



Theme for World Mission Sunday 2021

***“We cannot keep from speaking about
what we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:20)***



**Meditations on the Biblical Readings
of the Holy Mass of the Missionary Month**

October 2021

(prepared by the community of Trappist nuns of Vitorchiano - Italy
at the request of the Pontifical Missionary Union)



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For further information on the figure of Venerable Pauline Jaricot:

<http://paulinejaricot.opm-france.org/>

MASSON Catherine, *Pauline Jaricot, 1799-1862 Biographie*, Les Éditions du Cerf, Paris, 2019

FOREWARD

After the positive experience of the Extraordinary Missionary Month October 2019 (EMM OCT2019) with the theme "**Baptized and Sent: The Church of Christ on mission in the world**", some national directorates of the Pontifical Mission Societies (PMS) have suggested that each year the International Secretariat of the Pontifical Missionary Union (PMU) should develop an instrument for prayer and missionary formation through commentaries and meditations on the biblical readings proposed in the daily Celebration of the Liturgy of the Eucharist during the Missionary Month of October. These reflections for the Missionary Month October 2021, only available digitally in English, Italian, Spanish, French and Portuguese, represent a first attempt to respond to these suggestions. I would also like to thank all the national directorates who collaborated on the various translations.

It is above all a working tool, not an exhaustive text or established theological spiritual reflections. The reference is the Word of God proclaimed in the Liturgy and prayed in the personal and community meditation.

Given to the diverse English liturgical books used in English speaking countries, the native English-speaking translator referred to the daily readings offered by the Lectionary for the Sundays in Ordinary Time of Year B and by the Lectionary for weekdays of the odd-numbered years for the month of October of the year 2021, approved by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. Each local Church should refer to Biblical Readings taken from the Liturgical Lectionaries approved by its own National Bishops' Conference.

Its aim is that of making witnesses of the faith, moved by the mission entrusted to each of them by Jesus. Letting ourselves be inspired, supported by their intercessory prayer for all of us, represents a true experience of communion and holiness for the mission. These writings, texts and reflections reflect the Christian life of ordinary holiness of men and women who have been converted and transformed thanks to their vocation and mission in the Church. The teaching of the shepherds, mentioned here, is an indication of how faith can change one's life, giving it meaning and filling it with happiness and fulfillment. Furthermore, the Wednesday catechesis (2006-2012) by Pope Benedict XVI on the life of the saints (<http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences.html>) and the spiritual missionary comments to the biblical readings of weekdays (Odd Year) in the EMMOCT2019 GUIDE PART ONE (http://www.october2019.va/content/dam/october2019/documenti/la-guida-mmsott2019/DEF_WEB_Interno_Mese_Missionario - ING_v6-1.pdf) can still help us to pray and meditate on God's Word offered to us in the Liturgy of the month of October 2021.

It was not intended to lay out learned exegetical or theological reflections whose linear, logical development could guarantee a complete path to be repeated. We preferred to offer ideas for personal reflection and community work starting from concrete lives and texts, perhaps little known, of ordinary Christians who testify to the work of the Risen Lord in their lives of faith, charity, and martyrdom. In this text, the emphasis is on Christian witness. This manifests the efficacy of God's Word which is proclaimed, meditated, celebrated and lived in the Eucharist and in charity. *"Just so, your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father"* (Mt 5:16).

Pope Francis writes in this regard in his Message to the PMS on the Solemnity of the Ascension on May 21, 2020: *“In every human context witnesses are those who vouch for what someone else has done. In this sense, and only in this sense, can we be witnesses of Christ and his Spirit. As described in the conclusion of the Gospel of Mark, after the Ascension the apostles and disciples “went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the word through accompanying signs” (16:20). By his Spirit, Christ testifies to himself through the works that he fulfils in and with us. As Saint Augustine explains, the Church would not pray to the Lord to ask that faith be given to those who do not know Christ unless she believed that it is God himself who directs and draws our wills towards himself. The Church would not make her children pray to the Lord to persevere in the faith of Christ if she did not believe that it is the Lord himself who possesses our hearts. Indeed, if she asked him for these things, but thought that she could give them to herself, it would mean that all her prayers would be empty words, rote formulas or platitudes imposed by ecclesiastical custom rather than authentic prayer (cf. On the Gift of Perseverance. To Prosper and Hilary, 23, 63)”*.

Furthermore, the testimonies of prayer and charity of so many of our brothers and sisters from such different places and times make us relive the context of ecclesial communion. This communion gives us an ordinary sense of the faith of the People of God, in which the PMS also finds their charismatic inspiration and their organizational strength as an institution. *“The founders of the Mission Societies, beginning with Pauline Jaricot, did not invent the prayers and works to which they entrusted their hopes for the proclamation of the Gospel. They simply drew them from the infinite treasury of those familiar and habitual gestures of the People of God on its pilgrimage through history.”* (Pope Francis, Message to the Pontifical Mission Societies, 21 May 2020).

These reflections are the result of the prayer, mission, work and charity of the Sisters called to cloistered monastic life according to the Rule of St. Benedict in the Trappist Monastery of Vitorchiano (Viterbo, Italy, www.trappistevitorchiano.it/la-comunita.asp). At the invitation of the PUM International Secretariat, starting from January 2020, the Nuns began to pray and elaborate these texts, uniting themselves through prayer and their own work to the PMS national directorates in the particular Churches to which they belong. The involvement of monastic communities scattered all over the world, thanks to future collaborations with local PMS national directorates, will allow us to develop renewed ways of praying, working and forming missionaries in favor of the universal work of evangelization. A true path for the PMS within an ever tighter communion of charisms and institutions for the mission that Jesus entrusted to her, and whose protagonist remains the Holy Spirit alone.

Vatican City, November 21, 2020

Fr. Fabrizio Meroni
PMU Secretary General
CIAM and Fides Director

October 1, 2021

Friday, 26th Week in Ordinary Time

Memory of Saint Teresa of the Child Jesus, virgin, doctor of the Church, patroness of the Missions

Bar 1:15-22

Ps 79

Lk 10:13-16

On this first day of the missionary Month, the Eucharistic celebration in the Liturgy of the Word proposes very severe texts, which describe ancient realities, yet of disconcerting relevance. Jesus, who has just chosen seventy-two other disciples and sent them on a mission, already foresees the indifference or even refusal of many in the wake of preaching of the Kingdom of God:

Jesus said to them: "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty deeds done in your midst had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would long ago have repented, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. But it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment than for you. And as for you, Capernaum, 'Will you be exalted to heaven? You will go down to the netherworld.' Whoever listens to you listens to me. Whoever rejects you rejects me. And whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me."

In the first reading we meditate on the words that are attributed to the prophet Baruch, a disciple of Jeremiah, who lived at the time of the Babylonian captivity, six centuries before Christ. He too had noted with pain the consequences of sin throughout the kingdom of Judah:

"Justice is with the Lord, our God; and we today are flushed with shame, we men of Judah and citizens of Jerusalem, that we, with our kings and rulers and priests and prophets, and with our ancestors, have sinned in the Lord's sight and disobeyed him. We have neither heeded the voice of the Lord, our God, nor followed the precepts which the Lord set before us. From the time the Lord led our ancestors out of the land of Egypt until the present day, we have been disobedient to the Lord, our God, and only too ready to disregard his voice. And the evils and the curse that the Lord enjoined upon Moses, his servant, at the time he led our ancestors forth from the land of Egypt to give us the land flowing with milk and honey, cling to us even today. For we did not heed the voice of the Lord, our God, in all the words of the prophets whom he sent us, but each one of us went off after the devices of his own wicked heart, served other gods, and did evil in the sight of the Lord, our God."

The reality of sin, disobedience, and indifference is a constant in the history of mankind, and in our own personal history. These biblical texts, which remind us of it, help to place believers in the right position before God and neighbor: we are all sinners, we all continually need redemption and salvation.

The responsorial psalm, 79, is a cry that invokes this salvation: the holy city has been destroyed, the temple desecrated. To whom can we turn, whom should we call upon? The psalmist knows well that

only God can save his people and therefore starts to argue with him, to make him change his disposition so as obtain mercy:

O God, the nations have come into your inheritance; they have defiled your holy temple; they have laid Jerusalem in ruins. They have given the corpses of your servants as food for the birds of heaven, the flesh of your faithful ones to the beasts of the earth.

They have poured out their blood like water round about Jerusalem, and there is no one to bury them. We have become the reproach of our neighbors, the scorn and derision of those around us. O Lord, how long? Will you be angry forever? Will your jealousy burn like fire? Remember not against us the iniquities of the past; may your compassion quickly come to us, for we are brought very low.

Help us, O God our savior, because of the glory of your name; deliver us and pardon our sins for your name's sake.

Believers know well that without God's help we are all poor, alone, lost, helpless, unhappy. Every man seeks happiness and awaits salvation, but our strength alone is insufficient to obtain it. The humble awareness of this impotence and this need opens us up to welcoming it and enjoying it. We are sinners, it is true, but forgiven sinners. Christ has redeemed us. *God wills everyone to be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth.* (1 Tm 2:4).

The gratitude and joy of freely having received and continuing to receive salvation transform the heart and life of every baptized person, making him eager to transmit the gift that he has received to others. In turn, they too can recognize themselves as children of God, destined for eternal life, and thus become missionaries, heralds of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The commitment to proclaim Christ, Redeemer and Savior, is therefore a service rendered not only to the Christian community, but also to all mankind, which can freely, if it wishes, welcome the good news, the Gospel of Christ the Lord, who became man for us and for our salvation. No believer can escape the duty to announce the salvation wrought by Christ, each one in the form and extent of his particular vocation and condition in the world. When we do not feel this desire in us, we should question the authenticity and stability of our own life of faith.

Love pushes us to communicate the beauty and truth of salvation in a thousand different ways, through life's witness, through words, through silence, through gestures, through prayer, in daily relationships, in the simplicity of love and friendship. If love is true, it is recognized by the fruit it bears.

Today we celebrate the liturgical memory of Saint Teresa of the Child Jesus, who is the patroness of the missions alongside the great apostle Saint Francis Xavier.

Teresa, a young Carmelite nun, had never left the narrow space of her Carmel of Lisieux, but she knew well that her hidden life was for the sake of the Kingdom, for the sake of the coming of the Kingdom, of its growth and expansion. She knew that the first land in need of conversion was her heart and that the life she had embraced, with its demands of faith, prayer, and oftentimes challenging fraternal communion, had a mysterious apostolic fruitfulness. She aspired to possess all the charisms that St. Paul describes in the first letter to the Corinthians, but alas finding the more perfect way – that of charity:

Strive eagerly for the greatest spiritual gifts. But I shall show you a still more excellent way. If I speak in human and angelic tongues but do not have love, I am a resounding gong or a clashing cymbal. And if I have the gift of prophecy and comprehend all mysteries and all knowledge; if I have all faith so as to move mountains but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away everything I own, and if I hand my body over so that I may boast but do not have love, I gain nothing. (1 Cor 12:31-13:3).

The young nun surveyed the various functions existing in the Church, yet did not identify herself with any of them:

When I had looked upon the mystical body of the Church, I recognized myself in none of the members which St. Paul described, and what is more, I desired to distinguish myself more favorably within the whole body. Love appeared to me to be the hinge for my vocation. Indeed I knew that the Church had a body composed of various members, but in this body the necessary and more noble member was not lacking; I knew that the Church had a heart and that such a heart appeared to be aflame with love. I knew that one love drove the members of the Church to action, that if this love were extinguished, the apostles would have proclaimed the Gospel no longer, the martyrs would have shed their blood no more. I saw and realized that love sets off the bounds of all vocations, that love is everything, that this same love embraces every time and every place. In one word, that love is everlasting. Then, nearly ecstatic with the supreme joy in my soul, I proclaimed: O Jesus, my love, at last I have found my calling: my call is love. Certainly I have found my place in the Church, and you gave me that very place, my God. In the heart of the Church, my mother, I will be love, and thus I will be all things, as my desire finds its direction (Manuscrits autobiographiques, Lisieux 1957, pp.227-229, from The Liturgy of the Hours © 1973, 1974, 1975, ICEL).

But life on earth was not enough for the Carmelite saint to love Jesus and make him loved, and thus she wrote in her last letter to Father Adolphe Roulland of the Foreign Missions of Paris (MEP), a missionary in China:

I really count on not remaining inactive in heaven. My desire is to work still for the Church and for souls (Letter 254, July 14, 1897, from the Archives du Carmel de Lisieux).

During her last illness she often returned to express her conviction that the authenticity of our love for God manifests itself in the quality of our love for others, and she continued to prepare herself for this universal mission, without time or boundary:

God would not have given me the desire of doing good on earth after my death, if He didn't will to realize it; He would rather have given me the desire to rest in Him (Last Conversations, The "Yellow Notebook" of Mother Agnes, July 18, 1897).

A few weeks later she expressed herself as follows:

As long as you are in irons, you cannot carry out your mission; but later on, after your death, this will be the time for your works and your conquests (Last Conversations, The “Yellow Notebook” of Mother Agnes, August 10, 1897).

On December 14, 1927, Pius XI declared St. Therese of the Child Jesus the universal patron of the missions, giving her the same title as St. Francis Xavier. Consequently, she was given a place in the liturgy, and although it aroused much surprise, a more appropriate choice than this has never been made.

October 2, 2021

Saturday, 26th Week in Ordinary Time

Memorial of the Guardian Angels

Bar 4:5-12,27-29

Ps 69

Lk 10:17-24

The main theme of the texts of today's celebration is consolation, whose fruit is joy: the prophet Baruch, who had announced to the people their sins, their departure from God and the consequent punishment, now becomes a messenger of consolation and hope:

Fear not, my people! Remember, Israel, you were sold to the nations not for your destruction; it was because you angered God that you were handed over to your foes. For you provoked your Maker with sacrifices to demons, to no-gods; you forsook the Eternal God who nourished you, and you grieved Jerusalem who fostered you. She indeed saw coming upon you the anger of God; and she said: "Hear, you neighbors of Zion! God has brought great mourning upon me, for I have seen the captivity that the Eternal God has brought upon my sons and daughters. With joy I fostered them; but with mourning and lament I let them go. Let no one gloat over me, a widow, bereft of many: for the sins of my children I am left desolate, because they turned from the law of God. Fear not, my children; call out to God! He who brought this upon you will remember you. As your hearts have been disposed to stray from God, turn now ten times the more to seek him; for he who has brought disaster upon you will, in saving you, bring you back enduring joy."

The responsorial psalm is a hymn of jubilation for the consolation that God, in his mercy, offers to the poor:

"See, you lowly ones, and be glad; you who seek God, may your hearts revive! For the Lord hears the poor, and his own who are in bonds he spurn not. Let the heavens and the earth praise him, the seas and whatever moves in them!" For God will save Zion, and rebuild the cities of Judah. They shall dwell in the land and own it, and the descendants of his servants shall inherit it, and those who love his name shall inhabit it.

God knows well that the fragility of the human heart makes it impossible for his children to live unless there is hope and joy. Therefore, he gives orders to his messengers to bring them words of encouragement, alternating reproaches with invitations to rejoice. He invites them to contemplate a future of well-being and peace, which is only a foreshadowing of the salvation and of the eternal joy when the saved will enter into the fullness of Trinitarian joy wherein God will be all in all.

In the beautiful passage from Luke's Gospel, Jesus participates in the joy of the seventy-two disciples who return triumphant from the mission and who, with naive pride, tell him of their victory over the demons. He certainly shares the happiness of his people because, in his name, the

defeat of the demons has also begun through them. He then he immediately affirms his victory over evil and the power that he has given to his disciples to overcome the adversary's craftiness:

The seventy [-two] disciples returned rejoicing, and said to Jesus, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us because of your name." Jesus said, "I have observed Satan fall like lightning from the sky. Behold, I have given you the power 'to tread upon serpents' and scorpions and upon the full force of the enemy and nothing will harm you." (Lk 10:17-19).

But right after that, with great realism, he teaches them: he invites them back to the joy that can never be taken away from them. This is not joy of momentary success, of their affirmation, their adversary's submission, or of the suffering that will certainly come, but rather that joy that remains forever as a result of their names being written in heaven. What joy to find they are loved by God with an unfailing love, that they are already saved by his power, and that they are no longer foreigners or guests, but fellow citizens of the saints and members of God's family! United with Christ, who became their brother in the Incarnation, made sons and daughters in the Son, they have the privilege of participating in his very mission, in the mission that the Father has given to the Son, though not void of failure, pain or death – just as it was for him:

Nevertheless, do not rejoice because the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice because your names are written in heaven (Lk 10:20).

There follows a magnificent scene, in which Jesus presents himself to the disciples in all the beauty of his divine humanity: he testifies to the infinite love he has for the Father and, at the same time, the patient and merciful love he has for his disciples, the tenderness with which he looks at them in their fragility and weakness:

At that very moment he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, "I give you praise, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned you have revealed them to the childlike. Yes, Father, such has been your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father. No one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son wishes to reveal him." (Lk 10:21-22).

We Christians, to whom this revelation has been granted, have the task of continuing the Son's mission and conforming ourselves to him, according to the vocation we have each received. Our task includes accepting with felicity all sufferings intertwined with joy that every human existence entails, rooted in Baptism and therefore saved, fruit of Christ's resurrection.

The motive for this great hope, security and joy in the success of such a simple, yet so difficult a task, is the fact that from the beginning until the hour of death, human life is surrounded by the protection and intercession of angels (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 336). True missionaries to humanity, angels announce the great mysteries of salvation, travel alongside us through difficulties, fight with the devil – and overcome him. They are a concrete sign of God's concern for our daily life, with its regular worries, whether small or large, and its everyday joys and sufferings.

As Pope Francis writes in his *Message to the Pontifical Mission Societies of May 21, 2020*, God is near to us in our life “in progress”, he makes himself close to us in our everyday endeavors, our affections and our needs. He takes care of us concretely.

“Jesus met his first disciples on the shore of the Sea of Galilee while they were focused on their work. He did not meet them at a convention, a training workshop, or in the Temple. It has always been the case that the proclamation of Jesus’ salvation reaches people right where they are and just how they are in the midst of their lives in progress. Amid the needs, hopes and problems of everyday life we find the place where one who has acknowledged the love of Christ and received the gift of the Holy Spirit can offer an account of his or her faith, hope, and charity to those who ask for it. By journeying together with others, alongside everyone. Especially given the times in which we live, this has nothing to do with designing “specialized” training programs, creating parallel worlds, or constructing “slogans” that merely echo our own thoughts and concerns. I have elsewhere spoken of those in the Church who proclaim loudly that “this is the hour of the laity”, while in the meantime the clock seems to have stopped”.

An angel’s presence near to each of us, sent by God to enlighten us, to guard us, to support us and to govern us, helps to ensure that we might reach safely that state of supreme and definitive happiness to which God calls us: life that will have no end, with Mary, the Angels and Saints, the vision of God “face to face”, the communion of love with the Holy Trinity (cf. *Compendium of the Catechism*, 209).

Therefore, given that each Christian has an angel at their side, as their protector and shepherd, on this second day of October, the Church invites us to remember our guardian angels, faithful servants and messengers of God, in carrying out their salvific mission for all mankind (cf. *Compendium of the Catechism*, 60-61).

Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, abbot and mystical theologian of the Cistercian monastic order, comments in a sermon on a phrase from Psalm 91: “*he commands his angels with regard to you, to guard you wherever you go.*” (Ps 91:11), helping us to reflect on who the angels are and inviting us to thank the Lord for his mercy and wonders towards the children of men:

Let them give thanks and say among the nations, the Lord has done great things for them. O Lord, what is man that you have made yourself known to him, or why do you incline your heart to him? And you do incline your heart to him; you show him your care and your concern. Finally, you send your only Son and the grace of your Spirit, and promise him a vision of your countenance.

And so, that nothing in heaven should be wanting in your concern for us, you send those blessed spirits to serve us, assigning them as our guardians and our teachers. “He has given his angels charge over you to guard you in all your ways.” These words should fill you with respect, inspire devotion and instill confidence; respect for the presence of angels, devotion because of their loving service, and confidence because of their protection. And so the angels are here; they are at your side, they are with you, present on your behalf. They are here to protect you and to serve you.

But even if it is God who has given them this charge, we must nonetheless be grateful to them for the great love with which they obey and come to help us in our great need. So let us be devoted and grateful to such great protectors; let us return their love and honor them as much as we can and should.

Yet all our love and honor must go to him, for it is from him that they receive all that makes them worthy of our love and respect.

We should then, my brothers, show our affection for the angels, for one day they will be our co-heirs just as here below they are our guardians and trustees appointed and set over us by the Father. [...]

With such protectors what have we to fear? They who keep us in all our ways cannot be overpowered or led astray, much less lead us astray. They are loyal, prudent, powerful. Why then are we afraid? We have only to follow them, stay close to them, and we shall dwell under the protection of God's heaven (Sermo 12 in psalmum Qui habitat, 3, 6-8; Opera omnia, Edit. Cisterc 4:[1966], 458-462)

We can only add to the words of the holy abbot of Clairvaux a practical exhortation: as far as it is granted to us by God and is possible, let us continue the mission of our heavenly messengers and let us also become 'angels' for our brothers and sisters. This concept lies amongst our simple faith and our everyday language when in fact, someone who performs a service of consolation, defense or accompaniment towards another or others is called an "angel". The angels and the saints are in fact the most successful missionaries.

October 3, 2021

Sunday, 27th Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year B

Gn 2:18-24

Ps 128

Heb 2:9-11

Mk 10:2-16

Through the readings of this first Sunday of October, we can pass through a synthesis of the whole history of salvation, be amazed by the beauty of the original design conceived by God, experience the drama of its failure continuing throughout the centuries even today, and also understand where and in whom we find our salvation.

The first reading, taken from the book of Genesis, takes us back to the Garden of Eden, where:

The man gave names to all the cattle, all the birds of the air, and all wild animals; but none proved to be the suitable partner for the man. So the Lord God cast a deep sleep on the man, and while he was asleep, he took out one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. The Lord God then built up into a woman the rib that he had taken from the man. When he brought her to the man, the man said: "This one, at last, is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called 'woman', for out of 'her man' this one has been taken." That is why a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and the two of them become one flesh.

The happy astonishment and ecstatic cry of Adam in front of Eve, often commented on by the Fathers of the Church, testifies to the beauty of diversity joined together in unity through love. Man and woman, in their difference and in the unity that their loving, fruitful relationship creates, are the created image of the invisible and eternal divine reality.

Psalm 128 sings this original beauty:

Blessed are you who fear the Lord, who walk in his ways! For you shall eat the fruit of your handiwork; blessed shall you be, and favored. Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine in the recesses of your home; your children like olive plants around your table.

Behold, thus is the man blessed who fears the Lord. The Lord bless you from Zion: may you see the prosperity of Jerusalem all the days of your life. May you see your children's children. Peace be upon Israel!

The fall, however, obscured this wonderful image of the family, united in spousal love, blessed with the gift of their children, made prosperous through tiring, yet satisfying and profitable work. Unfortunately, we know well all the consequences of sin: lust, oppression, division, hatred, sadness, and death.

In the Gospel, the Pharisees, religious men and experts of the Law, with their deceitful and hypocritical questions, manifestly show the separation of the integrity and original harmony of God's plan for man and woman, which has come about in the history of fallen humanity.

The Pharisees approached Jesus and asked, "Is it lawful for a husband to divorce his wife?" They were testing him. He said to them in reply, "What did Moses command you?" They replied, "Moses permitted a husband to write a bill of divorce and dismiss her." But Jesus told them, "Because of the hardness of your hearts he wrote you this commandment. But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'. So they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, no human being must separate."

In the house the disciples again questioned Jesus about this. He said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her; and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery." (Mk 10:2-12).

Jesus' words, so clear and demanding, are a light of truth illuminating the lie of sin, and they reverberate their condemnatory judgment upon the darkened, confused periods of humanity's long history. This is particularly relevant today in our narcissistic societies that are so incapable of mutual self-giving and stable relationships that the beauty of the sexual difference no longer gives rise to awe, joy and thanksgiving, but instead to division and oftentimes confusion. Let's read them as words of judgment so we may return, in truth, to who we are, as Jesus has conveyed with such clarity.

In the second reading the author of the letter to the Hebrews contemplates and explains in a few magnificent words the whole mystery of the Incarnation of the Word of God and the possibility of redemption and salvation.

Created by God and made sons and daughters in the Only Begotten Son who, in taking our flesh, suffering and dying for us has become our brother, we may – through faith and despite our misery – be led to glory:

Brothers and sisters:

He "for a little while" was made "lower than the angels," that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. For it was fitting that he, for whom and through whom all things exist, in bringing many children to glory, should make the leader to their salvation perfect through suffering. He who consecrates and those who are being consecrated all have one origin. Therefore, he is not ashamed to call them "brothers."

