is waiting for him further on, in the holy city, confirming the sad tradition of the impiety of Jerusalem, Jesus does not turn away. No threat can prevent him from moving forward to face the appointed day or make his determination falter in carrying out the plan of salvation that the Father entrusted to him.

Many prophets and righteous men had already denounced in Samaria and Jerusalem the sins and crimes of the political and religious authorities of Israel. Almost all those who were sent suffered persecution and death. The murder of John the Baptist was only the latest in a long series of crimes committed.

Jesus does not need revelations or extraordinary visions to know what would happen if he interfered with the powerful of the city of Jerusalem, the city of the Lord God, the great King; the city that belonged to him by right, as the Alleluia verse proclaims: “Blessed is the king who comes

in the name of the Lord” (Lk 19:38). He came in peace, full of maternal tenderness to gather and save his children, like a hen protects its nest under its wings. He came to forgive and save his people, despite the many sin of the past. All that is needed from them, and from all of us, is the fruit of a sincere conversion – the practice of faith in God and justice.

But what if the conversion does not happen? What if he were rejected and persecuted like the prophets? And if his audacity would lead to stoning or death on a cross, would it be worth it? Why should anyone take this risk and put his life in the hands of notoriously corrupt and cruel men? The apostle Paul has only one answer: because of the power of his love for us. Everything, absolutely everything that God could have done to show us his love, he did by sending us his Son. How can we still doubt God’s saving love, after all that his Son has done for us sinners?

The Book of Wisdom already prophesied the final victory of the righteous for the love of God and of his eternal fidelity, saying: “If to others, indeed, they seem punished, yet is their hope full of immortality” (Wis 3:4). What the sage proclaimed is that the righteous who undergo trials are found worthy of God because they trust in his love until the end, until death. Therefore, it is not in earthly prosperity or in being spared from tribulation that divine blessing and reward is manifested, but in the glory of eternal life, which is received by not having doubted his love and his promises, even in the most difficult trials.

Now that this experience has received confirmation and has become a reality in Christ, Paul cannot contain the voice of the Spirit that cries in his heart, raising his song of praise to the unspeakable mystery of God’s love for us. His hymn, full of intense lyricism, which we hear in the first reading, is perhaps the most poetic synthesis of the Gospel of God, the Gospel of his Son, the Gospel of Christ, the Good News announced by the Apostle to all, Jews and pagans, with unswerving determination and untiring dedication, so that everyone can be fruitful in salvation through the obedience of faith. This hymn provides Paul’s answer to Jesus’ question to the disciples, “Who

do you say that I am?” Jesus is the Son of God who gave himself for all of us, the living proof, eternally shining, of the incorruptible love of God the Father for all of us, for all of humanity, and for all of creation.

Pope Francis writes:

This transmission of the faith, the heart of the Church’s mission, comes about by the infectiousness of love, where joy and enthusiasm become the expression of a newfound meaning and fulfilment in life. The spread of the faith “by attraction” calls for hearts that are open and expanded by love. It is not possible to place limits on love, for love is strong as death (cf. Song 8:6). And that expansion generates encounter, witness, proclamation; it generates sharing in charity with all those far from the faith, indifferent to it and perhaps even hostile and opposed to it. Human, cultural and religious settings still foreign to the Gospel of Jesus and to the sacramental presence of the Church represent the extreme peripheries, the “ends of the earth”, to which, ever since the first Easter, Jesus’ missionary disciples have been sent, with the certainty that their Lord is always with them (cf. Mt 28:20; Acts 1:8). This is what we call the *missio ad gentes*. The most desolate periphery of all is where mankind, in need of Christ, remains indifferent to the faith or shows hatred for the fullness of life in God. All material and spiritual poverty, every form of discrimination against our brothers and sisters, is always a consequence of the rejection of God and his love. (Message for World Mission Day 2018)

Christ is the love that dwells forever in us and awakens those who sleep in the sleep of death, the love that is with us from the beginning of our story until the end of time and beyond, that descends into the depths and enters the heavens, that saves us from all fear and slavery and from every enemy and oppressor, that liberates us in the glory of life in communion. He is the love that strengthens us, makes us confident, audacious, invincible, not only towards human and visible enemies, but also before invisible spirits, because God is with us. The accusation against us has been withdrawn; sin

has been forgiven; love has conquered hatred; injustice has been defeated. Affliction and anguish have received their consolation; the abyss has been leveled and the heights have descended towards us; death has given way to life and time has opened its doors to eternity. In his Son Jesus, the love and fidelity of the God of life have been demonstrated. Now, nothing and nobody can ever separate us from this Love. The time has also come for us to raise our voices with joy, saying, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” – he who comes for our salvation.