The images of returning to recompose the family of God, restoring lost innocence through Baptismal cleansing, and welcoming the kingdom of God as a child are also suggested in the final sentences of today's Gospel:

And people were bringing children to him that he might touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this he became indignant and said to them, "Let the children come to me; do not prevent them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these."

Amen, I say to you, whoever does not accept the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it." Then he embraced them and blessed them, placing his hands on them. (Mk 10:13-16)

Given that Baptism is the root of the missionary nature of the Church and of every Christian, evangelization carried out by Christian families is of fundamental importance. Parents have the responsibility and the privilege of evangelizing their children, through the daily witness of faith, in every moment of their life: from the simplest everyday choices to the most important and unique situations.

This year marks precisely the twentieth anniversary of the beatification of Luigi and Maria Beltrame Quattrocchi, the first married couple in the history of the Church to be beatified, by virtue of their ordinary holiness. Their spousal existence was a path of holiness, a journey towards God through their love for their spouse, becoming teachers and witnesses of the faith.

Pope John Paul II, in the homily of the Beatification Mass, on October 21, 2001, World Mission Sunday, said:

[...] The riches of faith and love of the husband and wife Luigi and Maria Beltrame Quattrocchi, are a living proof of what the Second Vatican Council said about the call of all the faithful to holiness, indicating that spouses should pursue this goal, "propriam viam sequentes", "following their own way" (Lumen gentium, n. 41). Today the aspiration of the Council is fulfilled with the first beatification of a married couple: their fidelity to the Gospel and their heroic virtues were verified in their life as spouses and parents.

In their life, as in the lives of many other married couples who day after day earnestly fulfil their mission as parents, one can contemplate the sacramental revelation of Christ's love for the Church. Indeed, "fulfilling their conjugal and family role by virtue of this sacrament, spouses are penetrated with the spirit of Christ and their whole life is permeated by faith, hope, and charity; thus they increasingly further their own perfection and their mutual sanctification, and together they render glory to God" (Gaudium et spes, n. 48).

Dear families, today we have distinctive confirmation that the path of holiness lived together as a couple is possible, beautiful, extraordinarily fruitful, and fundamental for the good of the family, the Church and society.

This prompts us to pray the Lord that there be many more married couples who can reveal in the holiness of their lives, the "great mystery" of spousal love, which originates in creation and is fulfilled in the union of Christ with his Church (cf. Eph 5:22-33).

Like every path of holiness, yours too, dear married couples, is not easy. Every day you face difficulties and trials, in order to be faithful to your vocation, to foster harmony between yourselves and between your children, to carry out your mission as parents and participate in social life.

May you be able to find in God's word the answer to the questions which arise in everyday life. [...]

Married and family life can also experience moments of bewilderment. We know how many families in these cases are tempted to discouragement. I am particularly referring to those who are going through the sad event of separation; I am thinking of those who must face illness and those who are suffering the premature death of their spouse or of a child. In

these situations, one can bear a great witness to fidelity in love, which is purified by having to pass through the crucible of suffering. [...]

At the same time, I ask all families to hold up the arms of the Church, so that she may never fail in her mission of interceding, consoling, guiding and encouraging. I thank you, dear families, for the support that you give to me in my service to the Church and to humanity. Every day I beg the Lord to help all the families suffering from poverty and injustice, and to advance the civilization of love.

Dear friends, the Church has confidence in you to confront the challenges that await her in the new millennium. Among the paths of her mission, "the family is the first and the most important" (Letter to Families, n. 2); the Church is counting on it and calling it to be "a true subject of evangelization and the apostolate" (ibid. n. 16).

I am certain that you will be equal to the task that awaits you in every place and on every occasion. Dear husbands and wives, I encourage you to embrace your role and your responsibilities. Renew your missionary zeal, making your homes privileged places for announcing and accepting the Gospel in an atmosphere of prayer and in the concrete exercise of Christian solidarity.

May the Holy Spirit, who filled Mary's heart so that, in the fullness of time, she might conceive the Word of life and welcome him, together with her husband Joseph, support you and confirm you. May he fill your hearts with joy and peace so that every day you may know how to praise the heavenly Father, from whom come every grace and blessing. Amen!

October 4, 2021

Monday, 27th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Memorial of St. Francis of Assisi, religious

Jon 1:1-2:1-2,11

Jon 2:3-5,8

Lk 10:25-37

Today we begin reading the prophet Jonah, which will continue for the next two days, such that we will cover the little book in its entirety. It is a didactic writing, full of irony towards the prophet and full of universalistic ideas, which mark an apex in the Old Testament writings. The Gospel, on the other hand, recounts the beautiful parable of the Good Samaritan.

The two texts, despite having been written in such different periods, have some common traits: they criticize the narrow theological vision of the ruling religious class, they clearly affirm the traits of true religion and they testify to the universality of salvation.

*The Lord Jesus sent his apostles to every person, people and place on earth. In the apostles, the Church received a universal mission – one which knows no boundaries – which involves the communication of salvation in its integrity according to that fullness of life which Christ came to bring (cf. Jn 10:10). The Church was "sent by Christ to reveal and communicate the love of God to all people and nations." This mission is one and undivided, having one origin and one final purpose; but within it, there are different tasks and kinds of activity. First, there is the missionary activity which we call mission ad gentes, in reference to the opening words of the Council's decree on this subject. This is one of the Church's fundamental activities: it is essential and never-ending. The Church, in fact, "cannot withdraw from her permanent mission of bringing the Gospel to the multitudes the millions and millions of men and women – who as yet do not know Christ the Redeemer of humanity. In a specific way this is the missionary work which Jesus entrusted and still entrusts each day to his Church" (John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio* n. 31, December 7, 1990).*

The biblical texts of Jonah and the Evangelist Luke, pervaded by the universality of divine mercy, are both full of movement and mission, escapes, journeys, returns, and of contrasts between those who do God's will and those who prefer their own.

This is the word of the Lord that came to Jonah, son of Amittai:

"Set out the great city of Nineveh, and preach against it; their wickedness has come up before me." But Jonah made ready to flee to Tarshish, away from the Lord. He went down to Joppa, found a ship going to Tarshish, paid the fare, and went aboard to journey with them to Tarshish, away from the Lord. (Jon 1:1-3).

Jonah opposes God's saving plan: he knows well that the Lord will look favorably on the signs of humility of the Ninevites, who also do not belong to the chosen people and are sinners. God will end up forgiving them at the first sign of their repentance. Jonah does not agree at all with this mercy, which he considers weakness. He then tries to escape to Tarshish, to the ends of the known world, deluding himself that he could thus flee from the Lord's will. One event follows another in rapid succession: the unleashing of the storm, the sailors' fear, the drawing of lots to know who was responsible for their misfortune, Jonah's confession. The sailors, compared to Jonah, appear deeply religious and determined to follow not their will, but that of the Lord:

Still the men rowed hard to regain the land, but they could not, for the sea grew ever more turbulent. Then they cried to the Lord: "We beseech you, O Lord, let us not perish for taking this man's life; do not charge us with shedding innocent blood, for you, Lord, have done as you saw fit." Then they took Jonah and threw him into the sea, and the sea's raging abated. Struck with great fear of the Lord, the men offered sacrifice and made vows to him. But the Lord sent a large fish, that swallowed Jonah; and Jonah remained in the belly of the fish three days and three nights. From the belly of the fish Jonah prayed to the Lord, his God. Then the Lord commanded the fish to spew Jonah upon the shore. (Jon 1:13-2:1-2,11).

Neither the sea nor the big fish can bear the narrow-mindedness of the disobedient prophet: at God's command, after three days, they spit him up on the beach. We know well that the Lord Jesus is not afraid to appropriate this fictional episode to make it a sign of his descent into hell and of his resurrection (cf. Mt 12:39-40).

The sacred author, through recounting Jonah's survival and preparatory actions, all dense with lessons to be learned, intertwines a stupendous poetic canticle of thanksgiving into the story.

The responsorial psalm of today's celebration of the Word offers us some verses from this canticle of the prophet who, in anguish and repentance, invokes God from the depths of the marine abyss and is heard by the Lord:

Out of my distress I called to the Lord, and he answered me; from midst of the nether world I cried for help, and you heard my voice. For you cast me into the deep, into the heart of the sea, and the flood enveloped me; all your breakers and your billows passed over me. Then I said, "I am banished from your sight! Yet would I again look upon your holy temple." When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the Lord; my prayer reached you in your holy temple.

Also in the Gospel there are scenes that express a lot of movement, symbolizing this earthly life's journey: a man who descends from Jerusalem to Jericho; the brigands who attack him and run away, leaving him half dead; the priest and the Levite who are also on a journey and pass him by; a Samaritan, who was travelling down that same road, helps the wounded man, takes him to an inn and leaves again, promising to return. In this journey – we have already seen it in Jonah – there are episodes and encounters that can make us understand the true meaning of life and of our bond with God and our brothers.

There are three moments in the Gospel passage where there also appear open criticism of the religious leaders of the people: at the beginning there is a doctor of the law who, "to put Jesus to the

test", asks him what he must do to have eternal life and then, "*wanting to justify himself*", he asks him: "*And who is my neighbor?*" In the parable that follows, told by Jesus, we find a priest and a Levite who, probably in order not to be contaminated with a poor wounded man's blood, fail precisely in their duty to help him, thus neglecting the true nucleus of the Law in order to comply with rules pertaining to their less important and transient purity. At the center of the story is the figure of the Samaritan, also traveling on his business who, having compassion, helps the unfortunate man who fell into the hands of the brigands, washes his wounds, loads him on his own mount and leads him to an inn. The Samaritan pays the hotelier, entrusting the wounded man to his care and promising him more money on his return to compensate him for his attentions to the wounded man. He is a Samaritan, therefore a foreigner, a man who the Jews considered a heretic.

The prickly question of the doctor of the Law: "*And who is my neighbor?*" indicates that in his mind and heart there was a clear distinction between neighbors and those considered strangers, co-religionists or not, as was the common religious mentality of the time. Jesus replies by reversing the question: it is you who must make yourself a neighbor to anyone in need, regardless of who is close to you by race, religion or culture. If you draw near to him, he will undoubtedly become "a neighbor" for you.

After this clear and precise reversal, Jesus sends the doctor of the Law, as God had done with Jonah, on a mission: "*Go and do the same*".

Many Fathers of the Church have seen Christ in the figure of the Samaritan, healing the wounds of humanity, caused by sin, and becoming a neighbor of our misery and unhappiness. The inn where He carries wounded humanity is the Church, which continues his work of salvation through preaching and the sacraments. Every Christian is called to take part in the salvific action of the Church, collaborating in the salvation of those who, near or far, need spiritual and material help, brotherly aid, love and closeness.

Today we commemorate Saint Francis of Assisi, the universal brother, the saint perhaps most similar to Christ, who with his witness of sweetness, love and poverty brought about a profound transformation in society, the Church of his time, and the universal Church.

The Franciscan Sources offer us many phrases from Francis that can comment on the texts we have meditated on and offer us ideas on how to offer the richness of the Gospel to our brothers near and far, through words and works:

[...] how happy and blessed are those who love the Lord and do as the Lord himself says in the Gospel: "You will love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul, and your neighbor as yourself". Let us therefore love God and adore him with a pure heart and a pure mind [...] (FF 186-187).

Let us also produce fruits worthy of penance. And let us love our neighbors as ourselves. And if one does not want to love them as oneself, at least do not harm them, but do good (FF 190).

The friars who go among the infidels can behave spiritually among them in two ways. One way is that they do not have quarrels or disputes, but are subject to every human creature for the love of God and confess that they are Christians. The other way is that when they see that it pleases the Lord, they proclaim the word of God so that they may believe in God almighty the Father and Son and Holy Spirit, Creator of all things, and in the Son the Redeemer and Savior, and be baptized, and let them become Christians [...] (FF 43).

In n. 34 of the encyclical *Lumen fidei*, the first of Pope Francis, but conceived and initially drafted by Pope Benedict XVI to complete the encyclicals he had already written on hope and charity (Pope Francis added "further contributions " to this initial draft), we read:

The light of love proper to faith can illumine the questions of our own time about truth. Truth nowadays is often reduced to the subjective authenticity of the individual, valid only for the life of the individual. A common truth intimidates us, for we identify it with the intransigent demands of totalitarian systems. But if truth is a truth of love, if it is a truth disclosed in personal encounter with the Other and with others, then it can be set free from its enclosure in individuals and become part of the common good.

As a truth of love, it is not one that can be imposed by force; it is not a truth that stifles the individual. Since it is born of love, it can penetrate to the heart, to the personal core of each man and woman. Clearly, then, faith is not intransigent, but grows in respectful coexistence with others.

One who believes may not be presumptuous; on the contrary, truth leads to humility, since believers know that, rather than ourselves possessing truth, it is truth which embraces and possesses us. Far from making us inflexible, the security of faith sets us on a journey; it enables witness and dialogue with all.

The witness one gives with their life and, *when they see that it pleases God*, the gentle, respectful proclamation of God's word, are therefore the fundamental elements of the mission.

October 5, 2021

Tuesday, 27th Week in Ordinary Time

Optional Memorial of Saint Maria Faustina Kowalska, apostle of Divine Mercy

Jon 3:1-10

Ps 130

Lk 10:38-42

The word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time: "Set out for the great city of Nineveh, and announce to it the message that I will tell you." So Jonah made ready and went to Nineveh, according to the Lord's bidding. Now Nineveh was an enormously large city; it took three days to go through it. Jonah began his journey through the city, and had gone but a single day's walk announcing, "Forty days more and Nineveh shall be destroyed" (Jon 3:1-4).

Jonah finally obeys the Lord and announces the city's destruction, using the words that God suggests. The prophet does not know, however, that even the most terrible threats from the Lord are only the expression of his saving will and an attempt to convert the hearts of the Ninevites. The rest of the story, however, shows that the prophet not only believed in the reality of the threat but also wanted it to come to pass.

Instead, there's a miracle: despite being unaware of God's commandments, despite being foreigners and great sinners, the Ninevites are converted!

The people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast and all of them, great and small, put on sackcloth. When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, laid aside his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in the ashes.

Then he had this proclaimed throughout Nineveh, by decree of the king and his nobles: "Neither man nor beast, neither cattle nor sheep, shall taste anything; they shall not eat, nor shall they drink water. Man and beast shall be covered with sackcloth and call loudly to God; every man shall turn from his evil way and from the violence he has in hand.

Who knows, God may relent and forgive, and withhold his blazing wrath, so that we shall not perish." When God saw by their actions how they turned from their evil way, he repented of the evil that he had threatened to do to them; he did not carry it out. (Jon 3:5-10).

The inhabitant's rapid repentance of the citizens, the penance that even the king imposes on himself, the fact that even the animals must cover themselves with sackcloth and participate in the inhabitants' fasting, testify to the novel and didactic character of the little book. Here the Lord's infinite mercy is revealed towards everyone, painting an exaggerated picture of the situation and highlighting the prophet's narrow-mindedness. In fact, in the parable, even though is unknown to everyone, they fear Him and are ready to convert – except Jonah. He remains a prisoner of his

stubbornness and wounded feelings, which the sacred author describes with much irony and literary skill that is both pleasant and attractive.

The responsorial psalm is the *De profundis*, the song of ascents, which is one of the masterpieces of the Psalter. Admiration of and meditation with this psalm never cease; it brings one down into the depths of the mysteries of the human heart, where sin's absurdity and squalor intermingles with the tension towards the good that remains unattainable without God's help. Saint Paul admirably described mankind's drama after the fall:

[...] The willing is ready at hand, but doing the good is not. For I do not do the good I want, but I do the evil I do not want. (Rom 7:18-19).

And St. Augustine, reflecting on human limitations, reiterates:

Here I can stay, but would not; there I would, but cannot; both ways, miserable. (Confessions, Tenth Book, Chapter 40).

*Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord; Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to my voice in supplication! If you, O Lord, mark iniquities, Lord, who can stand?
But with you is forgiveness, that you may be revered. Let Israel wait for the Lord, for with the Lord is kindness and with him is plenteous redemption; and he will redeem Israel from all their iniquities. (Ps 130).*

The Gospel of today's Eucharistic celebration, given that we continue reading St. Luke's text, presents us with an episode that is far removed from the other readings of the Mass and, apparently, has no connection to them.

We are in Bethany, in the house of Martha, Mary and Lazarus. Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem with his disciples and enters the friendly house.

Shortly before he had explained to the doctor of the law that one's neighbor is the one to whom we make ourselves close. Jesus too needs someone to come "close" to him. He too not only needs refreshment, but in his humanity seeks affection, comfort and loving attention. Mary sits at his feet and hangs on his words, while Martha, who thinks of dinner and other duties towards the numerous guests, "*was burdened with much serving*", which is easy enough to understand in the situation she finds herself in:

Martha, burdened with much serving, came to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me by myself to do the serving? Tell her to help me."

The Lord said to her in reply, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and worried about many things. There is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part and it will not be taken from her." (Lk 10:40-42).

This Gospel scene has made rivers of ink flow throughout history on thousands of pages interpreting these people and events either allegorically or realistically. Furthermore, the Gospel does not reveal how it turned out in the end. Perhaps Mary got up to help Martha prepare lunch or dinner, or maybe Martha as well, after Jesus' benevolent reproach, hastily finished her preparations

and then went to sit at his feet. What is certain is that Jesus, siding with Mary, helps Martha to think about listening to his word as being more important and better than any other material occupation, necessary though they may be.

It is easy to see that the two sisters have very different temperaments; Martha slightly resembles Jonah, who wanted to make all things fit squarely into his way of thinking. Mary, completely absorbed by her love for the Master, however, was more oblivious to the material needs of the moment. Also in chapter 11 of John's Gospel, where the resurrection of Lazarus is narrated, we see that the behavior of the two sisters is very different from each other: Martha is enterprising and decisive; Mary, more shy and thoughtful.

Even in one's own family, it is not easy to draw 'near' to our brothers and sisters. The first pagans that need to be converted are ourselves; the first people that we must bear and help bear us are those of our own home.

In John's Gospel, still in the scene of Lazarus' resurrection, there is a verse that allows us to collect our differences in unity, making us overcome and forgive the bitterness of conflicts: "*Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus*" (Jn 11:5), just as he loved the Ninevites and also his prophet Jonah, irritable and closed up in the narrowness of his religious conceptions.

St. Maria Faustina Kowalska, apostle of Divine Mercy, whose optional liturgical memorial is today, offers us the key to unify today's readings and to instill courage in humanity's restless search while *in via*. In her diary she records Jesus' words that she felt internally while praying:

Humanity will not find peace, until it turns with trust to My Mercy. Oh! How much the distrust of a soul hurts Me! Such a soul recognizes that I am holy and just, and does not believe that I am merciful, does not trust My goodness. The demons also admire My justice, but they do not believe in My goodness. My Heart rejoices in the title of Mercy. It announces that Mercy is God's greatest attribute. All the works of My hands are crowned by Mercy.

(cf. *Diary*, Notebook I, 3)

Then the saint cannot help but reply:

O eternal love, I desire that every soul you have created know You. I would like to become a priest; I would speak ceaselessly about Your Mercy to sinful souls, immersed in despair. I would like to be a missionary and bring the light of faith to wild lands, to make You known to souls and die annihilated for them with a martyr's death, with which You died, for me and for them. O Jesus, I also know very well that I can be a priest, a missionary, a preacher; I can die a martyr's death through my total annihilation and denial of myself for love of you, oh Jesus, and of immortal souls. Great love transforms small things into great things, and only love gives value to our actions. The more our love becomes pure, the less the fire of suffering will have to destroy in us and suffering will cease to be suffering for us. It will become a delight for us. With God's grace I have now obtained this disposition of the heart, that is, I am never so happy, as when I suffer for Jesus whom I love with every heartbeat.

(cf. *Diary*, Notebook I, 3)

October 6, 2021

Wednesday, 27th Week in Ordinary Time

Jon 4:1-11

Ps 86

Lk 11:1-4

Our reading of the book of Jonah continues and comes to an end. The prophet must realize that the threats of destruction towards the city of Nineveh have not come true, because its inhabitants have turned from their ways and the Lord has repented regarding the evil he had threatened.

Instead of rejoicing in the success of his prophetic mission, the main task of which is the work for conversion and salvation of the people, Jonah is indignant: God made him proclaim destruction, not to encourage conversion! The Ninevites are great sinners: they must die, not repent!

Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry that God did not carry out the evil he threatened against Nineveh. He prayed, "I beseech you, Lord, is not this what I said while I was still in my own country? This is why I fled at first to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger, rich in clemency, loath to punish.

And now, Lord, please take my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live."

But the Lord asked, "Have you reason to be angry?" (Jon 4:1-4).

Although extremely sensitive and closed in his ideas, Jonah's relationship with God is candid and direct; he prays, repeating his thoughts, reproaching him for his excessive pity and asking God to make him die. He does not even answer God's patient reply, which appeals to his reasonableness, but he leaves Nineveh, going east, "to see what would happen to the city", perhaps hoping that the Lord would change his mind again and destroy the Ninevite disbelievers. The universality of divine mercy is still foreign to his mind and heart.

But God, who took pity on Nineveh, likewise takes pity on his prophet, forcing him to reconsider his positions through suffering: the castor plant grown over his head, which had protected him from the heat of the sun, dries and the prophet is overwhelmed by the heat:

And when the sun arose, God sent a burning east wind; and the sun beat upon Jonah's head till he became faint. Then Jonah asked for death, saying, "I would be better off dead than alive." But God said to Jonah, "Have you reason to be angry over the plant?" "I have reason to be angry," Jonah answered, "angry enough to die." Then the Lord said, "You are concerned over the plant which cost you no labor and which you did not raise; it came up in one night and in one night it perished. And should I not be concerned over Nineveh, the great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot distinguish their right hand from their left, not to mention the many cattle?" (Jon 4:8-11).

Jonah's selfish temper does not frighten the Lord, who knows how to deal with him. He does it with irony, but also with compassion and gentleness, making him understand that one hundred and twenty thousand human beings, unaware of any moral law, plus a multitude of animals, cannot perish without arousing his infinite compassion. The book of Jonah anticipates the revelation which will be fully manifested in the Incarnation of the Word and which the apostle John summarizes as follows:

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is of God; everyone who loves is begotten by God and knows God. Whoever is without love does not know God, for God is love.

(1 Jn 4:7-8)

Some verses of Psalm 86, which we sing in the responsorial psalm, present the praying man's trust in God's mercy (in this way similar to the Ninevites) and show universal openness, which the prophet Jonah lacked:

Have mercy on me, O Lord, for to you I call all the day. Gladden the soul of your servant, for to you, O Lord, I lift up my soul. For you, O Lord, are good and forgiving, abounding in kindness to all who call upon you. Hearken, O Lord, to my prayer and attend to the sound of my pleading. All the nations you have made shall come and worship you, O Lord, and glorify your name. For you are great, and you do wondrous deeds; you alone are God.

The Gospel makes known the request of one of Jesus' disciples, and the Master's response:

"Lord, teach us to pray just as John taught his disciples." He said to them, "When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be your name, your Kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread and forgive us our sins for we ourselves forgive everyone in debt to us, and do not subject us to the final test."

The text of the Our Father that Luke hands down to us comes later than that of Matthew and is shorter: it contains only five petitions instead of the seven that we are used to reciting, but it is very meaningful. We first note the disciples desire to satisfy the longing for prayer that is present in their hearts: they saw Jesus praying to the Father and they want to imitate him. They also saw how Jesus prays: not like the scribes and Pharisees, who place themselves on the corners of the plaza to be seen by men, but He prays by establishing a conversation of trust and love with God, his Father. Jesus replies immediately to their humble and sincere request, without mincing words: "*When you pray, say: Father!*" Enter into a relationship with him and ask him for what you really need: that is, that his name be glorified, not yours; that his kingdom come, not yours; that he give you your daily bread, because you need it; that he forgive your sins, because you too are committed to forgiving the sins of others towards you; and that during temptation do not abandon yourself to your feeble strength alone, but allow him to support you in the struggle and grant you victory.

Blessed Christian of Chergé, a missionary monk martyred in Algeria in 1996, is a modern-day prophet, who represents the exact antithesis of the prophet Jonah and instead carries out, in accord with his monastic vocation, the great petitions of the Our Father: sanctification of God's name, the coming of his kingdom and, above all, the forgiveness of sins.

Christian, together with his brother monks, did not abandon his Muslim neighbors in time of danger and forgave in advance the one who would kill him:

Obviously, my death will appear to confirm those who hastily judged me naïve or idealistic: "Let him tell us now what he thinks of his ideals!"

But these persons should know that finally my most avid curiosity will be set free. This is what I shall be able to do, God willing: immerse my gaze in that of the Father to contemplate with him His children of Islam just as He sees them, all shining with the glory of Christ, the fruit of His Passion, filled with the Gift of the Spirit whose secret joy will always be to establish communion and restore the likeness, playing with the differences. For this life lost, totally mine and totally theirs, I thank God, who seems to have willed it entirely for the sake of that JOY in everything and in spite of everything. In this THANK YOU, which is said for everything in my life from now on, I certainly include you, friends of yesterday and today, and you, my friends of this place, along with my mother and father, my sisters and brothers and their families, You are the hundredfold granted as was promised!

And also you, my last-minute friend, who will not have known what you were doing: Yes, I want this THANK YOU and this GOODBYE to be a "GOD-BLESS" for you, too, because in God's face I see yours.

May we meet again as happy thieves in Paradise, if it please God, the Father of us both. Amen! Inch'Allah.

(Testament of Christian of Chergé, prior of the Tibhirine monastery – Algiers, December 1, 1993 – Tibhirine, January 1, 1994).

October 7, 2021

Thursday, 27th Week in Ordinary Time

Memorial of the Blessed Virgin Mary of the Rosary

Mal 3:13-20b

Ps 1

Lk 11:5-13

The first reading offers us a text from the prophet Malachi, in which God harshly rebukes those who served him and then expected prosperity and profit in return. Disappointed, their faith fails. They praise those who do evil and to whom all is well and, seeing the difference, they implicitly launch an accusation to the Lord, who seems unjust to them, because he rewards the wicked and does not care about the good who suffer.

You have defied me in word, says the Lord, yet you ask, "What have we spoken against you?" You have said, "It is vain to serve God, and what do we profit by keeping his command, and going about in penitential dress in awe of the Lord of hosts? Rather must we call the proud blessed; for indeed evildoers prosper, and even tempt God with impunity." (Mal 3:13-15).

The dramatic problem of the success of the wicked and the sufferings of the righteous appears often in the Bible: we think of the book of Job, we think of many psalms that present the triumph of the wicked and the apparent abandonment of the good (Ps 37, 73, etc.). In psalm 73 we read:

[...] I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For they suffer no pain; [...] They are free of the burdens of life; they are not afflicted like others. [...] Is it in vain that I have kept my heart pure, washed my hands in innocence? For I am afflicted day after day, chastised every morning.

Malachi establishes a comparison between those who fail in fidelity and love, because they are scandalized by the success of the wicked, and the God-fearing ones. The Lord announces the coming of 'a day' when justice will be fully restored.

Then they who fear the Lord spoke with one another, and the Lord listened attentively; and a record book was written before him of those who fear the Lord and trust in his name. And they shall be mine, says the Lord of hosts, my own special possession, on the day I take action. And I will have compassion on them, as a man has compassion on his son who serves him. Then you will again see the distinction between the just and the wicked; between the one who serves God, and the one who does not serve him. For lo, the day is coming, blazing like an oven, when all the proud and all evildoers will be stubble, and the day that is coming will set them on fire, leaving them neither root nor branch, says the Lord of hosts.

But for you who fear my name, there will arise the sun of justice with its healing rays. (Mal 3:16-20b).

The responsorial psalm, on the other hand, does not refer to an eschatological 'day'. There is rather an affirmation of the value of the good work carried out, wherein the just already find their joy and are blessed, while the wicked are scattered like chaff that the wind scatters.

Blessed the man who follows not the counsel of the wicked nor walks in the way of sinners, nor sits in the company of the insolent, but delights in the law of the Lord and meditates on his law day and night. He is like a tree planted near running water, that yields its fruit in due season, and whose leaves never fade. Whatever he does, prospers. Not so the wicked, not so; they are like chaff which the wind drives away. For the Lord watches over the way of the just, but the way of the wicked vanishes.

In Luke's Gospel passage, Jesus seems to take up the encouraging affirmation of Psalm 1: "*the Lord watches over the way of the just*", because he invites us to trust fully in the Father's help and providence. In fact, in the parable of the intrusive friend who, finding himself in need, goes at night to wake his friend for three loaves of bread, his comportment serves as a gentle reproach towards those who lack faith or doubt God's intervention. They become discouraged in the face of the weaknesses, shortcomings and fears that dot their daily existence:

[...] "And I tell you, ask and you will receive; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and the one who seeks, finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. What father among you would hand his son a snake when he asks for a fish? Or hand him a scorpion when he asks for an egg? If you then, who are wicked, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?"

Jesus' affirmation: "*If you then, who are wicked, know how to give good gifts to your children ...*" mitigates the differences between good and bad, so inherent in our human judgments. Of course it does not cancel them out, because differences obviously remain, but it helps us to realize that we are 'all' at least a little malicious, we are 'all' beggars for forgiveness and love and we 'all' need the help of the great friend who is the Father, whose providence is infinite and who will give us the Holy Spirit, provided we simply ask him.

We have already received it in Baptism, but we often forget that it was given in order for it to take action within us. The presence of the Holy Spirit, who sustains our earthly pilgrimage with his gifts already gives us a foretaste of eternity and renders our earthly life of difficulty, if not more blissful, at least more serene.

We also forget that the fullness of grace was given to us as a mother and advocate, she who fully possessed the Holy Spirit, the Virgin Mary. We can address our requests to her without fear, on any occasion.

On October 7th the Church commemorates the Blessed Virgin Mary of the Rosary. Today's feast commemorates the day on which Christians conquered the Turks in Lepanto in 1571, but in this month of October, missionary month par excellence, we remember Mary, mother of life and of all

creation, mother of peoples, above all the poorest and most forgotten. Thus, we want to copy here the prayer of the Holy Father Francis, who invokes Mary as Mother of life and Queen of the Amazon:

*Mother of life,
in your maternal womb Jesus took flesh, the Lord of all that exists.
Risen, he transfigured you by his light and made you the Queen of all creation.
For that reason, we ask you, Mary, to reign in the beating heart of Amazonia.*

Show yourself the Mother of all creatures, in the beauty of the flowers, the rivers, the great river that courses through it and all the life pulsing in its forests. Tenderly care for this explosion of beauty.

Ask Jesus to pour out all his love on the men and women who dwell there, that they may know how to appreciate and care for it.

Bring your Son to birth in their hearts, so that he can shine forth in the Amazon region, in its peoples and in its cultures, by the light of his word, by his consoling love, by his message of fraternity and justice.

And at every Eucharist, may all this awe and wonder be lifted up to the glory of the Father.

Mother, look upon the poor of the Amazon region, for their home is being destroyed by petty interests. How much pain and misery, how much neglect and abuse there is in this blessed land overflowing with life!

Touch the hearts of the powerful, for, even though we sense that the hour is late, you call us to save what is still alive.

*Mother whose heart is pierced, who yourself suffer in your mistreated sons and daughters, and in the wounds inflicted on nature, reign in the Amazon, together with your Son.
Reign so that no one else can claim Lordship over the handiwork of God.*

We trust in you, Mother of life. Do not abandon us in this dark hour.

Amen.

(Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Querida Amazonia* of the Holy Father Francis to the people of God and to all persons of good will – February 2, 2020)

October 8, 2021

Friday, 27th Week in Ordinary Time

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

Ps 9

Lk 11:15-26

The Prophet Joel's invitation to penance resounds in a period of great desolation: a terrible invasion of locusts is about to swoop into Judea and destroy the whole country:

Blow the trumpet in Zion, sound the alarm on my holy mountain! Let all who dwell in the land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming; yes, it is near, a day of darkness and of gloom, a day of clouds and somberness! Like dawn spreading over the mountains, a people numerous and mighty! Their like has not been from of old, nor will it be after them, even to the years of distant generations. (Jl 2:1-2).

Although aware of the impending catastrophe, the prophet Joel invites the priests and the people to a penitential gathering, because, even if the misfortune comes from the hands of the Almighty as a punishment for sins and heralds the great day of judgment, penance and prayer can placate God's wrath and move him to have mercy on his people:

Gird yourselves and weep, O priests! Wail, O ministers of the altar! Come, spend the night in sackcloth, O ministers of my God! The house of your God is deprived of offering and libation. Proclaim a fast, call an assembly; gather the elders, all who dwell in the land, into the house of the Lord, your God, and cry to the Lord! Alas, the day! For near is the day of the Lord, and it comes as ruin from the Almighty. (Jl 1:13-15).

The responsorial psalm, reproducing the verses of the first part of psalm 9, already makes believers rejoice for the deliverance from evil through Christ's victory over sin and death. God has done justice to ungodliness and has saved his faithful from the snares of the evil one.

I will give thanks to you, O Lord, with all my heart; I will declare all your wondrous deeds. I will be glad and exult in you; I will sing praise to your name, Most High. You rebuked the nations and destroyed the wicked; their name you blotted out forever and ever. The nations are sunk in the pit they have made; in the snare they set, their foot is caught. But the Lord sits enthroned forever; he has set up his throne for judgment. He judges the world with justice; he governs the peoples with equity.

In today's Gospel passage, Jesus has just cast out a mute demon. With the evil and mute spirit gone, the once possessed man begins to speak and the crowd is filled with admiration. Immediately, however, Jesus' accusers, forced to see the wonders he works, appear before him and attribute his

power to the devil. There are also others who, not persuaded by his miracles, still want to test him and ask for a sign from heaven. The Lord has a clear and precise answer for them all.

Every kingdom divided against itself will be laid waste and house will fall against house. And if Satan is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? For you say that it is by Beelzebul that I drive out demons. If I, then, drive out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your own people drive them out? Therefore they will be your judges. But if it is by the finger of God that I drive out demons, then the Kingdom of God has come upon you. (Lk 11:17-20).

Jesus does not deny the Adversary's power, but affirms his own supremacy over him:

When a strong man fully armed guards his palace, his possessions are safe. But when one stronger than he attacks and overcomes him, he takes away the armor on which he relied and distributes the spoils. Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters. (Lk 11:21-23).

However, the path of faith and Christian life is long and bumpy: "believing" is not a one-time event which allows us to glide through life in steady-state conditions; he who has been freed from the snares of Satan and has put the dwelling of his soul in order can still again fall into a slavery worse than the first:

When an unclean spirit goes out of someone, it roams through arid regions searching for rest but, finding none, it says, 'I shall return to my home from which I came.' But upon returning, it finds it swept clean and put in order. Then it goes and brings back seven other spirits more wicked than itself who move in and dwell there, and the last condition of that man is worse than the first. (Lk 11:24-26).

Christ is the only salvation, as St. John states:

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him will not be condemned, but whoever does not believe has already been condemned, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. (Jn 3:16-18).

In the life of the authentic Christian there can be no half measures: a little here and a little there. Either you belong to Christ or you belong to Satan. Either you constantly watch over your heart, your feelings, your thoughts, or you force the Holy Spirit of God to distance himself from your soul, which then easily becomes the abode of Satan.

It is certainly not the failures caused by human weakness, the small failures of our daily life that distance God from our heart, but the wallowing in lukewarmness and sin. Humble trust in God's infinite goodness, frequent practice of the sacraments, prayer and works of mercy are the best antidote to keep our interior "swept", clean and adorned, ready to be inhabited by the Lord.

Pope Francis urges us not to be afraid of holiness:

It will take away none of your energy, vitality or joy. On the contrary, you will become what the Father had in mind when he created you, and you will be faithful to your deepest self. To depend on God sets us free from every form of enslavement and leads us to recognize our great dignity.

We see this in Saint Josephine Bakhita: “Abducted and sold into slavery at the tender age of seven, she suffered much at the hands of cruel masters. But she came to understand the profound truth that God, and not man, is the true Master of every human being, of every human life. This experience became a source of great wisdom for this humble daughter of Africa”.¹ To the extent that each Christian grows in holiness, he or she will bear greater fruit for our world (Gaudete et exsultate, 32-33).

Below is a text prepared by the Pontifical Urbaniana University, with the collaboration of the Missionary Institutes to introduce the African saint:

Saint Josephine Bakhita, from Sudan, kidnapped, sold as slave, liberated and became Christian and religious in the congregation of the Canossians. Asked by an Italian student of Bologna what would she do “were she, by pure chance, to come across her kidnappers”, Bakhita replied without the least hesitation: “If I were to meet the slave-merchants who kidnapped me and even those who tortured me, I would kneel and kiss their hands. If what happened to me had never taken place, how could I become a Christian and a religious?”

Continuing the conversation on the same subject, she not only blessed their providential mediation in the hands of God, but excused them in these terms:

I pity them! No doubt they were unaware of the anguish they caused me. They were the masters and I was the slave. Just as it is natural for us to do good, so it is natural for them to behave as they did behave to me. They did so out of habit, not out of wickedness.

She did not complain in her sufferings, but remembered how much she had suffered as a slave:

Then I did not know the Lord: I lost much time then, and so many merits. Now I must make up for this loss... If I were to kneel my whole life, it would not be enough to express my gratitude to the good Lord.

A priest, to put her to the test, said to her: "If our Lord didn't want you in heaven, what would you do?" She quietly replied:

Well, if He does not want me in Heaven, let Him do what He likes, and let Him put me wherever He likes. When I am with Him and where He wishes, I am perfectly fine. He is the Master, I am only his humble creature.

¹ His Holiness Pope John Paul II, Canonization Homily, October 1, 2000.

Another priest asked her for her story, but Bakhita evaded his question by saying:

The Lord has loved me so much. We must love everybody... We must be understanding and compassionate! – “Even with those who tortured you?” – Poor things! They did not know the Lord.

Asked about death, she answered with great serenity:

When a person loves another very much, she greatly wishes to meet that person. Why then should I be afraid of death? Death brings us to God.

The superior, Mother Teresa Martini, was tormented by concerns, but Bakhita, calm and dignified, said to her:

Dear Mother, why do you wonder that the Lord is giving you some trouble? If He were not to come to us for sharing some of his sufferings, to whom will He go? Did we not come to the Convent to do His will? Yes, I will pray, in all my poverty, but only that the Will of God be done.

Prayer composed by Saint Josephine Bakhita on the occasion of her consecration to God with her Final Religious Profession, December 8, 1896:

O Lord, I wish I could fly southward to my people, to preach to all, loudly, your goodness. Oh! How many souls I could win for you! First among all, my mother, and my father, my brothers and my sister, as yet a slave... I wish I could reach all, all the poor negroes of Africa. Grant, O Lord, that they, too, may know and love you!

On February 10, 2019 during the Angelus prayer, the Holy Father Francis addressed the following prayer to the Saint, so that she would intercede for all trafficking victims:

Saint Josephine Bakhita, you were sold into slavery as a child and endured unspeakable hardship and suffering. Once liberated from your physical enslavement, you found true redemption in your encounter with Christ and his Church. O Saint Josephine Bakhita, assist all those who are entrapped in slavery. Intercede with the God of mercy on their behalf, so that the chains of their captivity will be broken.

May God himself free all those who have been threatened, injured or mistreated by the trade and trafficking of human beings. Bring comfort to survivors of this slavery and teach them to look to Jesus as an example of faith and hope, so they may find healing from their wounds.

We ask you to pray for us and to intercede on behalf of us all: that we may not fall into indifference, that we may open our eyes and be able to see the miseries and wounds of our many brothers and sisters deprived of their dignity and their freedom, and may we hear their cry for help. Amen.

Saint Josephine Bakhita, pray for us.

October 9, 2021

Saturday, 27th Week in Ordinary Time

Memorial of Saint John Henry Newman, cardinal.

Jl 4:12-21

Ps 97

Lk 11:27-28

The apocalyptic language of the last chapter of Joel's prophecy resounds threateningly for all the nations of the earth. Yet besides being the expression of God's justice, it is also an invitation to conversion: the valley of Jehoshaphat, the valley of judgment, where all the peoples will be gathered for the last and definitive judgment, is called the Valley of the Decision, because the final decision of God and man will appear right there.

Thus says the Lord: Let the nations bestir themselves and come up to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; for there will I sit in judgment upon all the neighboring nations. Apply the sickle, for the harvest is ripe; Come and tread, for the wine press is full; the vats overflow, for great is their malice. Crowd upon crowd in the valley of decision; for near is the day of the Lord in the valley of decision. Sun and moon are darkened, and the stars withhold their brightness. The Lord roars from Zion, and from Jerusalem raises his voice; the heavens and the earth quake. (Jl 4:12-16)

Nobody can make fun of God, who is a just judge. If you choose evil consciously and definitively, you will be judged on your conscious and final decision. There will be a day when God will exterminate all wickedness and make his faithful ones rejoice.

The passage from Joel ends with the phrase "...the Lord dwells in Zion". The heavenly Jerusalem, the eschatological one, will include all those who have chosen to live in love of God and neighbor, and not just historical Israel. John the Baptist had already announced it when he warned: "*Produce good fruits as evidence of your repentance; and do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father,' for I tell you, God can raise up children to Abraham from these stones.*" (Lk 3:8).

In the responsorial psalm we sing this universal extension, which calls together the earth, the islands, the mountains, the heavens and all peoples to proclaim justice and to contemplate the Lord's glory.

The Lord is king; let the earth rejoice; let the many isles be glad. Clouds and darkness are round about him, justice and judgment are the foundation of his throne. The mountains melt like wax before the Lord, before the Lord of all the earth. The heavens proclaim his justice, and all peoples see his glory. Light dawns for the just; and gladness, for the upright of heart. Be glad in the Lord, you just, and give thanks to his holy name.

The Gospel also helps us to distinguish earthly things from those of Heaven:

While Jesus was speaking, a woman from the crowd called out and said to him, "Blessed is the womb that carried you and the breasts at which you nursed." He replied, "Rather, blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it." (Lk 11:27-28).

While Jesus is teaching, his enemies' hostility is growing around him: he is continually contradicted and tested. Nonetheless, those who are good and simple listen to him, trust, and admire him. In the crowd, a woman praises the mother who generated that prophet who speaks with authority and, without realizing it, she begins to fulfill the prophecy that Mary herself had made about herself in the Magnificat: "*all generations will call me blessed*".

Pope Benedict XVI, in No. 124 of the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini*, comments on the Gospel passage as follows:

This close relationship between God's word and joy is evident in the Mother of God. Let us recall the words of Saint Elizabeth: "Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her by the Lord" (Lk 1:45). Mary is blessed because she has faith, because she believed, and in this faith she received the Word of God into her womb in order to give him to the world.

The joy born of the Word can now expand to all those who, by faith, let themselves be changed by God's word. The Gospel of Luke presents this mystery of hearing and joy in two texts. Jesus says: "My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it" (8:21). And in reply to a woman from the crowd who blesses the womb that bore him and the breasts that nursed him, Jesus reveals the secret of true joy: "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it!" (11:28). Jesus points out Mary's true grandeur, making it possible for each of us to attain that blessedness which is born of the word received and put into practice. I remind all Christians that our personal and communal relationship with God depends on our growing familiarity with the word of God. Finally, I turn to every man and woman, including those who have fallen away from the Church, who have left the faith or who have never heard the proclamation of salvation. To everyone the Lord says: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me" (Rev 3:20).

May every day of our lives thus be shaped by a renewed encounter with Christ, the Word of the Father made flesh: he stands at the beginning and the end, and "in him all things hold together" (Col 1:17). Let us be silent in order to hear the Lord's word and to meditate upon it, so that by the working of the Holy Spirit it may remain in our hearts and speak to us all the days of our lives. In this way the Church will always be renewed and rejuvenated, thanks to the word of the Lord which remains forever (cf. 1 Pet 1:25; Is 40:8). Thus we too will enter into the great nuptial dialogue which concludes sacred Scripture: "The Spirit and the bride say: 'Come'. And let everyone who hears say: 'Come!'" The one who testifies to these things, says: 'Surely I am coming soon!'. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! (Rev 22:17, 20).

Saint John Henry Newman, whose memorial we celebrate today, shows us the sure path to take in his long and painful spiritual journey: like Mary, he listens to the Word and puts it into practice in

the darkness and in the light of faith, entrusting himself completely to the Lord's goodness, aware that this is the essence of true joy:

God has created me to do Him some definite service; He has committed some work to me which He has not committed to another. I have my mission—I never may know it in this life, but I shall be told it in the next. Somehow I am necessary for His purposes, as necessary in my place as an Archangel in his—if, indeed, I fail, He can raise another, as He could make the stones children of Abraham. Yet I have a part in this great work; I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons. He has not created me for naught. I shall do good, I shall do His work; I shall be an angel of peace, a preacher of truth in my own place, while not intending it, if I do but keep His commandments and serve Him in my calling.

Therefore I will trust Him. Whatever, wherever I am, I can never be thrown away. If I am in sickness, my sickness may serve Him; in perplexity, my perplexity may serve Him; if I am in sorrow, my sorrow may serve Him. My sickness, or perplexity, or sorrow may be necessary causes of some great end, which is quite beyond us. He does nothing in vain; He may prolong my life, He may shorten it; He knows what He is about. He may take away my friends, He may throw me among strangers, He may make me feel desolate, make my spirits sink, hide the future from me—still He knows what He is about.

O Adonai, O Ruler of Israel, Thou that guidest Joseph like a flock, O Emmanuel, O Sapientia, I give myself to Thee. I trust Thee wholly. Thou art wiser than I—more loving to me than I myself. Deign to fulfil Thy high purposes in me whatever they be—work in and through me. I am born to serve Thee, to be Thine, to be Thy instrument. Let me be Thy blind instrument. I ask not to see—I ask not to know—I ask simply to be used.

(from *Meditations and Devotions, Meditations on Christian Doctrine*, I. Hope in God—Creator", March 7, 1848)

October 10, 2021

Sunday, 28th Week in Ordinary Time – Year B

Wis 7:7-11

Ps 90

Heb 4:12-13

Mk 10:17-30

We could unify the whole liturgy of the Word of today's celebration with a single word: "wisdom". Wisdom is a gift from God: the inspired author obtains it by praying for it. Once he has obtained it, he prefers it over everything, esteems it, loves it and realizes that he has received all other goods together with it.

*I prayed, and prudence was given me; I pleaded, and the spirit of wisdom came to me.
I preferred her to scepter and throne, and deemed riches nothing in comparison with her,
nor did I liken any priceless gem to her; because all gold, in view of her, is a little sand, and
before her, silver is to be accounted mire. Beyond health and comeliness I loved her, and I
chose to have her rather than the light, because the splendor of her never yields to sleep.
Yet all good things together came to me in her company, and countless riches at her hands.*

Wisdom, which is both God's gift and his attribute, totally penetrates man and changes his heart: it transforms his heart of stone, changing it into a heart of flesh capable of discerning, of exulting in the Lord's goodness, of working righteously in his service, of recognizing his own human frailty by living in the fear of the Lord and entrusting himself completely to him:

*Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain wisdom of heart. Return, O LORD!
How long? Have pity on your servants! Fill us at daybreak with your kindness, that we may
shout for joy and gladness all our days. Make us glad, for the days when you afflicted us, for
the years when we saw evil. Let your work be seen by your servants and your glory by their
children; and may the gracious care of the LORD our God be ours; prosper the work of our
hands for us! Prosper the work of our hands! (Ps 90)*

In his great condescension, "In times past, God spoke in partial and various ways to our ancestors through the prophets; in these last days, he spoke to us through a son, whom he made heir of all things and through whom he created the universe" (Heb 1:1-2), the Word, the living and effective Word of God, eternal Wisdom of the Father, became flesh and has dwelt among us:

Brothers and sisters:

*Indeed the word of God is living and effective, sharper than any two-edged sword,
penetrating even between soul and spirit, joints and marrow, and able to discern reflections*

and thoughts of the heart. No creature is concealed from him, but everything is naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must render an account.

In the Gospel, we see the Word of God, the eternal Wisdom of the Father, who goes on his way, drawing crowds and arousing in one man's heart the desire to follow him:

As Jesus was setting out on a journey, a man ran up, knelt down before him, and asked him, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus answered him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: You shall not kill; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal; you shall not bear false witness; you shall not defraud; honor your father and your mother." He replied and said to him, "Teacher, all of these I have observed from my youth." Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said to him, "You are lacking in one thing. Go, sell what you have, and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." At that statement his face fell, and he went away sad, for he had many possessions. (Mk 10:17-22).