HOMILIES AND ANGELUS REFLECTIONS OF POPE FRANCIS¹

October 1, 2019

Morning meditation in the Chapel of the *Domus Sanctae Marthae*
“The humility and strength of the Gospel,” Tuesday, October 1, 2013

October 2, 2019

Morning meditation in the Chapel of the *Domus Sanctae Marthae*
“The angel and the child,” Friday, October 2, 2015

October 3, 2019

Morning meditation in the Chapel of the *Domus Sanctae Marthae*
“The joy of Christian memory,” Thursday, October 3, 2013

October 4, 2019

Morning meditation in the Chapel of the *Domus Sanctae Marthae*
“The grace of penitence,” Friday, October 6, 2017

October 5, 2019

Morning meditation in the Chapel of the *Domus Sanctae Marthae*
“The strength of the little ones,” Tuesday, November 29, 2016

October 6, 2019

Apostolic Journey to Georgia and Azerbaijan (September 30 - October 2,

¹ Meditations by Pope Francis on the Lectionary readings of the days of October 2019 can be found in the following preaching and teaching (2013-2018). The texts can all be found on the website www.vatican.va.

2016), Mass in the Church of the Immaculate, Homily of the Holy Father, Sunday, October 2, 2016

October 7, 2019

Morning meditation in the Chapel of the *Domus Sanctae Marthae*
“Those who pass others by,” Monday, October 9, 2017 [missing from the English version of the Vatican website]

October 8, 2019

Morning meditation in the Chapel of the *Domus Sanctae Marthae*
“Mercy first and foremost,” Tuesday, October 6, 2015

October 9, 2019

General Audience, St. Peter’s Square, Wednesday, October 9, 2013

October 10, 2019

Morning meditation in the Chapel of the *Domus Sanctae Marthae*
“Courageous prayer,” Thursday, October 10, 2013

October 11, 2019

Morning meditation in the Chapel of the *Domus Sanctae Marthae*
“Vigilant against worldliness,” Friday, October 13, 2017

October 12, 2019

Apostolic Letter *Maximum Illud* of Pope Benedict XV

October 13, 2019

Mass, Homily of the Holy Father, St. Peter’s Square, Sunday, October 13, 2013

October 14, 2019

Morning meditation in the Chapel of the *Domus Sanctae Marthae*
“The Jonah Syndrome,” Monday, October 14, 2013

October 15, 2019

Morning meditation in the Chapel of the *Domus Sanctae Marthae*
“Love of God and neighbour conquers idolatry and hypocrisy,”
Tuesday, October 15, 2013

October 16, 2019

General Audience, St. Peter’s Square, Wednesday, October 16, 2013

October 17, 2019

Morning meditation in the Chapel of the *Domus Sanctae Marthae*
“Disciples of the Lord and not of ideology,” Thursday, October 17, 2013

October 18, 2019

Morning meditation in the Chapel of the *Domus Sanctae Marthae*
“The eve of the Apostle’s life,” Friday, October 18, 2013

October 19, 2019

General Audience, Paul VI Audience Hall, Wednesday, December 28, 2016

October 20, 2019

Mass, Homily of the Holy Father, St. Peter’s Square, Sunday, October 16, 2016

October 21, 2019

Morning meditation in the Chapel of the *Domus Sanctae Marthae*
“How and how much,” Monday, October 19, 2015

October 22, 2019

Morning meditation in the Chapel of the *Domus Sanctae Marthae*
“Contemplation, closeness, abundance,” Tuesday, October 22, 2013

October 23, 2019

Angelus, St. Peter’s Square, Sunday, August 11, 2013

October 24, 2019

Morning meditation in the Chapel of the *Domus Sanctae Marthae*
“Log of before and after,” Thursday, October 24, 2013

October 25, 2019

Morning meditation in the Chapel of the *Domus Sanctae Marthae*
“The grace of being ashamed,” Friday, October 25, 2013

October 26, 2019

Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, Introduction, Section III,
“The new evangelization for the transmission of the faith”

October 27, 2019

Mass, Homily of the Holy Father, St. Peter’s Square, Sunday, October 27,
2013

October 28, 2019

Morning meditation in the Chapel of the *Domus Sanctae Marthae*
“A special day,” Monday, October 28, 2013

October 29, 2019

Morning meditation in the Chapel of the *Domus Sanctae Marthae*
“If pastoral care lacks courage,” Tuesday, October 31, 2017

October 30, 2019

Angelus, St. Peter’s Square, Sunday, August 25, 2013

October 31, 2019

Morning meditation in the Chapel of the *Domus Sanctae Marthae*
“Like a mother hen,” Thursday, October 29, 2015