A passing enthusiasm, a fragile desire to do good, a heart that has not become wise, a mind that does not consider his riches as nothing compared to following Christ. The result is obvious: *his face fell, and he went away sad.*

He is spoken of as the "rich young man", but the Gospel only says "a man", without specifying his age, without giving him a name. Many other rich people were attracted by Jesus and we know their names: Zacchaeus, Matthew, Joseph of Arimathea, Giovanna, Susanna – the women who assisted him with their possessions during his public life – and still others, all people who had wealth at their disposition yet did not attach their hearts to it. These people believed that *all gold, in view of her [Wisdom], is a bit of sand, and before her [Wisdom], silver is to be accounted mire.*

Even if this year 10 October falls on a Sunday and thus we cannot celebrate the liturgical memorial of a saint, we cannot forget the great bishop Saint Daniel Comboni, in whom the *sapientia crucis* shone intensely through his total self-giving and an extraordinary love for the African people. On October 10, 1881, he died of cholera in Khartoum at the age of fifty. His motto: Either Africa or death tells us something of his total dedication to his missionary vocation. The Church owes it to him, through his *Plan for the Regeneration of Africa*, if a profound evangelization has taken place on that continent:

Homily in Khartoum (Translated from Arabic by Fr Carcereri) Khartoum, May 11, 1873.

I am truly happy, dearest friends, to be back with you again after so many sad events and so many sighs of affliction. The first love of my youth was for unhappy Africa and, leaving behind all that was dearest to me in the world, I came, sixteen years ago, to these lands to offer my work for the relief of their age-old sufferings. Subsequently, I was called back home since for health reasons the swamps of the White Nile in the vicinity of the Holy Cross and Gondokoro had reduced apostolic action to impotence. I departed through obedience: but I left my heart in your midst and, when I recovered, as God willed, my concerns and activities were always focused on you.

Today, at last taking back my heart by returning among you, I open it up in your presence with the sublime and religious sentiment of the spiritual paternity with which God willed me to be vested a year ago now by the supreme Head of the Catholic Church, our Lord Pope Pius IX. Yes, I am now your Father, and you are my children and as such, for the first time I embrace you and press you to my heart.

I am most grateful for all the enthusiastic welcomes you have shown me; they demonstrate your filial love and have persuaded me that you will always want to be my joy and my crown, just as you are my lot and my legacy.

Rest assured that my soul responds to this with unlimited love forever and for each one of you. I have returned among you never again to cease being yours and all consecrated for your greater good in eternity. Come day come night, come sun come rain, I shall always be equally ready to serve your spiritual needs: the rich and the poor, the healthy and the sick, the young and the old, the masters and the servants will always have equal access to my heart. Your good will be mine and your sorrows will also be mine.

I make common cause with each one of you, and the happiest day in my life will be the one on which I will be able to give my life for you. – I am not unaware of the weight of the burden I have to carry, since as shepherd, teacher and doctor to your souls I shall have to watch over you, educate you and correct you: defend the oppressed without hurting the oppressors, reproach errors without antagonizing those who err, denounce scandals and sins without ceasing to show compassion to sinners, seek out the corrupt without weakening to vice; in a word, be a father and a judge at the same time. But I am resigned to this in the hope that you will all help me to carry this burden with happiness and joy in the name of God. [...]

And now finally, I turn to you, O merciful Queen of Africa, and appealing once again to you, loving Mother of this Vicariate Apostolic of Central Africa which is entrusted to my care, I make bold to implore you solemnly to receive under your protection myself and my children and to guard us from evil and lead us to good.

O Mary, Mother of God, the great people of Africa sleeps for the most part in the darkness and shadow of death; hasten the hour of their salvation, remove the obstacles, disperse their enemies, prepare their hearts and always send new apostles to these remote lands which are so unhappy and in need.

My children, on this solemn day I commit you to the devotion of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, and as I offer for you the most acceptable of sacrifices to Almighty God, I humbly entreat him to pour the blood of redemption over your souls, to regenerate them, to heal them and refine them in accordance with your needs, that this holy Mission may bring you the fruits of salvation, and to God glory. Amen.

October 11, 2021

Monday, 28th Week in Ordinary Time

Optional Memorial of St. John XXIII, Pope

Rom 1:1-7

Ps 98

Lk 11:29-32

Today we begin reading Paul's letter to the Romans, making us feel as if we are immediately projected into a borderless universe: Paul writes to recipients he does not yet know, to a Church that was not founded by him, yet one he still wanted to visit so that the people might become formed in their Christian faith. Paul had wanted to go as far as Spain after first passing through Rome, where a Christian community made up of converted Jews and people from paganism, already existed.

Paul, a slave of Christ Jesus, called to be an Apostle and set apart for the Gospel of God, which he promised previously through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, the Gospel about his Son, descended from David according to the flesh, but established as Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness through resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord. Through him we have received the grace of apostleship, to bring about the obedience of faith, for the sake of his name, among all the Gentiles, among whom are you also, who are called to belong to Jesus Christ; to all the beloved of God in Rome, called to be holy. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

In this solemn introduction, Paul presents himself as a servant of the Messiah, and an apostle not by personal choice but rather by vocation; he is "set apart" to announce the good news of salvation.

In a wonderful summary, he proclaims that in the Scriptures the prophets had already foretold the Gospel, but they had been brought to fulfillment in Jesus, born of David's lineage, declared the Son of God *in power according to the Spirit of holiness through resurrection from the dead*.

It is Jesus Christ himself, the Lord, who gave Paul the grace and the ability to be an apostle, *to bring about the obedience of faith, for the sake of his name, among all the Gentiles*, and therefore also of the Romans, loved and called by God. To them, Paul wishes grace and peace from God and his Son Jesus Christ.

After such a consoling and solemn introduction, the responsorial psalm explodes with jubilation for the wonders worked by the Lord:

Sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done wondrous deeds; his right hand has won victory for him, his holy arm. The Lord has made his salvation known: in the sight of the nations he has revealed his justice. He has remembered his kindness and his faithfulness toward the house of Israel. All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation by our God. Sing joyfully to the Lord, all you lands; break into song; sing praise.

The Gospel also has a universal appeal: there is great sadness caused by the blindness and obstinacy in evil of the generation that Christ is addressing:

While still more people gathered in the crowd, Jesus said to them, "This generation is an evil generation; it seeks a sign, but no sign will be given it, except the sign of Jonah. Just as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites, so will the Son of Man be to this generation. At the judgment the queen of the south will rise with the men of this generation and she will condemn them, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and there is something greater than Solomon here. At the judgment the men of Nineveh will arise with this generation and condemn it, because at the preaching of Jonah they repented, and there is something greater than Jonah here."

Jesus speaks to the crowds that gather around him, who appear to be interested in his words, yet he denounces their superficiality. He bluntly describes it as 'evil': they do not wish to convert, they do not want to change their lives. Driven by curiosity for sensational things, the people who listen to him just want to witness miracles. They are not interested and moved by the presence of Christ, who is much more than Jonah, much more than Solomon; his words do not move them to repentance, as the Ninevites were; they do not want to listen to his wisdom, as the queen of the south did. In their superficiality, the listeners are content to be amazed by the Master's signs, perhaps even to be moved by his words and to agree with his teachings.

Jesus asks for more. He wants more. He wants more from that generation listening to him during his public life, from the men of all future generations, from us who now listen to his word: from us he expects true conversion so that opens our lives may open to him, our way of thinking and acting might be transformed and newly directed by a sincere love for the One, who is the way, the truth and the life. And then, through the witness of our changed life by Him, he wants more than anything for us to communicate the truth and beauty of our transformed existence to our brothers and sisters who do not yet know him, who have forgotten him, or who's conception of him is tainted because they have only been exposed to our lukewarm testimony. Conversion and mission belong strictly to our essence as Christians.

Some members of the Church then receive a specific missionary vocation from God to evangelize pagan or de-Christianized realities: they need our prayers and our help.

Today, October 11, we remember the Supreme Pontiff St. John XXIII, initiator of the Second Vatican Council and great promoter of the Missions. In the encyclical *Grata Recordatio* of September 26, 1959, he wrote:

On October 11, 1959, We shall have the great pleasure of presenting mission crucifixes to a large group of Catholic missionaries who are about to leave their beloved homes and undertake the heavy responsibility of bringing the light of Christianity to distant people. [...] These young men present such a wonderful spectacle that We must be optimistic for the future. They have overcome many obstacles and inconveniences and given themselves to God that other men might gain Christ (cf. Phil 3:8) whether in foreign lands as yet untouched by the light of truth or in those immense, noisy, and busy cities in which the pace of daily activity, rapid as a whirlwind, sometimes makes souls wither and become content with earthly goods.

From the lips of their elders, who have labored long in the same cause, comes the ardent prayer of the Prince of the Apostles: "Grant to thy servants to speak thy word with all boldness." (cf. Acts 4:29).

We trust that the apostolic labors of these young men will be commended to the Virgin Mary in your devout prayers through the month of October.

But the 'good' Pope does not forget that a clear Christian witness is everyone's duty: Baptism leaves an indelible mark on our being. In this sacrament the fire of the Holy Spirit marks us, so that all baptized men and women may live as missionaries. It is up to each one of us to rekindle this fire so that as it burns it continues to transmit its light and heat to others.

In the encyclical *Mater et Magistra* (May 15, 1961) the Pontiff underlines this fundamental task of every baptized person:

The Church today is faced with an immense task: to humanize and to Christianize this modern civilization of ours. The continued development of this civilization, indeed its very survival, demand and insist that the Church do her part in the world.

That is why [...] she claims the co-operation of her laity. In conducting their human affairs to the best of their ability, they must recognize that they are doing a service to humanity, in intimate union with God through Christ, and to God's greater glory. And St. Paul insisted: "Whether you eat or drink, or whatsoever else you do, do all to the glory of God." (1 Cor 10:31). "All whatsoever you do in word or in work, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks to God and the Father by him." (Col 3:17).

*To search for spiritual perfection and eternal salvation in the conduct of human affairs and institutions is not to rob these of the power to achieve their immediate, specific ends, but to enhance this power. The words of our divine Master are true for all time: "Seek ye therefore first the kingdom of God and his justice; and all these things shall be added unto you." (Mt 6:33). The man who is "light in the Lord" (Eph 5:8) and who walks as a "child of the light" (cf. *ibid*) has a sure grasp of the fundamental demands of justice in all life's difficulties and complexities, obscured though they may be by so much individual, national and racial selfishness. Animated, too, by the charity of Christ, he finds it impossible not to love his fellow men. He makes his own their needs, their sufferings and their joys. There is a sureness of touch in all his activity in every field. It is energetic, generous and considerate. For "charity is patient, is kind; charity envieth not, dealeth not perversely, is not puffed up, is not ambitious, seeketh not her own, is not provoked to anger, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth with the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things." (1 Cor 13:4-7).*

In conclusion, Venerable Brethren, We would remind you of that sublime truth of Catholic doctrine: our incorporation as living members in Christ's Mystical Body, the Church, "For as the body is one and hath many members; and all the members of the body, whereas they are many, yet are one body; so also is Christ." (1 Cor 12:12).

We most earnestly beg all Our sons the world over, clergy and laity, to be deeply conscious of the dignity, the nobility, which is theirs through being grafted on to Christ as shoots on a vine: "I am the vine; you the branches." (Jn 15:5) They are thus called to a share in His own divine life; and since they are united in mind and spirit with the divine Redeemer even when

they are engaged in the affairs of the world, their work becomes a continuation of His work, penetrated with redemptive power. "He that abideth in men, and I in him, the same beareth much fruit." (cf. ibid.). Thus is man's work exalted and ennobled—so highly exalted that it leads to his own personal perfection of soul, and helps to extend to others the fruits of Redemption, all over the world. It becomes a means whereby the Christian way of life can leaven this civilization in which we live and work—leaven it with the ferment of the Gospel.

(Mater et Magistra, 256-259)

October 12, 2021

Tuesday, 28th Week in Ordinary Time

Rom 1:16-25

Ps 19

Lk 11:37-41

The texts of the Liturgy of the Word of today's Eucharistic celebration bring St. Paul's uncompromising faith before our eyes:

Brothers and sisters:

I am not ashamed of the Gospel. It is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: for Jew first, and then Greek. For in it is revealed the righteousness of God from faith to faith; as it is written, "The one who is righteous by faith will live."

St. Paul then denounces the sins of the pagans, their twisted reasoning and moral deviations being inexcusable since God's works are clearly manifest to them:

The wrath of God is indeed being revealed from heaven against every impiety and wickedness of those who suppress the truth by their wickedness. For what can be known about God is evident to them, because God made it evident to them. Ever since the creation of the world, his invisible attributes of eternal power and divinity have been able to be understood and perceived in what he has made. As a result, they have no excuse; for although they knew God they did not accord him glory as God or give him thanks. Instead, they became vain in their reasoning, and their senseless minds were darkened. While claiming to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for the likeness of an image of mortal man or of birds or of four-legged animals or of snakes. Therefore, God handed them over to impurity through the lusts of their hearts for the mutual degradation of their bodies. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie and revered and worshiped the creature rather than the creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

Psalm 19 clearly states that creation tells of and proclaims God's glory:

The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament proclaims his handiwork. Day pours out the word to day, and night to night imparts knowledge. Not a word nor a discourse whose voice is not heard; through all the earth their voice resounds, and to the ends of the world, their message.

The Gospel tells us about the scandal of the Pharisee who had invited Jesus: the Master had not performed the ritual ablutions before sitting at table. Jesus' indignation establishes the truth:

“Oh you Pharisees! Although you cleanse the outside of the cup and the dish, inside you are filled with plunder and evil. 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.”

The uncompromising faith of St. Paul flanked against the pagans' proud ignorance and the narrow-mindedness of the Pharisees, should challenge the way Christians today think and act.

St. Alberto Hurtado, a Chilean Jesuit who was a profoundly spiritual man, tireless in his work for young people and workers, a great apostle of joy ("happy, Lord, happy!"), helps us in this. One of his texts, written in Paris in November 1947, entitled *"Elements of spiritual life"*, gives us ample room for reflection:

When we compare the Gospel to the lives of the majority of us, we as Christians feel uncomfortable... The majority of us have forgotten that we are the salt of the earth, the light on the candlestick, the yeast in the mass... (cf. Mt 5:13-15). The breath of the Spirit does not animate many Christians; rather a spirit of mediocrity consumes us. There are among us active people, too active, perhaps agitated is a better word; however the causes that consume us are not the cause of Christianity.

After looking at oneself over and over and at what one finds around oneself, I take the Gospel, turn to St. Paul and here I find a Christianity that is all fire, all life, all conquering; a true Christianity that takes all of a man, that rectifies all of life, that exhausts all activity. It is like an incandescent river of burning lava that gushes from the very depths of religion.

In our time religion is turned into a worldly formality, a pious sentimentality, a peaceful police: "Don't break anything, don't let anything break!". This is how we could express this Christianity of good taste, negative, devoid of passion, devoid of substance, devoid of Christ, devoid of God. A Christianity without fire and without love, of peaceful people, of satisfied people, of fearful people, or of those who like to command and want to be obeyed. There is no need for such a Christianity.

Fortunately, however, there are small groups of Christians everywhere who have understood the meaning of the Gospel: young people who wish to serve their brothers; priests who carry the open wound that continues to bleed upon seeing so much pain, so much injustice, so much misery; men and women who prolong for us Christ's presence in our midst, behind a cassock, overalls or festive garb. They are bright like Christ and benefactors like Him. Christ lives in them and this is enough for us. We cannot help but love them, take them by the hand and, through them, enter this immense Body, animated by the Spirit.

These are the true Christians, those whom Christ has completely penetrated, he has taken everything in them, changed their whole life: a Christianity that transformed them, that communicates itself, that enlightens. They are console the world. They are the Good News permanently announced. In them everything is a sermon: words, of course, but also smiles and kindness, an outstretched hand, resignation, the total absence of ambition, constant joy. They always go forward, perhaps broken within, serenely embracing difficulties, forgetful of themselves, completely given to others...

Nothing stops them, neither the contempt of the great, nor the systematic opposition of the powerful, nor poverty, nor disease, nor pranks: they love and that's enough for them!

They have faith, they hope. In the midst of their pains, they are the world's happy people. Their hearts, having expanded infinitely, are nourished by God.

They are the Church that is born among us. They are Christ who lives among us and it is from him that their nobility comes, from Him, to whom they gave themselves by giving themselves to their less fortunate brothers and sisters. Understanding that others were also children of God, brothers of Christ, made them grow. Between them, God, Christ and others there is now a definitive bond. They understand that their mission is to be a bridge to the Father, a bridge for all people. Everyone together, all the Father's children, carried by the Son Jesus Christ, who all reach the Father through him, and this happens through our action, the action of each one of us. All of humanity working in this task, helped by yesterday's activists, who have already received their reward as their work comes to an end. How can it happen that we no longer live in this perspective? Knowing that we are consecrated to God, we cannot continue to live turned in on ourselves, nor on our merits and not even on our sins ..., but we must instead imitate our energetic and sweet Savior, who "having loved his own, loved them to the end (Jn 13:1).

A Condition

A condition for Christianity to take hold of our entire lives is to know Christ intimately, his message, and to know the men of our time to whom this message is directed. Few apostles, priests or laity, are prepared for the modern apostolate. Their action does not penetrate, but remains on the surface. Who has not felt within themselves ardent desires which, once communicated to others, produce only superficial results in them? Our clearest thoughts do not easily find the way of intelligence or even of the heart to reach others.

We preach a sure doctrine. We repeat the Gospel, the Fathers, St. Thomas, the encyclicals, ... however the contact is superficial, our dynamism has not moved those we wanted to move. But there is more: if we go from those who seem to be great guides of men, to those who have been successful in their social or civil action, to those who have managed to create a little more justice and happiness in the world, and if we ask them if they are happy with their action, they will reply that they are perfectly aware that they have only managed to touch the problem on the surface, that society always escapes any moralizing and, even more, sanctifying action. It would take geniuses and saints to remedy such deep evils ... and even these must be persevering!

When an apostle turns to action too quickly or stops his formation work, he suffers the consequences. In apostolic action one remains at the level of his true value. Only the saint sanctifies, only light illuminates, only love warms.

Usually, easy groups allow themselves to be penetrated easily by an apostle's action: children, religious, pious souls ... Apostles, especially in front of men, are as if disarmed, because they only have ready-made formulas for them, abstract or worn out, textbook answers ... They do not even know how to use encyclicals, because they do not know the setting in which they apply.

Many modern-day apostles fail because they set out too early, or because they were satisfied right away with their science, experience, virtue. They felt complete too soon.

The laity... has remained mediocre activists, without real training. The priests, always out of touch with life, out of touch with reality, maladjusted or misunderstood, have always repeated the same clichés in front of their easy clientele, while the immense mass still continues to ignore that there is God and that Christ has come ..., without there being anyone to remind the powerful, leaders, as well as the humble about their duties, nor anyone to show the way in critical times.

It is necessary to know with the knowledge of Wisdom, which is richer and deeper than simple science: to know men and to love them passionately as Christ's brothers and God's children; to know our sick society, as the doctor does by examining it. How many are there who take the time to study the complex web of our social life, its intellectual currents, its economic mechanisms, its legal empires, its political tendencies? To act with prudence one must know. The price of our conquest must be using all our energy to collaborate with grace.

Deep knowledge of Christ: theology encapsulated from a dissertation cannot be enough. Wisdom imposes itself. The gaze of the humble man who approaches God's face by strength of his purity; the contemplative's gazing upon Christ, in whom everything is summed up, who is the hope of our salvation. The apostle must integrate his action into Christ's plan for our time; he must know Christ well and know our time well in order to approach them both with love. Everything is here (and this presupposes that immense humility which is what makes us able to receive graces from above).

Healthy spirituality, which does not consist only in pious practices, nor in sentimentality, but in those who let themselves be taken entirely by Christ who fills their lives. Spirituality that is nourished by profound contemplation, in which one learns to know and love God and his brothers, the men of one's era. This spirituality is what will turn the Church into the yeast of the world.

October 13, 2021

Wednesday, 28th Week in Ordinary Time

Rom 2:1-11

Ps 62

Lk 11:42-46

In the first reading, we see that after having listed the Gentiles' errors, St. Paul turns to the Jews. They too are guilty, because they do the same reprehensible things as the Gentiles, and of that weren't enough, they are extremely judgmental towards them. Even if God's judgment is slow in coming, as he awaits man's repentance, at any rate it will come, and everyone will be judged according to the good or evil done, whether Jew or Gentile, because God does not show partiality.

You, O man, are without excuse, every one of you who passes judgment. For by the standard by which you judge another you condemn yourself, since you, the judge, do the very same things. We know that the judgment of God on those who do such things is true. Do you suppose, then, you who judge those who engage in such things and yet do them yourself, that you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you hold his priceless kindness, forbearance, and patience in low esteem, unaware that the kindness of God would lead you to repentance? By your stubbornness and impenitent heart, you are storing up wrath for yourself for the day of wrath and revelation of the just judgment of God, who will repay everyone according to his works, eternal life to those who seek glory, honor, and immortality through perseverance in good works, but wrath and fury to those who selfishly disobey the truth and obey wickedness. Yes, affliction and distress will come upon everyone who does evil, Jew first and then Greek. But there will be glory, honor, and peace for everyone who does good, Jew first and then Greek. There is no partiality with God.

The responsorial psalm is the humble man's confident confession. Aware of his weakness, he takes refuge completely in God. The one praying feels secure, because he does not rely on himself, but rather solely on the Lord. Thus, he invites the people to trust in God and to open their hearts to him in the security of being able to count on his mercy and justice:

Only in God is my soul at rest; from him comes my salvation. He only is my rock and my salvation, my stronghold; I shall not be disturbed at all. Only in God be at rest, my soul, for from him comes my hope. He only is my rock and my salvation, my stronghold; I shall not be disturbed. Trust in him at all times, O my people! Pour out your hearts before him; God is our refuge!

In the Gospel, Jesus pronounces his terrible "woe to you" four times against the Pharisees and doctors of the law, denouncing their hypocrisy:

Woe to you Pharisees! You pay tithes of mint and of rue and of every garden herb, but you pay no attention to judgment and to love for God. These you should have done, without overlooking the others. (Lk 11:42).

Through his reproaches, Jesus declares the true values of religion: justice, love of God and neighbor, humility, the consistent witness of life:

Woe to you Pharisees! You love the seat of honor in synagogues and greetings in marketplaces. Woe to you! You are like unseen graves over which people unknowingly walk. [...] And he said, "Woe also to you scholars of the law! You impose on people burdens hard to carry, but you yourselves do not lift one finger to touch them." (Lk 11:43-44, 46).

These reproaches unmask our duplicity and hypocrisy, and urge us to follow the invitation of Psalm 62, which we have just read: "*Pour out your hearts before him; God is our refuge!*". In this true light of our misery, purified and healed by God's mercy, we receive salvation.

In the long history of Christianity there are also many cases of betrayal and infidelity! This observation should grieve us, but not discourage us, because the examples of fidelity and total self-giving are much more numerous, and they console, strengthen and stimulate the daily commitment of every baptized person, helping him to rise from any falls.

Such was the life and testimony of St. Damian de Veuster, a Belgian missionary priest belonging to the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary (or Picpus Fathers), a religious order that mainly dealt with missions in Oceania and in distant lands. Once he arrived in Hawaii, Damien's vocation was made even more intense by the drama of leprosy that was spreading in the archipelago in those years. All the lepers had been confined to one of the smaller islands, Molokai, and Damien gave his life to console those poor people. Damien, the apostle of the lepers, died in Molokai in 1889. Below is a letter written a year and a half before his death to his brother which shows that his greatest joy was serving the Lord in his poor and sick children.

Letter XXVIII, Molokai, November 9, 1887 (to his brother Pamphile)

My dear brother, having been informed that some of the Belgian papers had stated the death of your exiled brother, I suppose that is the reason why you do not write to me anymore. Unfortunately, Almighty God has not yet called me out of this miserable world; and here I am nearly useless now, and I do not know for how many years more; yet I am in my daily occupations as usual, since it has pleased our Divine Savior to entrust to my care the spiritual welfare of the unfortunate lepers exiled at Molokai. As you know, a long time ago, I myself have been chosen by Divine Providence as a victim of this loathsome disease.

I hope to be eternally thankful to God for this favor; as it seems to me that this disease may shorten a little, and even make more direct, my road to our dear fatherland. Such being my hope, I have accepted this malady as my special cross, which I try to carry, as Simon the Cyrenian, in the footsteps of our Divine Master. Please help me with your good prayers to obtain persevering strength, till I happily arrive at the top of Calvary.

Though leprosy has a pretty strong hold on my body, and has already disfigured me somewhat, I continue to be robust and strong, and my terrible pains in the feet are gone. So

far the disease has not yet distorted my hands, and I continue to say Mass every day. This privilege is my greatest consolation, for my own sake as well as for the benefit of my numerous fellow-sufferers, who every Sunday fill pretty well my two churches, in both of which I permanently reserve the Blessed Sacrament. I have here living with me fifty orphan boys, and they keep me pretty well busy during my free time. Death had brought down the number of patients here to about five hundred, but now the Government is sending new ones by dozens every week, and it is expected that shortly our number will be doubled or even tripled, and therefore if Almighty God spares my strength, I shall have more and more work to harvest the poor souls of those lepers who obtain the grace of conversion [...].

I do my best to plant and water the field that my Divine Savior has confided to me. Here and there I pull up a weed; but to obtain the true fruit of conversion, I need in a special manner the prayers of devout and compassionate souls. So, as you are not coming in person, you must assist in this exceptional mission of mine by praying and getting prayers for us.

(The letter continues with the following addition)

November 16

I still continue to be the only priest in Molokai. Father Columban Beissel, and quite lately Father Wendelin Mullers, are the only ones I have seen for sixteen months. As I have plenty of work, the time seems very short to me. The joy and contentment of heart that the Sacred Hearts deluge me with, make me consider myself the happiest missionary in the world. Consequently, the sacrifice of my health, which our good God has deigned to accept that He may render my ministry among the lepers more fruitful, appears after all but a slight affair, and even profitable for me. I venture to say, with a little perhaps of Saint Paul's meaning, "I am dead, and my life is hidden with Christ in God" [...]

Your brother,

Joseph Damien De Veuster

(Pamphile de Vesuster, Auguste. *Life and Letters of Father Damien, The Apostle of the Lepers*. London: The Catholic Truth Society, 1889, pp. 141-143)

October 14, 2021

Thursday, 28th Week in Ordinary Time

Rom 3:21-30

Ps 130

Lk 11:47-54

With his remarkably characteristic depth, St. Paul explains that God's justice is made manifest and that, through faith in Jesus, Jews and pagans are freely justified without any distinction. *All have sinned and are deprived of the glory of God. They are justified freely by his grace through the redemption in Christ Jesus.* In fact,

God set forth [Christ Jesus] as an expiation, through faith, by his Blood, to prove his righteousness because of the forgiveness of sins previously committed, through the forbearance of God – to prove his righteousness in the present time, that he might be righteous and justify the one who has faith in Jesus.

All were in the condition of sinners, therefore,

What occasion is there then for boasting? It is ruled out. On what principle, that of works? No, rather on the principle of faith. For we consider that a person is justified by faith apart from works of the law. Does God belong to Jews alone? Does he not belong to Gentiles, too? Yes, also to Gentiles, for God is one.

As a responsorial psalm we once again encounter the *De profundis*, which we had already seen on October 5: it is a cry that rises from the depths of the soul, aware that its only hope to rise again from the abyss is the Lord's forgiveness, in which we place all our trust:

Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord; Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to my voice in supplication. If you, O Lord, mark iniquities, Lord, who can stand? But with you is forgiveness, that you may be revered. I trust in the Lord; my soul trusts in his word. My soul waits for the Lord more than sentinels wait for the dawn.

In the Gospel of today's celebration, Jesus' 'woe to you' continues against the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees, who want to be saved and save the people in their own way: not by correctly interpreting God's way and putting it into practice, but by multiplying the rules and persecuting the true prophets:

The Lord said:

"Woe to you who build the memorials of the prophets whom your fathers killed. Consequently, you bear witness and give consent to the deeds of your ancestors, for they

killed them and you do the building. Therefore, the wisdom of God said, 'I will send to them prophets and Apostles; some of them they will kill and persecute' in order that this generation might be charged with the blood of all the prophets shed since the foundation of the world, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah who died between the altar and the temple building. Yes, I tell you, this generation will be charged with their blood! Woe to you, scholars of the law! You have taken away the key of knowledge. You yourselves did not enter and you stopped those trying to enter."

Sadly, the end of the Gospel confirms the incorrigible hypocrisy of the religious class controlling the country, thus preventing the simple folk from finding the path to salvation. These hypocrites do not authentically seek God, but instead exalt themselves as they seek a way to get rid of Jesus just as their ancestors tried to eliminate the prophets:

When Jesus left, the scribes and Pharisees began to act with hostility toward him and to interrogate him about many things, for they were plotting to catch him at something he might say.

Jesus will also say:

If the world hates you, realize that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, the world would love its own; but because you do not belong to the world, and I have chosen you out of the world, the world hates you. Remember the word I spoke to you, 'No slave is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. And they will do all these things to you on account of my name, because they do not know the one who sent me. (Jn 15:18-21).

Faith uniting everyone, Jews and Gentiles alike, is rendered comprehensible from the universal dimension of salvation in which Jesus is operative. Even more illuminating is that, by enduring our sufferings and persecutions, we all have the possibility of participating in this unifying salvation, offered without bias towards any ethnicity, or cultural affiliation.

Vietnamese Cardinal François-Xavier Nguyễn Văn Thuận, who has already been declared venerable thanks to the proven heroism of his virtues, is a great witness of this faith and its universal efficacy. As a Christian he is reached and redeemed by Christ's grace which saves beyond the Law given to the Jews. Overcoming every legalistic reduction of the Law while suffering the persecutions inflicted on him, he was able, thanks to obedient love, to embrace the same cross of Jesus for salvation. It was for his personal salvation, for the salvation of the Christians of his Church in Saigon, and even the salvation of his persecutors. While he was bishop of Saigon, he was arrested by the Communists who had come to power, was convicted and remained in prison for 13 years. Appointed President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, he became a cardinal in 2001. He died of a tumor in Rome at the age of 74, September 16, 2002.

From February 3-8, 2002, he had preached his last Spiritual Retreat for the Roman Curia, later published in a book with the title: "*Testimony of Hope*". We offer here the second to last meditation of the retreat:

When I was in prison, I sometimes experienced moments of despair, of revolt, wondering why God had abandoned me since I had consecrated my life entirely to his service, to building churches, schools, pastoral structures, to guiding vocations, to following movements and spiritual experiences, to developing dialogue with other religions, to helping rebuild my country after the war, etc. I wondered why God had forgotten about me and all the works undertaken in his name. Often I couldn't sleep and was gripped by anguish.

One night I heard a voice inside me saying: "All those things are God's works, but they are not God." I had to choose God and not his works. Maybe one day, if God should have wanted it, I would have been able to take them up again, but I had to let him choose, which He would do better than me.

From that moment on, I felt a deep peace in my heart and, despite all the trials, I always repeated to myself: "God and not God's works". What matters is to live according to the Gospel, of the Gospel and for the Gospel alone, as Saint Paul said: "I do everything for the Gospel" (1 Cor 10:23).

We must live the fundamentals in everything, but above all in the missionary enthusiasm of our life as pastors, starting from the essentials. Having the fundamentals in your heart. When we have what's essential inside of us, we no longer feel the need for anything. Also in our priestly life we must have the essentials within us, that is, God and his will. If you have God you have everything, if you don't have God in your heart, you lack everything.

For this reason, when I was in prison, every day before celebrating Holy Mass, I thought of the promises I had made at the time of my episcopal ordination. With them, I was committed to always having God, to keep the fundamentals in my life: Him and his will. The promises that were made at the moment of ordination, however, must be continually renewed because they are a program of holiness and, if we keep them, we are holy. Those promises challenge us every day. They ask us for a fidelity that is not the simple repetition of the past but the ever-renewed newness of our heart's gift to God and the Church.

It is the acceptance of the grace of his spirit that rejuvenates our commitment and makes us witnesses of an experience, every day new, of Lord's love.

This is what I mean when I speak of the need to always start afresh from the essentials: Everything is relative, everything passes. For this reason I wanted to write on my episcopal ring: "todo pasa" (Saint Teresa of Jesus, Let Nothing Disturb You). Only God remains and only He is enough. Let's never forget it. The essentials can only be lost with sin and, if we strive to be faithful, we will keep them in our hearts and this will give us the joy of starting every day anew with new energy and enthusiasm.

(François-Xavier Nguyễn Văn Thuán, *Testimony of Hope*, translated from the Italian, Scoprite la gioia della speranza, Ed. ART, Roma 2002, pp. 79 ss.)

15 October 2021

Friday, 28th Week in Ordinary Time

Memorial of Saint Teresa of Jesus, virgin and doctor of the Church

Rom 4:1-8

Ps 32

Lk 12:1-7

All the passages of the Liturgy of the Word emphasize the importance of faith whereby man is justified by God through a justice that immensely surpasses human works.

[...] A worker's wage is credited not as a gift, but as something due.

But when one does not work, yet believes in the one who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness. So also David declares the blessedness of the person to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: "Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord does not record." (Rom 4:4-8)

The psalm that St. Paul used in his argument is Psalm 32; it proclaims salvation's absolute gratuitousness, but requires of those who receive it the confession of sin and loving trust. This is true faith:

Blessed is he whose fault is taken away, whose sin is covered. Blessed the man to whom the Lord imputes not guilt, in whose spirit there is no guile. Then I acknowledged my sin to you, my guilt I covered not. I said, "I confess my faults to the Lord," and you took away the guilt of my sin. Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, you just; exult, all you upright of heart.

And it is authentic faith that Jesus preaches to the crowds that gather around him: not the hypocrisy of the Pharisees who expect to save themselves on their own by unlawfully multiplying precepts. True faith implies righteousness in action and full trust in God who also takes care of the sparrows and even counts the hair on the heads of his children. As Jesus addresses his listeners, those whom he affectionately calls "his friends", he does not pretend to hide the possibility of suffering or even martyrdom from them, but asks for them to resist sin and abandon themselves in trust to God's providence.

At that time: So many people were crowding together that they were trampling one another underfoot. Jesus began to speak, first to his disciples, "Beware of the leaven—that is, the hypocrisy—of the Pharisees." There is nothing concealed that will not be revealed, nor secret that will not be known. Therefore whatever you have said in the darkness will be heard in the light, and what you have whispered behind closed doors will be proclaimed on the housetops. I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body but after that

can do no more. I shall show you whom to fear. Be afraid of the one who after killing has the power to cast into Gehenna; yes, I tell you, be afraid of that one. Are not five sparrows sold for two small coins? Yet not one of them has escaped the notice of God. Even the hairs of your head have all been counted. Do not be afraid. You are worth more than many sparrows."

The saint remembered today, Saint Teresa of Avila, perfectly embodies the faith that Jesus requires of his friends, unfettered and full of amazement. A faith made out of trust, humility, and security in Providence. Reformer of Carmel, together with St. John of the Cross, Teresa personally founded 18 convents. Upon her death, the reform counted numerous monasteries, hundreds of nuns and just as many male foundations with an even higher number of friars.

The missionary yearning is the foundation of the reform carried out by St. Teresa and its extraordinary diffusion. Teresa was in fact convinced that the radicalism of monastic life is in itself a form of evangelization: the prayer of the communities, members' mutual love and their joy are "good news", presented without many words, but visible, which impacts those who come into contact with monasteries. The saint wanted to sow new tabernacles everywhere and populate her houses with people who would experience adoration of God and brotherly love in its fullness. Her book: "*The Foundations*", of which we present a few pages, gives us an idea of the missionary spirit of this great and very humble founder:

After four years, or it may be a little more, a religious of the Order of St. Francis came to see me: his name was Alfonso Maldonado, a great servant of God, having the same desires as myself for the good of souls; but he was able to accomplish them, for which I envied him extremely. As he had not long come from India, he began to tell me how many millions of souls were lost there, for want of instruction, and he gave us a sermon on the subject, exhorting us to do penance, and then departed. I became so distressed at the loss of so many souls that I could not contain myself: and I went to one of our hermitages, and there, with many tears, cried to our Lord, beseeching Him to give me the means whereby I might be able to gain some souls to His service, since the devil carried away so many, and that my prayers might be of some avail, for I was good for nothing more myself. I envied those greatly, who for the love of God were able to spend themselves in this work, though they should suffer a thousand deaths; and thus it happens, that when we read in the Lives of the Saints, how they converted souls, this excites within me more devotion, more tenderness and envy, than all the martyrdoms they suffered; and this is a feeling our Lord has given me, thus showing me that He values one soul which gain through His mercy by our prayers more than all the services we can do Him. (Book of the Foundations 1:7).

(Our general father) was very pleased to see our way of living, which was an imperfect image of our Order as its commencement, and how the primitive rule was observed in all its rigor, which was not the case in any other monastery of the whole Order. As he had a great desire that this beginning should go forward, he gave me several letters patent for the erection of more monasteries, with an injunction that none of the Provincials should prevent me. These letters I did not ask of him since he knew my manner of proceeding in prayer, and the great desire I had to be the means of enabling souls to approach nearer to God.

But these means I procured not from him; rather it appeared to me madness, because I well knew that a worthless woman like myself, and without any power, could do nothing. But when these desires come into the soul, it is not to please God, and her confidence in Him, His Divine Majesty makes that possible, which to natural reason is not so. Thus when I saw the great desire our very reverend Father General had, that more monasteries should be founded, it seemed as if I saw them already established; and, remembering the words our Lord had spoken to me, I now perceive some beginning of that which before I could not understand. [...]. A few days after, when I considered how necessary it was that, if I erected convents for nuns, there should also be some monasteries for men observing the same rule; and seeing how few there were in this province, after having earnestly recommended the matter to our Lord, I wrote a letter to our Father General entreating him as well as I could to be favorable, and giving him reasons to prove what great honor would result therefrom to God; and at the same time showing that the inconveniences which might happen were not sufficient to give up so good a work: I likewise placed before him the honor our Blessed Lady would derive from it, to whom he was exceedingly devout. She it was who must advanced this object; for the Father General having received my sister when he was at Valencia, sent me, from thence a license to found two monasteries [...].

Being now very much consoled by having obtained the license, I was the more troubled because there were no friars in the province that I could hear of, to begin the work, nor any secular willing to make a beginning: in this difficulty I could do nothing but beseech our Lord, that He would be pleased to raise up one person at least.. I had neither house, nor means to purchase one. Behold here a poor barefooted nun, without the support of anyone, but our Lord, furnished with plenty of letters and good desires, without any possibility of putting them in execution. But neither my courage nor confidence failed me; for when I considered that our Lord having granted one thing, would certainly grant the other, then everything appeared to me possible, and so I began to set to work.

Oh, greatness of God, how do you show your power by giving courage to such an ant! And O, my Lord! What great things would You not do for those who love You, but our cowardice and fears are in the way, because we never resolve but when full of a thousand apprehensions and human considerations! And you, O my God! You displays not your wonders and greatness! Who is more disposed to give, were there any to receive? Who more willing to accept our services at our own charge, that You? May it be that I have done your Majesty some service, and not rather have the greater account to give for all that I have received!. (Book of the Foundations 2:3-7).

For frequently, when carrying on these Foundations, I found myself seized with so much sickness and so many pains, that I was so much oppressed thereby, and thought I could not even remain in my cell, without keeping my bed: and then I turned to my Savior, complaining to His Majesty, and asking "Why he wished me to do more that I was able." But afterwards (though with much labor) our Lord gave me strength, and with the fervor and solicitude with which He filled me, me thought I had forgot myself.

As well as I can remember, I never omitted a Foundation, through fear of the labor, though I felt great repugnance to the journeys (especially long ones), but when once I began them, they appeared inconsiderable, seeing as I did for whose sake they were undertaken, and that

God in every house was to be praised, and the Most Blessed Sacrament venerated. (Book of the Foundations 17:4-5).

October 16, 2021

Saturday, 28th Week in Ordinary Time

Rom 4:13,16-18

Ps 105

Lk 12:8-12

St. Paul exalts the faith of Abraham, who became the father of many peoples precisely because of his faith. It is by virtue of faith that promises are fulfilled. The law given to Moses is good and holy, but it is only a temporary stage in the overall plan of salvation, which instead is fulfilled in Christ Jesus and is universal in scope:

Brothers and sisters:

It was not through the law that the promise was made to Abraham and his descendants that he would inherit the world, but through the righteousness that comes from faith. For this reason, it depends on faith, so that it may be a gift, and the promise may be guaranteed to all his descendants, not to those who only adhere to the law but to those who follow the faith of Abraham, who is the father of all of us, as it is written, I have made you father of many nations. He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into being what does not exist. He believed, hoping against hope, that he would become the father of many nations, according to what was said, Thus shall your descendants be.

In the Christian reading of Psalm 105, God's same universality and fidelity is affirmed, he who has always remembered his covenant promised to Abraham and his descendants, long before the gift of the law:

You descendants of Abraham, his servants, sons of Jacob, his chosen ones! He, the Lord, is our God; throughout the earth his judgments prevail. He remembers forever his covenant which he made binding for a thousand generations – Which he entered into with Abraham and by his oath to Isaac. For he remembered his holy word to his servant Abraham. And he led forth his people with joy; with shouts of joy, his chosen ones.

We can see in today's Gospel passage an explanation of what St. Paul affirmed in the letter to the Romans: it is not the law alone, but faith that allows us to recognize Christ as the fullness of the promises made to the Fathers. At the moment when Jesus feels hostility and rejection towards him growing, he asks his faithful ones to acknowledge him, not to deny him. He assures them that the Holy Spirit will intervene in their defense when they are dragged into court and he will prompt them in what they should say:

Jesus said to his disciples:

"I tell you, everyone who acknowledges me before others the Son of Man will acknowledge before the angels of God. But whoever denies me before others will be denied before the angels of God. "Everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but the one who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven. When they take you before synagogues and before rulers and authorities, do not worry about how or what your defense will be or about what you are to say. For the Holy Spirit will teach you at that moment what you should say."

In recent times, in the Algerian Church, 19 Christian martyrs have given us a great example of faith and evangelical courage. They not only ceaselessly acknowledged Christ, but also upheld their place of service even when given an alternative. Even more, they loved and forgave their persecutors in advance. These martyrs served the few Christians present in the country, living in friendship and fraternal dialogue with Muslims (who are also children of Abraham, the common father of all), and, in trying to alleviate their neighbor's suffering, they gave testimony to all – regardless of race or religion – of that love which is possible and can be made visible even in the tragic moments of a civil war.

One of these 19 martyrs was the Dominican Pierre Claverie, Bishop of Oran, a pied-noir, born and raised in Algeria. He was assassinated along with his young Muslim driver Mohamed Bouchikhi on August 1, 1996, during the civil war. He was beatified in Oran in 2019, along with his 18 companions.

On the occasion of his enthronement in the cathedral of Oran, on October 9, 1981, Bishop Pierre had made clear in his homily his understanding of his mission and that of the Church in an independent and totally Muslim Algeria:

Yes, our Church is sent on a mission. I am not afraid to say it and also to say that I am joyful to have entered into this mission with you. There are many misunderstandings inherited from history that rest on the mission and missionaries. Today we clearly say that we are not and do not want to be aggressors [...]. We are not and we do not want to be soldiers of a new crusade against Islam, against non-believers or against anyone else [...]. We do not want to be agents of an economic or cultural neo-colonialism that divides the Algerian people in order to better dominate them [...]. We are not and we do not want to be of those proselytizing evangelizers who believe they are honoring God's love through indiscreet zeal or a total lack of respect for their fellow man, for his culture, for his faith [...] But we are and we want to be missionaries of God's love as we discovered it in Jesus Christ. This love, infinitely respectful of men, does not impose itself, does not impose anything, does not force consciences and hearts. With delicacy and through its presence alone, it frees what was chained, reconciles what was torn apart, restores what was broken [...]. We have known this love and have believed in it [...]. It grabbed hold of us and fascinated us. We believe that it can renew the life of humanity if only it is acknowledged a little [...].

In a text written six months before his death, entitled *Humanité plurielle*, he wrote:

In this experience of closure, then of the crisis and the emergence of the individual, I acquire the personal conviction that humanity is only plural and that, as soon as we claim –

in the Catholic Church, we have had the sad experience of it in the course of our history – to possess the truth or to speak in the name of humanity, we fall into totalitarianism and exclusion. Nobody owns the truth, everyone seeks it. There are certainly objective truths that are beyond all of us and to which we can only reach after a long journey and by gradually reconstructing this truth, drawing something from other cultures, from other types of humanity, what others have also acquired, what they also searched for on their path to the truth. I am a believer, I believe that God exists, but I do not claim to possess this God, neither through Jesus who reveals him to me, nor through the dogmas of my faith. One does not possess God. We don't possess the truth and I need the truth of others.

At the end of June 1996, Pierre Claverie went to Prouilhe, the birth place of the Dominican Order and he delivered his testament in a sermon:

After the start of the Algerian tragedy I have been asked more than once: “but what are you doing over there, in Algeria? Why do you stay in that country? But finally shake off the dust from your shoes, and come home.” Home... but where is really our home?... We are in Algeria for the sake of this crucified Messiah, only for his sake! We have no interest to safeguard, no influence to defend, we have not been driven by any masochistic perversion, we have no power, but we are there as at the bedside of a friend, of a sick brother, holding his hand and wiping the sweat from his front! Only for the sake of Jesus because it is he who is suffering because of this violence that spares no one, crucified again in the flesh of thousands of innocent people.

Like Mary, the Mother, and the Apostle John, we too find ourselves at the foot of the cross where Jesus dies abandoned by his own and mocked by the crowd. Is it not the duty of every Christian to be present in the places where someone is rejected and abandoned?... Where can the Church, which is the mystical body of Christ, be found if not in the forefront? I believe that it dies of not being close to the Cross of his Lord. Although it may seem paradoxical, and St. Paul has demonstrated it with clarity, strength, vitality, Christian hope, the fruitfulness of the Church come precisely from there, from nowhere else and in no other way. The Church deceives itself and misleads the world it is aligned with the other powers, as a humanitarian organization or as an evangelical movement loving to be noticed. In that way it will shine, but not burn with the fire of God, “strong as death”, as the Song of Solomon says, because here all is really about love, love first of all, and only love, a passion that Jesus has given us the taste and has shown us the way. “There is no greater love than to lay down one’s own life for the one you love!”

Giving one's life: this is not reserved for martyrs or maybe we are at least called to become martyrs, witnesses of love’s free gift, of the free gift of our life. This gift comes to us from the grace of God, given to us in Jesus Christ. Giving one's life is this and nothing else! In every decision, in every act, it is concretely giving something of oneself: one's time, smile, friendship, one's ability, presence – even if silent, even if powerless – one's attention, material and moral support. or spiritual, one's outstretched hand ... without calculations, without reservations, without fear of losing...

(Homily at Prouilhe, June 23, 1996 : *La vie spirituelle*, Cerf Editorial, Paris 1997, p. 833-834)

October 17, 2021

Sunday, 29th Week in Ordinary Time – Year B

Is 53:10-11

Ps 33

Heb 4:14-16

Mk 10:35-45

The liturgy of the Word's theme on this XXIX Sunday in Ordinary Time is that of life conceived and implemented as a service, not as a possession. The first reading offers us the 4th poem of the servant of Yahweh, in whose suffering and humiliation the Church sees a prefigurement of the suffering and death of Christ, who suffers *for us*, is in solidarity with us, and redeems us from our sins:

The Lord was pleased to crush him in infirmity. If he gives his life as an offering for sin, he shall see his descendants in a long life, and the will of the LORD shall be accomplished through him. Because of his affliction he shall see the light in fullness of days; through his suffering, my servant shall justify many, and their guilt he shall bear.

It is in him alone that we must hope, because he alone is our true point of reference: the earth is full of his love, he is our help and our shield:

Upright is the word of the Lord, and all his works are trustworthy. He loves justice and right; of the kindness of the Lord the earth is full. See, the eyes of the Lord are upon those who fear him, upon those who hope for his kindness, to deliver them from death and preserve them in spite of famine. Our soul waits for the Lord, who is our help and our shield. May your kindness, O Lord, be upon us who have put our hope in you.

The letter to the Hebrews invites us to be firm in our faith in him who, despite being the Son of God, wanted to experience, out of love, the weakness, temptation and pain that characterize the human condition after sin. Precisely for this reason we can approach him with full confidence:

Brothers and sisters: Since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has similarly been tested in every way, yet without sin. So let us confidently approach the throne of grace to receive mercy and to find grace for timely help.

In the Gospel we see that the attitude of the sons of Zebedee is exactly the opposite of that of their Master: they behave like boastful teenagers, who only aim to be the stop and shine in front of their companions who, obviously, are indignant.

James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to Jesus and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." He replied, "What do you wish me to do for you?" They answered him, "Grant that in your glory we may sit one at your right and the other at your left." Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Can you drink the cup that I drink or be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" They said to him, "We can." Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink, you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized; but to sit at my right or at my left is not mine to give but is for those for whom it has been prepared." When the ten heard this, they became indignant at James and John.

Jesus' response to the pretentious request of the sons of Zebedee is full of tenderness: he points out to the two disciples that they have asked for a privilege whose importance they cannot comprehend, in their ignorance. Moreover, it is not up to him to grant, yet he seems to approve their bold confidence in affirming that they are capable of drinking his cup: "*The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized*". It is as if he were saddened on behalf of the future suffering and death his apostles would endure in their human condition in testimony of the love they bear him, the Master, even if small and imperfect. Then Jesus, aware that the indignation of the other ten is on the same level as the request of James and John, gives everyone a wonderful lesson in humility, service and self-giving, showing who the true disciple is:

Jesus summoned them and said to them, "You know that those who are recognized as rulers over the Gentiles Lord it over them, and their great ones make their authority over them felt. But it shall not be so among you. Rather, whoever wishes to be great among you will be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you will be the slave of all. For the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many."

The Sunday liturgy prevails over the memorials of the saints, but today we cannot fail to remember St. Ignatius of Antioch, known as Theophorus, Syrian bishop and martyr, second successor of St. Peter on the chair of Antioch, numbered among the apostolic fathers and fathers of the Church.

A great witness to the fervor of the apostolic Church, his love for Christ made him one of the greatest apostles and missionaries.

Imitating his Master, he too became a suffering servant as Isaiah states in the first reading and was a priest tested like Jesus, as we read in the letter to the Hebrews. As the Gospel invites all of us to do, he drank the Lord's cup and made himself a slave to all.

Led to Rome to be torn to pieces by wild beasts, he died in the tenth year of the emperor Trajan. During his journey, chained and harassed by a handful of soldiers (the 'ten leopards'), he wrote seven letters addressed to the Churches of Asia and Greece.

I am corresponding with all the churches and bidding them all realize that I am voluntarily dying for God — if, that is, you do not interfere. I plead with you, do not do me an unseasonable kindness. Let me be fodder for wild beasts — that is how I can get to God. I am God's wheat and I am being ground by the teeth of wild beasts to make a pure loaf for Christ. I would rather that you fawn on the beasts so that they may be my tomb and no scrap

of my body be left. Thus, when I have fallen asleep, I shall be a burden to no one. Then I shall be a real disciple of Jesus Christ when the world sees my body no more. Pray Christ for me that by these means I may become God's sacrifice.

I do not give you orders like Peter and Paul. They were apostles: I am a convict. They were at liberty: I am still a slave. But if I suffer, I shall be emancipated by Jesus Christ; and united to him, I shall rise to freedom. Even now as a prisoner, I am learning to forgo my own wishes.

All the way from Syria to Rome I am fighting with wild beasts, by land and sea, night and day, chained as I am to ten leopards (I mean to a detachment of soldiers), who only get worse the better you treat them. But by their injustices I am becoming a better disciple, "though not for that reason am I acquitted." What a thrill I shall have from the wild beasts that are ready for me! I hope they will make short work of me. I shall coax them on to eat me up at once and not to hold off, as sometimes happens, through fear. And if they are reluctant, I shall force them to it. Forgive me — I know what is good for me. Now is the moment I am beginning to be a disciple. May nothing seen or unseen begrudge me making my way to Jesus Christ. Come fire, cross, battling with wild beasts, wrenching of bones, mangling of limbs, crushing of my whole body, cruel tortures of the devil — only let me get to Jesus Christ!

Not the wide bounds of earth nor the kingdoms of this world will avail me anything. "I would rather die" and get to Jesus Christ, than reign over the ends of the earth. That is whom I am looking for — the One who died for us. That is whom I want — the One who rose for us. I am going through the pangs of being born. Sympathize with me, my brothers! Do not stand in the way of my coming to life — do not wish death on me. Do not give back to the world one who wants to be God's; do not trick him with material things. Let me get into the clear light and manhood will be mine. Let me imitate the Passion of my God. If anyone has Him in him, let him appreciate what I am longing for, and sympathize with me, realizing what I am going through.

The prince of this world wants to kidnap me and pervert my godly purpose. None of you, then, who will be there, must abet him. Rather be on my side — that is, on God's. Do not talk Jesus Christ and set your heart on the world. Harbor no envy. If, when I arrive, I make a different plea, pay no attention to me.

Rather heed what I am now writing to you. For though alive, it is with a passion for death that I am writing to you. My Desire has been crucified and there burns in me no passion for material things. There is living water in me, which speaks and says inside me, "Come to the Father."

I take no delight in corruptible food or in the dainties of this life. What I want is God's bread, which is the flesh of Christ, who came from David's line; and for drink I want his blood: an immortal love feast indeed!

I do not want to live any more on a human plane. And so it shall be, if you want it to. Want it to, so that you will be wanted! Despite the brevity of my letter, trust my request. Yes, Jesus Christ will clarify it for you and make you see I am really in earnest. He is the guileless mouth by which the Father has spoken truthfully. Pray for me that I reach my goal. I have written prompted, not by human passion, but by God's will. If I suffer, it will be because you favored me. If I am rejected, it will be because you hated me.

Remember the church of Syria in your prayers. In my place they have God for their shepherd. Jesus Christ alone will look after them — he, and your love. I blush to be reckoned among them, for I do not deserve it, being the least of them and an afterthought. Yet by his mercy I shall be something, if, that is, I get to God. With my heart I greet you; and the churches which have welcomed me, not as a chance passer-by, but in the name of Jesus Christ, send their love. Indeed, even those that did not naturally lie on my route went ahead to prepare my welcome in the different towns.

I am sending this letter to you from Smyrna by those praiseworthy Ephesians. With me, along with many others, is Crocus — a person very dear to me. I trust you have had word about those who went ahead of me from Syria to Rome for God's glory. Tell them I am nearly there. They are all a credit to God and to you; so you should give them every assistance. I am writing this to you on the twenty-fourth of August. Farewell, and hold out to the end with the patience of Jesus Christ.

(Ignatius to the Romans, IV-X, Early Christian Fathers, Cyril Richardson, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1995, pp. 104-06)

October 18, 2021

Feast of St. Luke, evangelist

2 Tim 4:10-17b

Ps 145

Lk 10:1-9

A scribe of Christ's meekness, as Dante defines him, Luke, a disciple of the second Christian generation, was an educated man, a doctor, probably from Antioch of Syria. He did not belong to the group of the apostles or even to the 72 disciples and he did not know Jesus.

St. Paul VI writes in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*:

The witness that the Lord gives of Himself and that Saint Luke gathered together in his Gospel – "I must proclaim the Good News of the kingdom of God" – without doubt has enormous consequences, for it sums up the whole mission of Jesus: "That is what I was sent to do." These words take on their full significance if one links them with the previous verses, in which Christ has just applied to Himself the words of the prophet Isaiah: "The Spirit of the Lord has been given to me, for he has anointed me. He has sent me to bring the good news to the poor." Going from town to town, preaching to the poorest – and frequently the most receptive – the joyful news of the fulfillment of the promises and of the Covenant offered by God is the mission for which Jesus declares that He is sent by the Father. And all the aspects of His mystery – the Incarnation itself, His miracles, His teaching, the gathering together of the disciples, the sending out of the Twelve, the cross and the resurrection, the permanence of His presence in the midst of His own – were components of His evangelizing activity. (EN 6, December 8, 1975).

The Gospel of Saint Luke testifies to God's great mercy and Jesus' predilection for the poor. It is the Gospel of prayer and joy. The female characters in his Gospel are numerous and always treated with delicacy. One can ponder, for example, the news about the angel's annunciation to Mary. The birth and childhood of the Messiah were probably communicated to the evangelist directly by Mary herself or at least by credible witnesses who lived with Mary. Legend has it that San Luca was also a skilled painter: many icons of the Madonna have been attributed to his work.

In addition to his Gospel, the book of the Acts of the Apostles is attributed to St. Luke, which is a continuation of his Gospel. Saint Luke's humility is such that we come to know his name only from Saint Paul, whom he accompanied on some journeys and who mentions him three times.

Beloved: Demas, enamored of the present world, deserted me and went to Thessalonica, Crescens to Galatia, and Titus to Dalmatia. Luke is the only one with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is helpful to me in the ministry. I have sent Tychicus to Ephesus. When you come, bring the cloak I left with Carpus in Troas, the papyrus rolls, and especially the parchments. (2Tm 4:10-13).

Like Paul, St. Luke was a great propagator of the 'good news' of Christ and, with him, *he proclaimed the message fully, that all the Gentiles might hear it.*

Alexander the coppersmith did me a great deal of harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds. You too be on guard against him, for he has strongly resisted our preaching. At my first defense no one appeared on my behalf, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them! But the Lord stood by me and gave me strength, so that through me the proclamation might be completed and all the Gentiles might hear it (2Tm 4: 14-17).

The responsorial psalm invites the faithful and all the cosmos to praise and bless the Lord. All things and all men must speak of God's glory and power to make them known to all people. They must communicate to everyone that God reigns forever with justice and goodness and is close to those who invoke him:

Let all your works give you thanks, O Lord, and let your faithful ones bless you. Let them discourse of the glory of your Kingdom and speak of your might. Making known to men your might and the glorious splendor of your Kingdom. Your Kingdom is a Kingdom for all ages, and your dominion endures through all generations. The Lord is just in all his ways and holy in all his works. The Lord is near to all who call upon him, to all who call upon him in truth.

The Gospel describes the sending of the disciples on mission:

The Lord Jesus appointed seventy-two disciples whom he sent ahead of him in pairs to every town and place he intended to visit. He said to them, "The harvest is abundant but the laborers are few; so ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest. Go on your way; behold, I am sending you like lambs among wolves. Carry no money bag, no sack, no sandals; and greet no one along the way. Into whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this household.' If a peaceful person lives there, your peace will rest on him; but if not, it will return to you. Stay in the same house and eat and drink what is offered to you, for the laborer deserves payment. Do not move about from one house to another. Whatever town you enter and they welcome you, eat what is set before you, cure the sick in it and say to them, 'The Kingdom of God is at hand for you.'"

To comment on this Gospel we have chosen the homily of another great evangelizer: St. Gregory the Great, Father and Doctor of the Church. Initially Prefect of Rome, he became a Benedictine monk and then was elected Supreme Pontiff in extremely difficult times for the city of Rome, for the Church and for Europe; it was he who sent forty Benedictine monks to evangelize Britain, obtaining the conversion of those peoples:

Dearly beloved Brethren, our Lord and Savior instructs us at one time by His words, and at another by His works. For His works are lessons, because from His acts, though performed in silence, our duty becomes manifest.

For instance, He sends His disciples two and two to preach, because there are two precepts of charity the love, that is, of God and of our neighbor, and between less than two there cannot be charity. For no one is said to have charity for himself; but love, to deserve the name of charity, must have for object another. Our Lord sent His disciples two and two to preach, to give us to understand that the man who has not charity for his neighbor ought on no account to undertake the office of preaching.

And with good reason it is said that He sent them two and two before His face into every city whither He Himself was to come. The Lord follows His preachers; for preaching comes first, and when the words of exhortation have preceded, and the intellect has been enlightened by truth, our Lord comes to take up His abode in our minds. For this reason Isaiah says to preachers: "Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight His paths" (Isa. 40:3). Hence the Psalmist also says, "Make a way for Him who ascendeth upon the west " (Ps. 67:5).

For our Lord ascends upon the west, inasmuch as from the place where He set in His Passion He displayed in His resurrection His greater glory. He ascends in sooth upon the west, because by His resurrection He triumphed over death, to which He had submitted. For Him, therefore, who ascends upon the west we make a way, when we preach His glory to your minds, that He Himself, coming after, may enlighten them by the presence of His love. Let us give ear, then, to what He says when sending His preachers: "The harvest indeed is great, but the laborers are few. Pray ye, therefore, the Lord of the harvest, that He send laborers into His harvest. "It is with profound sorrow we have to admit that though the harvest is great, the laborers are few, because, though the people are ready to hear the Word of God, there are few to preach it. Lo, the world is full of priests, yet in the harvest of the Lord a laborer is very rare, for we undertake, it is true, the office of the priesthood, but its duties we do not fulfill.

Yet weigh well, dearly beloved, weigh well the words of the text: "Pray ye the Lord of the harvest that He send laborers into His harvest." Pray then for us that we may have strength to labor for you as we ought, that our tongue may not be slack to exhort, and that, having undertaken the office of preaching, our silence may not prove our condemnation at the tribunal of the just Judge.

For oftentimes by reason of their own sins the tongue of preachers is tied, oftentimes on the other hand it is because of the sins of their people that the gift of eloquence is withheld from pastors. By reason of their own sins the tongue of preachers is tied, according to the words of the Psalmist, "But to the sinner God hath said, why dost thou declare My justices?" (Ps 49:16.)

And again, the voice of preachers is hindered because of the sins of the people, according to the words of the Lord to Ezechiel: "I will make thy tongue stick fast to the roof of thy mouth, and thou shalt be dumb, and not as a man that reproveth, because they are a provoking house" (Ezec. 3:26). As though He said expressly: The gift of eloquence is withdrawn from thee, because while the people offend Me by their sins they are not worthy to have the truth preached to them. Through whose fault it is that speech is withdrawn from the preacher is no easy matter to decide. But that the silence of the pastor is hurtful to himself sometimes, and to his flock at all times, is beyond all doubt. There is another feature, dearly beloved brethren, in the life of pastors which causes me deep affliction; and lest perchance my words may seem to reflect on anyone, I accuse myself also though I am so circumstanced, much

against my will, and through the necessities of the present troubled times. For we have descended to secular business, and having received the dignity of one office we busy ourselves with the duties of another. We abandon the duty of preaching, and to our disgrace, as I perceive, we are bishops in name, and have the title but not the virtue that befits that dignity. For the people committed to our care abandon God, and we are silent. They live in sin, and we do not stretch out a hand to correct them. But how can we reform the life of others while we neglect our own? For through attention to secular affairs the more we are occupied with external things, the more insensible we become to what is internal.

Hence holy Church, with reason, says of her weak members: "They have made me a keeper in the vineyards, my vineyard I have not kept" (Cant. 1:5).

But though we are made keepers in the vineyards, our own vineyard we do not keep, because being involved in external business we neglect the duties of our own ministry.

(Homily XVII, Addressed to the Bishops and Clergy, assembled in Council at the Lateran Basilica, about A.D. 591 Translated by rev. Patrick Boyle, C.M)

October 19, 2021

Tuesday, 29th Week in Ordinary Time

Optional Memorial of Saint John de Brébeuf, Isaac Jogues e companions, martyrs.

Optional Memorial of Blessed Jerzy Popiełuszko, martyr.

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

Ps 40

Lk 12:35-38

Brothers and sisters: Through one man sin entered the world, and through sin, death, and thus death came to all men, inasmuch as all sinned. If by that one person's transgression the many died, how much more did the grace of God and the gracious gift of the one man Jesus Christ overflow for the many. For if, by the transgression of the one, death came to reign through that one, how much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the gift of justification come to reign in life through the one Jesus Christ. In conclusion, just as through one transgression condemnation came upon all, so, through one righteous act acquittal and life came to all. For just as through the disobedience of one man the many were made sinners, so, through the obedience of the one the many will be made righteous. Where sin increased, grace overflowed all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through justification for eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Death entered the world due to Adam's sin, and all men belonging to Adam's lineage received death as an inheritance from him. Jesus Christ, the new Adam, brings a new beginning into the world: *acquittal and life came to all*. This life given to us by Christ has no comparison with the previous one: we have received an overabundance of grace, an elevation of our human nature: we have become children in the Son, we have received the Holy Spirit and our inheritance is eternal life. Truly *the grace of God and the gracious gift of the one man Jesus Christ overflow for the many*.

Psalm 40, chosen as the responsorial psalm, is a messianic psalm, which ends with the action of grace and the exultation of all those who seek God: *May all who seek you exult and be glad in you, and may those who love your salvation say ever, "The Lord be glorified."*

Sacrifice or oblation you wished not, but ears open to obedience you gave me. Burnt offerings or sin offerings you sought not; then said I, "Behold I come." "In the written scroll it is prescribed for me, to do your will, O my God, is my delight, and your law is within my heart!" I announced your justice in the vast assembly; I did not restrain my lips, as you, O Lord, know. May all who seek you exult and be glad in you, and may those who love your salvation say ever, "The Lord be glorified."

However, the memory of how the letter to the Hebrews quotes this psalm tempers the joy of salvation, making us aware of the price Christ paid to give it to us, to elevate us to the dignity of children of God the Father and his brothers:

Then I said, 'As is written of me in the scroll, behold, I come to do your will, O God.' First he says, "Sacrifices and offerings, holocausts and sin offerings, you neither desired nor delighted in." These are offered according to the law. Then he says, "Behold, I come to do your will." He takes away the first to establish the second. By this "will," we have been consecrated through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. (Heb 10:7-10)

Christ's victory over death, paid for at a very high price, requires from those who have been saved an attitude of attentive vigilance and loving expectation, since he will return to take his brothers, with whom he desires to share his triumph. Jesus describes earthly life as a night in which he will return: certainly, even if he always remains with us accompanying us in life and death, his definitive return will be a judgment of reward or condemnation. Blessed are those who have waited for him as obedient servants, carrying out their service with zeal and love!

Jesus said to his disciples: "Gird your loins and light your lamps and be like servants who await their master's return from a wedding, ready to open immediately when he comes and knocks. Blessed are those servants whom the master finds vigilant on his arrival. Amen, I say to you, he will gird himself, have them recline at table, and proceed to wait on them. And should he come in the second or third watch and find them prepared in this way, blessed are those servants."

The image of the master who rewards the faithful servants by making them sit at table and serving them, is only a figure of the bliss that awaits those who, in this life down below, have always been ready, waiting for their master: they served Him in their neighbor and they joined themselves to Christ's sacrifice in martyrdom. They united their obedience with their Savior's, thus contributing to the salvation of all. Precisely to exemplify today's readings, we propose some texts by the Canadian holy martyrs and by Blessed Jerzy Popiełuszko, whose optional liturgical memorial is today.

Jean de Brébeuf, a Jesuit, is the most prominent figure among the eight martyred Canadian missionaries: he suffered martyrdom together with another Jesuit by the Iroquois in March 1649. Here is an excerpt from his "*Spiritual Notes*":

For two days now I have experienced a great desire to be a martyr and to endure all the torments the martyrs suffered. Jesus, my Lord and Savior, what can I give you in return for all the favors you have first conferred on me? I will take from your hand the cup of your sufferings and call on your name. I vow before your eternal Father and the Holy Spirit, before your most holy Mother and her most chaste spouse, before the angels, apostles and martyrs, before my blessed fathers Saint Ignatius and Saint Francis Xavier—in truth I vow to you, Jesus my Savior, that as far as I have the strength I will never fail to accept the grace of martyrdom, if some day you in your infinite mercy would offer it to me, your most unworthy servant.

I bind myself in this way so that for the rest of my life I will have neither permission nor freedom to refuse opportunities of dying and shedding my blood for you, unless at a particular juncture I should consider it more suitable for your glory to act otherwise at that time. Further, I bind myself to this so that, on receiving the blow of death, I shall accept it

from your hands with the fullest delight and joy of spirit. For this reason, my beloved Jesus, and because of the surging joy which moves me, here and now I offer my blood and body and life. May I die only for you, if you will grant me this grace, since you willingly died for me. Let me so live that you may grant me the gift of such a happy death. In this way, my God and Savior, I will take from your hand the cup of your sufferings and call on your name: Jesus, Jesus, Jesus!

My God, it grieves me greatly that you are not known, that in this savage wilderness all have not been converted to you, that sin has not been driven from it. My God, even if all the brutal tortures which prisoners in this region must endure should fall on me, I offer myself most willingly to them and I alone shall suffer them all.

This vow of Jean de Brébeuf was evidently inspired by the Holy Spirit, because, without a specific intervention of God, he could not have sustained martyrdom, which was of an unprecedented horror and cruelty, as the *Report* left us by the Jesuit Father P.J.M. Chamounot testifies.

No less cruel or frightening was the young priest Jerzy Popiełuszko's martyrdom in October 1984, which the liturgy celebrates today. The cause of the murder was that of "*abuse of freedom of conscience achieved in the People's Republic of Poland*".

Here are excerpts from two sermons by Father Popiełuszko:

*Thanks to Christ's death and resurrection, the symbol of shame and humiliation has become that of courage, help and brotherhood. In the sign of the cross we, today, grasp what is most beautiful and most valuable in man. It is through the cross that one approaches the resurrection. There is no other way. And it is for this reason that the crosses of our homeland, our personal crosses, those of our families, must lead to victory, to the resurrection, if we join them to Christ who has conquered the cross (J. Popieluszko, *The Way of My Cross: Masses at Warsaw*, Translated by Michael J. Wrenn. Chicago: Regnery Books, 1986). [Our Translation]*

*May Holy Week and Easter be a time of prayer for us who present the crosses of our suffering, the crosses of our salvation: signs of the victory of good over evil, of life over death, of love over hatred. And for you, brothers, who feel hatred towards mercenaries in your hearts, it is time to reflect on the fact that force cannot win, even if it may triumph for a short time. We have the best proof of this at the foot of Christ's cross. There was violence there too, there was hatred of the truth. But strength and hatred were overcome by Christ's active love. Therefore, let us be strong in love, praying for our misled brothers, without condemning anyone, stigmatizing and exposing evil. As true faithful, we pray with the words of Christ, with the words he pronounced on the cross: "Forgive them, Father, for they know not what they are doing" (Lk 23:34). And grant us, O Christ, to be sensitive more to the power of love than to that of oppression and hatred." (Grazyna Sikorska, *Vita e morte di Jerzy Popieluszko*, Queriniana Editrice, Brescia, 1986, p. 67) [Our Translation]*

As always, the strength of martyrdom had and will have a missionary fruitfulness superior to any form of preaching, because "*the blood of martyrs is the seed of new Christians*".

October 20, 2021

Wednesday, 29th Week in Ordinary Time

Rom 6:12-18

Ps 124

Lk 12:39-48

Brothers and sisters: Sin must not reign over your mortal bodies so that you obey their desires. And do not present the parts of your bodies to sin as weapons for wickedness, but present yourselves to God as raised from the dead to life and the parts of your bodies to God as weapons for righteousness. For sin is not to have any power over you, since you are not under the law but under grace. What then? Shall we sin because we are not under the law but under grace? Of course not! Do you not know that if you present yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God that, although you were once slaves of sin, you have become obedient from the heart to the pattern of teaching to which you were entrusted. Freed from sin, you have become slaves of righteousness. (Rm 6: 12-18).

Christian freedom frees us from sin, making us God's servants: it is a true liberation, because sin leads us to death. However, this liberation was offered to us not to simply let us live according to our own will, but rather to become "slaves of justice".

The new life given to us by Christ is superior to natural life, yet does not invalidate it: the struggle between good and evil continues to be a reality. Natural death is also not suppressed. So what's new? In the struggle between justice and sin, between life and death, Christ has enabled us to take the right side, always in an attitude of service, and to win the battle, because *our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth*. True freedom from sin is serving God:

Had not the Lord been with us, let Israel say, had not the Lord been with us— When men rose up against us, then would they have swallowed us alive; when their fury was inflamed against us. Then would the waters have overwhelmed us; the torrent would have swept over us; over us then would have swept the raging waters. Blessed be the Lord, who did not leave us a prey to their teeth. We were rescued like a bird from the fowlers' snare; broken was the snare, and we were freed. Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.

The responsorial psalm needs no comment: *Blessed be the Lord, who did not leave us a prey to their teeth. We were rescued like a bird from the fowlers' snare; Broken was the snare, and we were freed.*

The gospel offers us a concrete illustration of what it means to serve God and be a slave to sin:

Jesus said to his disciples: "Be sure of this: if the master of the house had known the hour when the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. You also must be prepared, for at an hour you do not expect, the Son of Man will come." Then Peter said, "Lord, is this parable meant for us or for everyone?" And the Lord replied, "Who, then, is the faithful and prudent steward whom the master will put in charge of his servants to distribute the food allowance at the proper time? 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. 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 the servant severely and assign him a place with the unfaithful. That servant who knew his master's will but did not make preparations nor act in accord with his will shall be beaten severely; and the servant who was ignorant of his master's will but acted in a way deserving of a severe beating shall be beaten only lightly. Much will be required of the person entrusted with much, and still more will be demanded of the person entrusted with more."

The salvation Christ brought us requires our collaboration and vigilance: our earthly existence is lived out in service and expectation. We are not the masters; we are only servants, who must manage the house well and guide the other servants in their service in anticipation of the master's return.

If the master is late in coming, we who have been called to a free and loving service, could once again become slaves of our desires. We might no longer recognize the hidden but real presence of the one we await in the waiting itself. Our brothers, who serve with us, need to receive their portion of food in due time, not beatings! The expectation of the one we love, and who should always be present in our mind and heart, is incompatible with excessive eating and drinking and getting drunk! As St. Paul rightly says in the Epistle:

Brothers and sisters: Sin must not reign over your mortal bodies so that you obey their desires. And do not present the parts of your bodies to sin as weapons for wickedness, but present yourselves to God as raised from the dead to life and the parts of your bodies to God as weapons for righteousness. (Rm 6:12-13).

We have only one alternative: either servants of sin for death or servants of God for life!

A very clear example of authentic service of the Lord and a concrete expectation of his return was offered to us in recent times by Mother Teresa of Calcutta, whose example of a life given has become a call for both believers and non-believers, and an authentic presentation of the missionary apostolate.

In her life and in her teaching, the apostolate of smiling held great importance, apparently so simple to offer to those close to us, but which, on the other hand, can prove extremely difficult in particular circumstances:

Let us keep that joy of loving Jesus in our hearts. And share that joy with all that we come in touch with. And that radiating joy is real, for we have no reason not to be happy because we have no Christ with us. Christ in our hearts, Christ in the poor that we meet, Christ in the

smile that we give and the smile that we receive. Let us make that one point: That no child will be unwanted. And also that we meet each other always with a smile, especially when it is difficult to smile.

I never forget some time ago about fourteen professors came from the United States from different universities. And they came to Calcutta to our house. Then we were talking about that they had been to the home for the dying. They came to our house and we talked of love, of compassion, and then one of them asked me: Say, Mother, please tell us something that we will remember, and I said to them: Smile at each other, make time for each other in your family. Smile at each other.

And then another one asked me: Are you married, and I said: Yes, and I find it sometimes very difficult to smile at Jesus because he can be very demanding sometimes. This is really something true, and there is where love comes— when it is demanding, and yet we can give it to Him with joy [...]

I think that this is something, that we must live life beautifully, we have Jesus with us and He loves us. If we could only remember that God loves me, and I have an opportunity to love others as he loves me, not in big things, but in small things with great love, then Norway becomes a nest of love. And how beautiful it will be that from here a center for peace has been given. That from here the joy of life of the unborn child comes out.

If you become a burning light in the world of peace, then really the Nobel Peace Prize is a gift of the Norwegian people. God bless you!

(Humanitarian/Nobel Peace Prize 1979 December 11, 1979 at Oslo City Hall, Oslo, Norway).
To a journalist who asked her:

“What should we do when suffering visits us?” She replied: “Accept it with a smile”. “Accept it with a smile?” “Yes, with a smile. Because it is the greatest gift that God gives us”. “What? A smile?” “Smile at God, have the courage to accept everything he sends us, and ask and give what He takes away from us with a generous smile”.

(Interview conducted on January 15, 1973 by Ralf Rolls for a BBC school program, entitled *Belief and Life*).

October 21, 2021

Thursday, 29th Week in Ordinary Time

Rom 6:19-23

Ps 1

Lk 12:49-53

St. Paul addresses the brothers of the Roman Church in this passage of the epistle. His brothers had made a firm decision to renounce a life of slavery due to sin in exchange for one in service to God. In the first case, the sinners were under the illusion of being free (and now ashamed of their actions), but had newly acquired true freedom through service. The choice is always between two masters. One cannot serve them both – even just a little: man either serves God or he serves sin. The real difference between the two types of service is found at the end of the path, because sin leads to death, while conversion to God’s service leads to eternal life:

Brothers and sisters: I am speaking in human terms because of the weakness of your nature. For just as you presented the parts of your bodies as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness for lawlessness, so now present them as slaves to righteousness for sanctification. For when you were slaves of sin, you were free from righteousness. But what profit did you get then from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. But now that you have been freed from sin and have become slaves of God, the benefit that you have leads to sanctification, and its end is eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The responsorial psalm reaffirms the opportunity (and benefits) of making a good choice: the man who turns away from sin is blessed, finds his joy, succeeds well in everything he does *For the Lord watches over the way of the just, but the way of the wicked vanishes*. Even if reality often contradicts the psalmist's optimism, he knows that true happiness is found only in God:

Blessed the man who follows not the counsel of the wicked, nor walks in the way of sinners, nor sits in the company of the insolent, but delights in the law of the Lord and meditates on his law day and night. He is like a tree planted near running water, that yields its fruit in due season, and whose leaves never fade. Whatever he does, prospers. Not so the wicked, not so; they are like chaff which the wind drives away. For the Lord watches over the way of the just, but the way of the wicked vanishes.

In the Gospel we also read about an indispensable choice that man must make, one that is entrusted to the gift of freedom given by God. Jesus came to cast fire on the earth and the fire he speaks of is the Holy Spirit. He wants to ignite this Spirit, this love that burns sin and opens one up to total gift of self. This will only happen after his passion, death and resurrection, however, and if the fire of the Spirit is smothered, it can very well lead to division even within a family, for this darkness is

wherein lies opposition, persecution, and choosing to serve someone other than the Lord. In this case, the symbol of fire transforms into the fire of judgment, into the wager of death.

Jesus said to his disciples: "I have come to set the earth on fire, and how I wish it were already blazing! There is a baptism with which I must be baptized, and how great is my anguish until it is accomplished! Do you think that I have come to establish peace on the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. From now on a household of five will be divided, three against two and two against three; a father will be divided against his son and a son against his father, a mother against her daughter and a daughter against her mother, a mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law."

Jesus' words: *I have come to set the earth on fire, and how I wish it were already blazing!* can be a warning to every Christian who wants Christ to be known and the Holy Spirit to be everywhere shared. This is the place where all men freely make the right choice which, in turn, leads them to eternal bliss. Every Christian, guided by the Holy Spirit, is a witness and missionary, as Pope Francis affirmed in his homily given in Washington on the occasion of the canonization of the Franciscan Friar Junípero Serra, father of the California missions (1713-1784).

Jesus gives the answer. He said to his disciples then and he says it to us now: Go forth! Proclaim! The joy of the Gospel is something to be experienced, something to be known and lived only through giving it away, through giving ourselves away. The spirit of the world tells us to be like everyone else, to settle for what comes easy. Faced with this human way of thinking, "we must regain the conviction that we need one another, that we have a shared responsibility for others and for the world" (Laudato Si', 229). It is the responsibility to proclaim the message of Jesus. For the source of our joy is "an endless desire to show mercy, the fruit of our own experience of the power of the Father's infinite mercy" (Evangelii Gaudium, 24). Go out to all, proclaim by anointing and anoint by proclaiming. This is what the Lord tells us today. He tells us: A Christian finds joy in mission: Go out to people of every nation! A Christian experiences joy in following a command: Go forth and proclaim the good news! A Christian finds ever new joy in answering a call: Go forth and anoint! Jesus sends his disciples out to all nations. To every people. We too were part of all those people of two thousand years ago. Jesus did not provide a short list of who is, or is not, worthy of receiving his message and his presence. Instead, he always embraced life as he saw it. In faces of pain, hunger, sickness and sin. In faces of wounds, of thirst, of weariness, doubt and pity. Far from expecting a pretty life, smartly-dressed and neatly groomed, he embraced life as he found it. It made no difference whether it was dirty, unkempt, broken. Jesus said: Go out and tell the good news to everyone. Go out and in my name embrace life as it is, and not as you think it should be. Go out to the highways and byways, go out to tell the good news fearlessly, without prejudice, without superiority, without condescension, to all those who have lost the joy of living. Go out to proclaim the merciful embrace of the Father. Go out to those who are burdened by pain and failure, who feel that their lives are empty, and proclaim the folly of a loving Father who wants to anoint them with the oil of hope, the oil of salvation. Go out to proclaim the good news that error,

deceitful illusions and falsehoods do not have the last word in a person's life. Go out with the ointment which soothes wounds and heals hearts.

Mission is never the fruit of a perfectly planned program or a well-organized manual. Mission is always the fruit of a life which knows what it is to be found and healed, encountered and forgiven. Mission is born of a constant experience of God's merciful anointing. The Church, the holy People of God, treads the dust-laden paths of history, so often traversed by conflict, injustice and violence, in order to encounter her children, our brothers and sisters. The holy and faithful People of God are not afraid of losing their way; they are afraid of becoming self-enclosed, frozen into élites, clinging to their own security. They know that self-enclosure, in all the many forms it takes, is the cause of so much apathy. So let us go out, let us go forth to offer everyone the life of Jesus Christ (Evangelii Gaudium, 49). The People of God can embrace everyone because we are the disciples of the One who knelt before his own to wash their feet (ibid., 24).

We are here today, we can be here today, because many people wanted to respond to that call. They believed that "life grows by being given away, and it weakens in isolation and comfort" (Aparecida Document, 360). We are heirs to the bold missionary spirit of so many men and women who preferred not to be "shut up within structures which give us a false sense of security... within habits which make us feel safe, while at our door people are starving" (Evangelii Gaudium, 49). We are indebted to a tradition, a chain of witnesses who have made it possible for the good news of the Gospel to be, in every generation, both "good" and "news".

Today we remember one of those witnesses who testified to the joy of the Gospel in these lands, Father Junípero Serra. He was the embodiment of "a Church which goes forth", a Church which sets out to bring everywhere the reconciling tenderness of God. Junípero Serra left his native land and its way of life. He was excited about blazing trails, going forth to meet many people, learning and valuing their particular customs and ways of life. He learned how to bring to birth and nurture God's life in the faces of everyone he met; he made them his brothers and sisters. Junípero sought to defend the dignity of the native community, to protect it from those who had mistreated and abused it. Mistreatment and wrongs which today still trouble us, especially because of the hurt which they cause in the lives of many people. Father Serra had a motto which inspired his life and work, not just a saying, but above all a reality which shaped the way he lived: siempre adelante! Keep moving forward! For him, this was the way to continue experiencing the joy of the Gospel, to keep his heart from growing numb, from being anesthetized. He kept moving forward, because the Lord was waiting. He kept going, because his brothers and sisters were waiting. He kept going forward to the end of his life. Today, like him, may we be able to say: Forward! Let's keep moving forward!

(Homily of Pope Francis, *Canonization of Blessed Father Junípero Serra*, September 23, 2015. National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, Washington, D.C., USA)

October 22, 2021

Friday, 29th Week in Ordinary Time

Optional Memorial of St. John Paul II, pope

Rom 7:18-25a

Ps 119

Lk 12:54-59

Brothers and sisters:

I know that good does not dwell in me, that is, in my flesh. The willing is ready at hand, but doing the good is not. For I do not do the good I want, but I do the evil I do not want. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. So, then, I discover the principle that when I want to do right, evil is at hand. For I take delight in the law of God, in my inner self, but I see in my members another principle at war with the law of my mind, taking me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Miserable one that I am! Who will deliver me from this mortal body? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

St. Paul wonderfully describes the conflict that exists in man: the interior man is continually in conflict with the exterior; the spirit battles against the flesh. Man cannot save himself and thus he implores the help of a savior. Jesus Christ, our Lord, brought about that redemption that was impossible for man, therefore thanksgiving springs spontaneously from the Apostle's whole being: "*Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!*"

Neither the Old Testament's law nor the Church's precepts alone can bring about salvation, therefore a Christian reading of Psalm 119 teaches us to ask God directly that he help us, through Christ our Lord: "*Teach me wisdom and knowledge... You are good and bountiful; teach me your statutes. ... Let your kindness comfort me... Let your compassion come to me that I may live... I am yours; save me*".

Indeed, the responsorial psalm says:

Teach me wisdom and knowledge, for in your commands I trust. You are good and bountiful; teach me your statutes. Let your kindness comfort me according to your promise to your servants. Let your compassion come to me that I may live, for your law is my delight. Never will I forget your precepts, for through them you give me life. I am yours; save me, for I have sought your precepts.

Even though he is unable to save himself *by himself* and divided interiorly, man is endowed with intelligence and freedom. In the Gospel, Jesus reproaches his listeners by questioning them and making them become aware of their hypocrisy. They are not stupid and unable to think! "*You know how to interpret the appearance of the earth and the sky; why do you not know how to interpret the present time? Why do you not judge for yourselves what is right?*" Why then division, enmity, and

conflict? Why is it impossible to find accord with those who don't think like us? Why must brothers fight amongst themselves?

Jesus said to the crowds, "When you see a cloud rising in the west you say immediately that it is going to rain—and so it does; and when you notice that the wind is blowing from the south you say that it is going to be hot—and so it is. You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of the earth and the sky; why do you not know how to interpret the present time?"

"Why do you not judge for yourselves what is right? If you are to go with your opponent before a magistrate, make an effort to settle the matter on the way; otherwise your opponent will turn you over to the judge, and the judge hand you over to the constable, and the constable throw you into prison. I say to you, you will not be released until you have paid the last penny."

Dialogue between Christians of different denominations, which is itself an indispensable form of authentic mission, begs an intelligence and aptitude for right judgment. Accord and exchange of spiritual gifts is always possible, as long as one does not fall into sterility or foolish irenicism.

On the day in which it is possible to liturgically celebrate the memorial of Saint John Paul II, a tireless missionary and a great promoter of Christian unity, it is appropriate to reread one of his homilies, made during his longest apostolic pilgrimage through Bangladesh, Singapore, Fiji, New Zealand, Australia and the Seychelles Islands. In Christchurch, New Zealand, on November 24, 1986, an ecumenical celebration was held in the Catholic cathedral, in which the Pope gave the homily that follows:

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brethren. Amen. (Gal 6:18)

Dear Brothers and Sisters, dear Friends,

My thanks to you for coming to take part in this act of prayer; how fitting that it should be my first encounter with the Christian people in Christchurch. With great pleasure I join with leaders of the Catholic Church and other Christian Communions in New Zealand [...]. I rejoice at this occasion which speaks so vividly of the desire of New Zealand Christians, especially of you who are present here today, for that unity which our Lord wills for his followers.

New Zealand has always been a place of new beginnings. Your ancestors came here to make a better life in a land of opportunity. You yourselves have faced problems with vigor and have tried to find solutions. In this spirit you have faced the divisions among Christians. You have entered into dialogue, collaborated in projects for justice, peace and human well-being, and you have sought to devise suitable means to enable the Christian Churches and Ecclesial Communities to work and pray together for full unity. Jesus Christ came to "gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad". This is the design of God – that the human family should be one.

It was Christ's work on the Cross to bring together the broken fragments of humanity. The Church was founded by Christ as an instrument for this purpose. It is precisely in the Church that, through the Holy Spirit, the recomposition of broken humanity is to be carried on. The Church herself is the beginning of the incorporation of all peoples into Jesus Christ

as one Lord, and she is the sign of God's whole purpose. She is united in herself in order to bring about the unity, peace, and reconciliation which are a foretaste of the Kingdom of God.

Such unity can only be the gift of God. It is much more than a federation, a working arrangement, a means of enabling the followers of Jesus Christ to do certain things together. "The promise we have from God is the promise of the unity which is the essence of himself" (S. Ignatii Antiocheni Ad Trallianos). It is a unity which is nothing less than a sharing in that communion which is the inner life of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. It is a unity in the profession of the apostolic faith. It is a unity in that sacramental life whereby Jesus Christ touches human lives with his salvation and maintains the communion of believers in one visible body. It is also a unity with the visible teaching authority of the Church, which in God's design necessarily expresses her inner communion. Only a deeply interior yet fully visible unity such as this could be adequate for Christ's mission to knit together the connective tissue of humanity torn apart by sin.

As we meet here today we can rejoice that despite the still serious divisions between us, a real communion, limited though it is, does bind us together. We can call one another brothers and sisters, for we call on Jesus Christ as our one Lord, are baptized in his name, and already share many of his saving gifts. Yet in honesty we also have to acknowledge that real differences between us make our communion incomplete. It is a communion that still falls short of "that unity which Jesus Christ wanted to bestow on all those to whom he has given new birth in one body" (Unitatis Redintegratio, 3). This is the measure of our ecumenical task. It is this which calls forth our persevering efforts of theological dialogue. Since the unity which Christ will for his Church is a unity in faith, we cannot settle for less. We must work for it by the process of honest dialogue sustained by prayer, without compromising the truth; by facing up to the demands of the teachings of Jesus Christ; and by refusing to settle for a minimal form of Christianity, always seeking to do the truth in love. (cf. Eph 4:15).

Here in New Zealand you have experienced the strength of the commitment which the Catholic Church brings to the ecumenical movement, a commitment which I assure you is irreversible. At the same time I am aware that the Catholic participation makes new demands of the other Churches and Ecclesial Communities taking part in the ecumenical movement. For we come to it with those Catholic principles of ecumenism formulated in the Second Vatican Council's Decree on Ecumenism. We are convinced that the goal is not simply partnership; it is nothing less than the fullness of communion in a visible, organic unity. The ecumenical way cannot be one of reduction. It is rather a journey of growth into the fullness of Christ, the fullness of unity. It is a journey in which the Churches and Ecclesial Communities taking part must have a genuine respect for one another and for their gifts and traditions, helping each other towards that unity in faith which alone can enable us to be one Church and to share in one Eucharist.

This is the goal of our dialogue and theological reflection, our common study of the Scripture, our collaboration in upholding justice and peace and serving human needs, our common witness, and our prayer together.

It is a goal which cannot be reached without fervent prayer, penance, and conversion of heart. For in the end it is not we who will bring about the unity of all Christians; we can only prepare ourselves to cooperate with what God is doing in order to bring it about. Because so much has been done here in New Zealand to bring Christians together, and because there is such a strong desire for closer communion, I have taken the occasion of our prayer, and the dedication of the Chapel of Unity in this Cathedral, to speak to you about some central issues of the ecumenical task. Be strong and faithful in giving your best energies to it. Knowing that he who has begun this good work can "bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ". (Phil 1:6) Amen.

October 23, 2021

Saturday, 29th Week in Ordinary Time

Rom 8:1-11

Ps 24

Lk 13:1-9

Chapter VIII is the nucleus of the letter to the Romans, quoted most frequently by the Fathers of the Church. Opening with a triumphal declaration that we are no longer under the dominion of the ancient Law but in Christ Jesus who works in the Church, we understand that we are under the law of the Spirit, who imbues life, freedom and peace.

The Spirit guides us to justice and will provide us with life after death. Essentially we must remain in Christ, under the Spirit's guidance – not living according to the flesh:

Brothers and sisters:

Now there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus has freed you from the law of sin and death. For what the law, weakened by the flesh, was powerless to do, this God has done: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for the sake of sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, so that the righteous decree of the law might be fulfilled in us, who live not according to the flesh but according to the spirit. For those who live according to the flesh are concerned with the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the spirit with the things of the spirit. The concern of the flesh is death, but the concern of the spirit is life and peace. For the concern of the flesh is hostility toward God; it does not submit to the law of God, nor can it; and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh; on the contrary, you are in the spirit, if only the Spirit of God dwells in you. Whoever does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the spirit is alive because of righteousness. If the Spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, the one who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also, through his Spirit that dwells in you.

After reading of the Epistle, we need to Christianize Psalm 24: the Lord's mountain is Christ, who for us made himself the way, the truth and the life. When we abide in Him it is equivalent to staying in God's holy place. Only by living in Him will we be able to keep innocent hands and pure hearts, obtain blessings and righteousness, and belong to the generation of those who seek God.

The Lord's are the earth and its fullness; the world and those who dwell in it. For he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers. Who can ascend the mountain of the Lord? Or who may stand in his holy place? He whose hands are sinless, whose heart is clean, who desires not what is vain. He shall receive a blessing from the Lord, a reward

from God his savior. Such is the race that seeks for him, that seeks the face of the God of Jacob.

The Gospel warns against hasty and unjust judgments, which are purely human, but instead highlights the need for conversion: “*if you do not repent, you will all perish as they did*” is repeated twice. On the other hand, the parable of the barren fig tree, which follows immediately, also announces that God's timing and infinite patience are not that of humans. He knows how to wait, because he knows fruitfulness is ensured, even if only those who cultivate the tree are the ones who will aid in its fruitful production. The warning of condemnation (“*It may bear fruit in the future. If not, you can cut it down.*”) and the patience and mercy of waiting, particularly emphasized throughout Luke’s Gospel, are clearly highlighted.

Some people told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with the blood of their sacrifices. He said to them in reply, "Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were greater sinners than all other Galileans? By no means! But I tell you, if you do not repent, you will all perish as they did! Or those eighteen people who were killed when the tower at Siloam fell on them – do you think they were more guilty than everyone else who lived in Jerusalem? By no means! But I tell you, if you do not repent, you will all perish as they did!" And he told them this parable: "There once was a person who had a fig tree planted in his orchard, and when he came in search of fruit on it but found none, he said to the gardener, 'For three years now I have come in search of fruit on this fig tree but have found none. So cut it down. Why should it exhaust the soil?' He said to him in reply, 'Sir, leave it for this year also, and I shall cultivate the ground around it and fertilize it; it may bear fruit in the future. If not, you can cut it down.'"

Christ gave his life for us and, after his resurrection from the dead, he sent forth his Spirit. The Holy Spirit’s mission targets conversion, that is, via his direct calls to engage the human heart, he elicits a change in mentality and self-conduct. The Spirit gives true freedom, takes away all fear, and makes us brave in the face of danger or death with his assurance: “*If the Spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, the one who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also, through his Spirit that dwells in you.*”

The Spirit’s liberating invasion totally liberated the heart and mind of Archbishop Oscar Romero, Bishop of San Salvador, when he was 60 years old. It certainly cannot be said that his priestly and episcopal life did not bear fruit, in contrast to the barren fig tree in the Gospel. However, the image used by Jesus may be adapted to Archbishop Romero in the sense that for many years his “clerical mentality”, (including being fearful overly prudent) prevented him from bearing all the fruits that God requested of him. His environmental circumstances initially prompted him to *not* oppose the unjust continuous human rights violations and repressions in his homeland, but the murder of his close friend, Jesuit Rutilio Grande alongside two peasants completely changed his attitude. Since then his sermons have always been a clear denunciation of the oppression and a decisive alignment in favor of the poor and the lowliest people. He was assassinated on March 24, 1980, while celebrating the Eucharist. He is the first holy martyr in Central America.

(From the homily delivered for the funeral of the Jesuit Father Rutilio Grande, assassinated on March 12, 1977).

If this were a simple funeral, dear brothers, I would be speaking about human and personal relationships with Fr. Rutilio Grande, who was like a brother to me. In very key moments of my life he was very close to me, and I will never forget those gestures; but this isn't a time to think about those personal aspects, but to retrieve a message from that corpse for all of us who continue our pilgrimage.

I want to take this message from the Pope's words who is present here in his representative, the nuncio. I thank him for giving our Church structure that sense of unity that I am now feeling in the Archdiocese, in these tragic hours; that sense of unity, as a rapid flowering of these sacrifices that the Church is offering.

Paul VI's message, when he speaks to us about evangelization, gives us the parameter to understand Rutilio Grande. "What does the Church contribute to this universal struggle for liberation from so much misery?" And the Pope recalls that at the 1974 Synod the bishop's voices from all over the world, represented mainly by those third world bishops, cried out: "The anguish of these hungry, destitute, marginalized peoples." And the Church cannot be absent from that struggle for freedom; but her presence in that struggle to lift up, to dignify man, has to be a message, a very original presence, a presence that the world will not be able to understand, but that carries the seed, the power of victory, of success. The Pope says: "The Church offers this liberating struggle in the world, liberating men, but to whom it gives an inspiration of faith, a social doctrine that is at the base of its prudence and its existence to be translated into concrete commitments and, above all, a motivation of love, of brotherly love".

This is the Church's liberation. That is why the Pope says: "It cannot be confused with other liberating movements without a supernatural scope, without a spiritual scope." And Father Rutilio Grande, above all, is an inspiration of faith: a priest, a Christian who at his baptism and priestly ordination made a profession of faith: "I believe in God the Father revealed through Christ his Son, who loves us and invites us to love. I believe in a Church that is a sign of that presence of God's love in the world, where men shake hands and come together as brothers. An illumination of faith that sets it apart from any kind of political, economic or earthly liberation that does not go beyond ideologies, interests and mundane things".

Brothers, it will never occur to any of those present here that this gathering around Fr. Grande has a political, sociological or economic atmosphere: by no means. It is a meeting of faith, a faith that opens up to eternal horizons through his corpse that died in hope.

The liberation preached by Fr. Grande is inspired by faith, a faith that speaks to us of eternal life, a faith that with his face raised to heaven, accompanied by two peasants, he now offers in its entirety, in its perfection. This liberation ends in happiness in God; this liberation stems from the repentance of sin; this liberation finds support in Christ, the only saving force. This is the liberation that Rutilio Grande preached, and that is why he lived the Church's message.

It gives us liberating men with an inspiration of faith, and alongside that inspiration of faith. Second, men who put doctrine at the base of their prudence and their existence: the social doctrine of the Church; the social doctrine of the Church that tells men that the Christian

religion is not only a horizontal, spiritualistic feeling that forgets about the misery that surrounds it. It is to look upon God, and from God to look at your neighbor as a brother and feel that "everything you did to one of these you did to me." A social doctrine that I hope the movements that are sensitive to social issues would know about. They would not expose themselves to failures, or myopia, to a myopia that can't see beyond mundane things, structures of time. And as long as there is no conversion of heart, a doctrine illuminated by faith to organize life according to God's heart, everything will be weak, revolutionary, temporary, violent. None of those things are Christian [...] The social doctrine of the Church! That was what Fr. Rutilio Grande preached; and Father Rutilio Grande died because many times it is misunderstood to the point of murder. A social doctrine of the Church that was confused with a political doctrine that hinders the world: A social doctrine of the Church, which wants to be slandered, as a subversion...

October 24, 2021

Sunday, 30th Week in Ordinary Time – Year B

World Mission Sunday 2021

Jer 31:7-9

Ps 126

Heb 5:1-6

Mk 10:46-52

This Sunday's main theme is God's compassion, his paternal love. It helps his people and guides them to salvation in the old covenant and saves the world through Christ Jesus the one mediator in the new. Yet on the other hand, his compassion sees mankind's poverty crying out to the Lord in search of mercy and help.

In the first reading of the prophet Jeremiah, the Lord emphasizes that the great crowd of those he brings back from the Babylonian exile include *the blind and the lame, the woman with child and her who is in travail*. These are the most in need, those who have the greatest need for divine help. He does not forget anyone.

The whole nation that was deported had left in tears, going into exile under servitude and estranged from the homeland and the temple. Now God guarantees instead that everyone, strong and weak, will be brought back to consolations: [...]: *I will lead them to brooks of water, on a level road, so that none shall stumble. For I am a father to Israel, Ephraim is my first-born:*

Thus says the Lord: Shout with joy for Jacob, exult at the head of the nations; proclaim your praise and say: The Lord has delivered his people, the remnant of Israel.

Behold, I will bring them back from the land of the north; I will gather them from the ends of the world, with the blind and the lame in their midst, the mothers and those with child; they shall return as an immense throng.

They departed in tears, but I will console them and guide them; I will lead them to brooks of water, on a level road, so that none shall stumble. For I am a father to Israel, Ephraim is my first-born.

The responsorial psalm, written after returning home and after the disappointments caused by the new difficulties that had arisen, recalls the unexpected joy of home-coming:

When the Lord brought back the captives of Zion, we were like men dreaming. Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with rejoicing. Then they said among the nations, "The Lord has done great things for them." The Lord has done great things for us; we are glad indeed.

We were... The Lord has worked miracles for us, but now we are again prey to opposition and suffering. Our hope, however, does not fail. We cry out to you, for only you can save us:

Restore our fortunes, O Lord, like the torrents in the southern desert. Those that sow in tears shall reap rejoicing. Although they go forth weeping, carrying the seed to be sown, They shall come back rejoicing, carrying their sheaves.

Pope Francis writes in his Message to the Pontifical Mission Societies from May 21, 2020:

The joy of proclaiming the Gospel always shines brightly against the backdrop of a grateful memory. The Apostles never forgot the moment that Jesus touched their hearts: “It was about four in the afternoon” (Jn 1:39). The reality of the Church shines forth whenever gratitude is manifested within her by the free initiative of God, for “he loved us” first (1 Jn 4:10) and “it is only God who gives the growth” (1 Cor 3:7). The loving predilection of God surprises us, and surprise by its very nature cannot be owned or imposed by us. One cannot be “necessarily surprised”. Only in this way can the miracle of gratuitousness, the gratuitous gift of self, blossom. Nor can missionary fervor ever be obtained as the result of reasoning or calculation. To be “in a state of mission” is a reflection of gratitude. It is the response of one who by gratitude is made docile to the Spirit and is therefore free. Without a recognition of the predilection of the Lord, who inspires gratitude in us, even knowledge of the truth and of God himself would, presented as a goal to be achieved by our own efforts, in fact become a “letter that brings death” (cf. 2 Cor 3:6), as Saint Paul and Saint Augustine were the first to point out. Only in the freedom of gratitude can one truly know the Lord, whereas it is useless and above all improper to insist on presenting missionary activity and the proclamation of the Gospel as if they were a binding duty, a kind of “contractual obligation” on the part of the baptized.

The second reading presents us with Jesus to whom God the Father says: “*You are my Son: this day I have begotten you... You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek*”. He has clothed himself in our weakness; for this very reason he feels compassion towards us and is an effective mediator for us – our only true Mediator – between God and man, having made himself flesh to redeem us from our sins.

Every high priest is taken from among men and made their representative before God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. He is able to deal patiently with the ignorant and erring, for he himself is beset by weakness and so, for this reason, must make sin offerings for himself as well as for the people. No one takes this honor upon himself but only when called by God, just as Aaron was. In the same way, it was not Christ who glorified himself in becoming high priest, but rather the one who said to him: You are my son: this day I have begotten you; just as he says in another place: You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.

We can have recourse to Jesus, who knows our trials and our miseries, with our shouts: “*Son of David, have pity on me!*”. And if circumstances or people try to stop us from shouting out, we can shout even louder, because surely He will call us to Him and our faith will save us:

As Jesus was leaving Jericho with his disciples and a sizable crowd, Bartimaeus, a blind man, the son of Timaeus, sat by the roadside begging. On hearing that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, "Jesus, son of David, have pity on me."

And many rebuked him, telling him to be silent. But he kept calling out all the more, "Son of David, have pity on me." Jesus stopped and said, "Call him." So they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take courage; get up, Jesus is calling you." He threw aside his cloak, sprang up, and came to Jesus. Jesus said to him in reply, "What do you want me to do for you?" The blind man replied to him, "Master, I want to see." Jesus told him, "Go your way; your faith has saved you." Immediately he received his sight and followed him on the way.

Today we recommend reading the Message of the Holy Father Pope Francis for [World Mission Sunday](#) 2021.

October 25, 2021

Monday, 30th Week in Ordinary Time

Rom 8:12-17

Ps 68

Lk 13:10-17

Christian life implies a decision, a choice: between flesh and Spirit, between death and life. Whoever chooses the Spirit and lets himself be guided by him truly becomes a child of God, Christ's brother, no longer a slave to the Law. If he is a son, he is also an heir, a co-heir of Christ, on condition that he shares his sufferings. Undoubtedly life in the Spirit is very demanding; it is not comfortable, but this is where life begins – the life worth living. The Spirit continually testifies that we are God's children; that through the Spirit we may call God "daddy", that we are walking towards the glory, and that all of our suffering, united with that of Christ, will lead us to eternal happiness:

Brothers and sisters,

we are not debtors to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh, you will die, but if by the spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

For those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you received a spirit of adoption, through which we cry, "Abba, Father!" The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if only we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

For those who have received the fullness of Revelation, the ancient psalm not only sings of liberation from slavery, but recounts the total liberation wrought by God, through Christ, in the Holy Spirit: enemies flee, while the righteous rejoice, exalt and sing. Nobody should be afraid anymore, not even the weakest and most disadvantaged, because God is the father of orphans and defender of widows; he leaves no one alone, he frees the prisoners, serves and saves; beyond death, it is He that we find:

God arises; his enemies are scattered, and those who hate him flee before him. But the just rejoice and exult before God; they are glad and rejoice. The father of orphans and the defender of widows is God in his holy dwelling. God gives a home to the forsaken; he leads forth prisoners to prosperity. Blessed day by day be the Lord, who bears our burdens; God, who is our salvation. God is a saving God for us; the Lord, my Lord, controls the passageways of death.

In the episode that the Gospel recounts, we find in Jesus' action the service, salvation, and freedom spoken of in the Epistle and the responsorial psalm. Christ is the true Son, led by the Spirit, the one

who accomplishes salvation, who has mercy on the poor, the Lord of the Sabbath, the one to whom the law belongs, the liberator from Satan's chains:

Jesus was teaching in a synagogue on the Sabbath. And a woman was there who for eighteen years had been crippled by a spirit; she was bent over, completely incapable of standing erect. When Jesus saw her, he called to her and said, "Woman, you are set free of your infirmity." He laid his hands on her, and she at once stood up straight and glorified God. But the leader of the synagogue, indignant that Jesus had cured on the sabbath, said to the crowd in reply, "There are six days when work should be done. Come on those days to be cured, not on the sabbath day." The Lord said to him in reply, "Hypocrites! Does not each one of you on the sabbath untie his ox or his ass from the manger and lead it out for watering? This daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has bound for eighteen years now, ought she not to have been set free on the sabbath day from this bondage?" When he said this, all his adversaries were humiliated; and the whole crowd rejoiced at all the splendid deeds done by him.

In this Missionary Month we offer the example of a worthy disciple of Christ, who lived the values we read about in St. Paul and in Luke's Gospel: St. Peter Chanel, protomartyr and patron of Oceania. He did not live according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit – with an extraordinary gentleness and meekness. He preached Christ and the freedom of God's children to those who lived in fear, enslaved by evil spirits. Even during his short missionary life on the island of Futuna, many rejoiced at his preaching and felt impelled to conversion, while his opponents were ashamed and plotted against him, as today's Gospel says. As with Jesus, the fruits of his work and sacrifice would ripen only after his death.

Here is his eulogy from the second reading of the Office of Readings in his optional liturgical memorial, which occurs on April 28, the anniversary of his martyrdom:

Eulogy of Saint Peter Chanel, Priest and Martyr

As soon as Peter embraced religious life in the Society of Mary, he was sent at his own request to the missions of Oceania, and landed on the island of Futuna in the Pacific Ocean, where the name of Christ had never before been preached. A lay-brother who was constantly at his side gave the following account of his life in the missions. "Because of his labors he was often burned by the heat of the sun, and famished with hunger, and he would return home wet with perspiration and completely exhausted. Yet he always remained in good spirits, courageous and energetic, as if he were returning from a pleasure jaunt, and this would happen almost every day. "He could never refuse anything to the Futunians, even to those who persecuted him; he always made excuses for them and never rejected them, even though they were often rude and troublesome. He displayed an unparalleled mildness toward everyone on all occasions without exception.

It is no wonder then that the natives used to call him the 'good-hearted man.' He once told a fellow religious: 'In such a difficult mission one has to be holy.'"

Quietly he preached Christ and the Gospel, but there was little response. Still with invincible perseverance he pursued his missionary tasks on both the human and religious level, relying

on the example and words of Christ: There is one who sows and another who reaps. And he constantly prayed for help from the Mother of God, to whom he was especially devoted. By his preaching of Christianity he destroyed the cult of the evil spirits, which the chieftains of the Futunians encouraged in order to keep the tribe under their rule.

This was the reason they subjected Peter to a most cruel death, hoping that by killing him the seeds of the Christian religion which he had sowed would be annihilated. On the day before his martyrdom he had said: "It does not matter if I die. Christ's religion is so deeply rooted on this island that it cannot be destroyed by my death."

The blood of this martyr benefited, in the first place, the natives of Futuna, for a few years later they were all converted to the faith of Christ. But it benefited as well the other islands of Oceania, where Christian churches, which claim Peter as their first martyr, are now flourishing.

What is striking in the figure of this young Marist priest (he had abandoned the secular clergy to enter the Society of Mary, precisely in the hope of being sent on a mission) is the extraordinary meekness and solid realism with which he had faced his assignment in the challengingly remote oceanic island assigned to him as a place of mission. In the first two years, during which he struggled to learn the difficult language, he devoted himself to service, pacifying the hostilities between two warring tribes, caring for the needy and the dying, with kindness, meekness and merciful and humble charity, so much so as to truly deserve the title of "man with an excellent heart", as the natives called him.

He used to say: *"Let no one complain or grieve about us, because I find my lot and that of my brothers worthy of envy, and I wouldn't want to give it up for anything in the world."* and also *"Although I am unworthy of the sublimity of my vocation, I would not want to exchange it for a kingdom"*.

The cruel martyrdom that was inflicted on him after three years of mission, when he was only thirty-eight, was the culmination of a life lived in the Holy Spirit, in love for Mary, in self-giving, in an extraordinary goodness of soul, in being courteous and heroically patient.

While a hatchet that split his skull was dealing him the final blow, Father Pietro spoke the words: *Malie fuai*, that is, *It is good for me*, thus confirming the full acceptance of martyrdom. A few months later, a brother came to Futuna to take his remains and transport them to New Zealand. The natives expressed their sorrow for what had happened and asked for a new missionary for the island.

October 26, 2021

Tuesday, 30th Week in Ordinary Time

Rom 8:18-25

Ps 126

Lk 13:18-21

Brothers and sisters:

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are as nothing compared with the glory to be revealed for us. For creation awaits with eager expectation the revelation of the children of God; for creation was made subject to futility, not of its own accord but because of the one who subjected it, in hope that creation itself would be set free from slavery to corruption and share in the glorious freedom of the children of God.

We know that all creation is groaning in labor pains even until now; and not only that, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, we also groan within ourselves as we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that sees for itself is not hope. For who hopes for what one sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait with endurance.

In today's passage from the letter to the Romans, San Paul offers us a precise picture of the world redeemed by Christ and lays before us man's present condition and that of all creation with extreme realism, but also with hope.

Though saved, though made a child of God, man lives in pain, awaiting a fulfillment that has not yet been achieved. We have received the Holy Spirit, but only as a deposit; we have the first fruits of the Spirit, not the fullness, and our body has not yet been totally redeemed. All creation participates in this suffering and expectation as well, having been brought into the slavery of corruption through man's sin.

But, Saint Paul says, man and creation, in this state of transience and pain, are not experiencing death, but gestation for childbirth. It naturally involves anxiety and suffering, but it is directed towards true life: man and creation are reaching for the glory that they do not yet see, but which they hope to see. The condition for seeing what is not yet seen consists in waiting for it with hope and perseverance.

And the responsorial psalm immediately offers an example of rebirth, even if it is not yet complete happiness, because we are still on earth. The deportees to Babylon, even if in small numbers and in the midst of serious difficulties, have returned free to their land! "*We are glad*" says the psalmist. The Lord knows that his creatures cannot live without joy, even if it might be fragile and temporary; then, in his tenderness, he softens the trials suffered in exile. He puts us to the test: he tests our fidelity, he wants us to bear witness to him with hope and perseverance, but he does not make us endure long periods of acute suffering without any great joy(s) or small daily joys that allow us to advance more happily in the midst of tribulations:

When the Lord brought back the captives of Zion, we were like men dreaming. Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with rejoicing. Then they said among the nations, "The Lord has done great things for them." The Lord has done great things for us; we are glad indeed. Restore our fortunes, O Lord, like the torrents in the southern desert. Those that sow in tears shall reap rejoicing. Although they go forth weeping, carrying the seed to be sown, They shall come back rejoicing, carrying their sheaves.

Today's gospel is especially in tune with the epistle and the psalm: it gives us much confidence and hope.

Jesus said, "What is the Kingdom of God like? To what can I compare it? It is like a mustard seed that a man took and planted in the garden. When it was fully grown, it became a large bush and the birds of the sky dwelt in its branches."

Again he said, "To what shall I compare the Kingdom of God? It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of wheat flour until the whole batch of dough was leavened."

The image of God's kingdom that St. Luke offers us is simple and familiar, so as not to frighten anyone. *The Kingdom of God is like a mustard seed... It is like yeast ...* The mustard seed and the yeast are small realities, within our reach, yet they have an extraordinary strength within them, which certainly does not come from us. We have the ability and the responsibility to use these elements well, to make them serve the purpose for which God created them: to sow the grain in our garden or to mix the yeast in our flour for the growth of the kingdom of God. It is not us, but it is God's grace that makes it grow, without us knowing how. *"Mission's mysterious fruitfulness does not consist in our intentions, in our methods, in our impulses and in our initiatives, but rests precisely in this vertigo: the vertigo we perceive when we hear Jesus' words: 'without Me you can do nothing'."* (Pope Francis, *Without Jesus We Can Do Nothing. Being Missionary in the World Today*, Translated by Barry Hudock, Twenty-Third Publications, 2020)

The kingdom of God grows in us, provided, however, that we become aware of our poverty and inability to save ourselves on our own. Christ, with his life, death, resurrection already saved us: we must only believe it, hope for it and offer our little collaboration to this salvation, which we do not yet see in its entirety. We adore the initiative and the gift we receive and confidently do whatever we can do on our part, even if it is little. And let us try to be grateful for the mercy that we have received from God.

Our cooperation in grace is always a missionary work – indeed *the only* truly missionary work, because the witness of life is the most convincing form of apostolate. This witness happens in a particular way if the testimony is linked to great suffering, lived with love, and even with joy and a smile on the lips.

This is what happened to a Lebanese saint, Rafqa Choboq Ar-Rayès, who died in 1914 and was canonized by Pope John Paul II on June 10, 2001:

By canonizing Blessed Rafqa Choboq Ar-Rayès, the Church sheds a very particular light on the mystery of love given and received for the glory of God and the salvation of the world. This nun of the Lebanese Maronite Order desired to love and to give her life for her people.

In the sufferings which never left her for 29 years of her life, St Rafqa always showed a passionate and generous love for the salvation of her brothers, drawing from her union with Christ, who died on the cross, the force to accept voluntarily and to love suffering, the authentic way of holiness.

May St Rafqa watch over those who know suffering, particularly over the peoples of the Middle East who must face a destructive and sterile spiral of violence. Through her intercession, let us ask the Lord to open hearts to the patient quest for new ways to peace and so hasten the advent of reconciliation and harmony.

(Canonization of 5 Blessed, Homily of John Paul II, Feast of the Blessed Trinity, 10 June 2001)

Given the long period of blindness and total paralysis, there are no writings left by the humble nun, compatriot and contemporary of the famous miracle worker St. Charbel Makhluf.

She first entered a Congregation of apostolic life and was sent as a teacher to the mountain villages, only to later become a contemplative nun in the same Order of St. Charbel.

Santa Rafqa lived her childhood and adolescence during the civil war and divisions that impoverished Lebanese families from 1840 to 1845, but she suffered above all from the extermination of the Maronites in 1860, during which children were snatched from their mothers' arms and killed. The Saint was able to save a child, hiding him in her dress, thus defending him from the cruelty and barbarism of those who pursued him. She was always so disturbed by these massacres that she was moved every time someone spoke to her about them.

In 1871 she passed from the Congregation of the Mariamites of Bikfaya, which had been dissolved, to the Lebanese Order of Maronite Nuns, wanting to join more in Christ's sufferings, asking him to participate in his passion. And so it happened. She lost an eye during an operation and then went permanently blind. Her whole body went paralyzed except for her hands, which allowed her to knit throughout her life. She lived to the age of 82 with a smile on her face, in perfect joy.

After her death, on her grave, the same phenomenon occurred that had been seen on that of Saint Charbel: a bright light shone and then disappeared. Some people from the villages near the monastery of St. Joseph of Jrapta saw this miracle and gave testimony of it.

Saint Rafqa's message for every Christian who is in pain encourages them to be patient and joyfully accept suffering for love of Christ and neighbor, according to the saying that he who seeks Jesus Christ without the cross will find the cross without Jesus Christ; it will be burdensome and even impossible for him to carry. Rafqa teaches us that, with Christ and through him, the Cross of life's many sufferings become one's prayer and joy. These are the most effective form of evangelization.

October 27, 2021

Wednesday, 30th Week in Ordinary Time

Rom 8:26-30

Ps 13

Lk 13:22-30

The Holy Spirit guides our poor and fragile being. The Spirit illumines our prayer, completes it, and even replaces it when it is unsuitably shapeless, because *the Spirit intercedes for the holy ones according to God's will*. Our whole life is also guided by the Holy Spirit, whether we know it or not, because *we know that all things work for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose*.

Brothers and sisters:

The Spirit comes to the aid of our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes with inexpressible groanings. And the one who searches hearts knows what is the intention of the Spirit, because he intercedes for the holy ones according to God's will.

We know that all things work for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. For those he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, so that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined he also called; and those he called he also justified; and those he justified he also glorified.

St. Paul's grandiose vision, full of trust and hope, is also foreseen and sung about by the Psalmist, who prays for life and salvation. It was especially in difficult moments that he needed to believe in God's goodness: when he faltered in front of his adversaries... It was in those painful moments that it was necessary to trust in the Lord's mercy and not in one's own. But the person praying has obtained this grace, and says: "*I trusted in your mercy*", therefore his heart can rejoice and his mouth can sing to the Lord who has been good to him:

Look, answer me, O Lord, my God! Give light to my eyes that I may not sleep in death lest my enemy say, "I have overcome him"; lest my foes rejoice at my downfall. Though I trusted in your mercy, Let my heart rejoice in your salvation; let me sing of the Lord, "He has been good to me."

The Gospel passage would seem to restrict the Lord's mercy and the possibility of salvation, widely open also to repentant sinners, but this is not the case. Jesus' reproach is addressed to those who calculate or reduce salvation to their own narrow concepts, to those who claim to be saved alone, to those who exclude categories and people, to those who do not trust in him despite having eaten and drunk in his presence and having listened to his teaching, in short, to those who have not understood the Gospel of mercy because they would rather cling to their own convictions, interpretations and habits.

Jesus is the door, but this door – large and always open to all – becomes very narrow only for those who cannot enter it for lack of humility:

Jesus passed through towns and villages, teaching as he went and making his way to Jerusalem. Someone asked him, "Lord, will only a few people be saved?" He answered them, "Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I tell you, will attempt to enter but will not be strong enough. After the master of the house has arisen and locked the door, then will you stand outside knocking and saying, 'Lord, open the door for us.' He will say to you in reply, 'I do not know where you are from.' And you will say, 'We ate and drank in your company and you taught in our streets.' Then he will say to you, 'I do not know where you are from. Depart from me, all you evildoers!' And there will be wailing and grinding of teeth when you see Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and all the prophets in the Kingdom of God and you yourselves cast out.

And people will come from the east and the west and from the north and the south and will recline at table in the Kingdom of God. For behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last."

It is extremely consoling that Jesus' words continue to be fulfilled in every age: "*And people will come from the east and the west and from the north and the south and will recline at table in the Kingdom of God. For behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last.*" The following text demonstrates this very clearly:

Canonization of the Uganda martyrs: St. Peter's Basilica, Sunday October 18, 1964

Homily of St. Paul VI

"Who are these, wearing white robes, and where did they come from?" (Rev 7:13b). [...] Who are they? They are Africans, true Africans, of color, race and culture, worthy exponents of the fabulous Bantu and Nilotic populations explored in the last century by the audacity of Stanley and Livingstone, established in the region of East Africa, which is called the Great Lakes [...]. Their homeland was a British protectorate when they lived there [...], a field of missionary apostolate that first welcomed the English ministers of the Anglican confession, and two years later, the French-speaking Catholic missionaries called the White Fathers, missionaries of Africa, sons of the famous and courageous Cardinal Lavigerie (1825-1892). who not only Africa, but civilization itself must remember among the most illustrious and providential men. The White Fathers introduced Catholicism in Uganda, preaching the Gospel in friendly competition with the Anglican missionaries, and it was the White Fathers who had the happiness – paid for with incalculable risks and hardships – to train these martyrs for Christ, those whom we honor today as heroes and brothers in the faith and invoke as protectors in heaven. Yes, they are African and they are martyrs. "These are the ones – continues the Holy Scriptures – who have survived the time of great distress; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. For this reason they stand before God's throne..." (Rev. 7:14-15).

Each once we pronounce the word "martyrs" in the sense it has in Christian hagiography, a horrible and wonderful drama should come to mind: horrible because of the injustice, armed with authority and cruelty, that causes the drama; horrible as well because of the blood that flows and the pain of the flesh that suffers, mercilessly subjected to death; wonderful for the innocence that physically yields to torture with docility and without defending itself, happy and proud to be able to witness to the invincible truth of a faith that is fused with human life: life dies, faith lives. Strength against strength, the first is defeated by winning; the other triumphs by losing.

Martyrdom is a drama, a terrible and evocative drama, whose unjust and depraved violence is forgotten right where it took place, while always remaining in the memory of the ages, shining and lovable, the meekness which was able to make of its own oblation a sacrifice, a holocaust, a supreme act of love and fidelity to Christ, an example, a testimony, a perennial message for present and future men. This is martyrdom [...].

The African martyrs add another page to the martyrology – the Church's roll of honor – an occasion both of mourning and of joy. This is a page worthy in every way to be added to the annals of that Africa of earlier which we, living in this era and being men of little faith, never expected to be repeated. In earlier times there occurred those famous deeds, so moving to the spirit, of the martyrs of Scilli, of Carthage, and of that "white robed army" of Utica commemorated by Saint Augustine and Prudentius; of the martyrs of Egypt so highly praised by Saint John Chrysostom, and of the martyrs of the Vandal persecution. Who would have thought that in our days we should have witnessed events as heroic and glorious? Who could have predicted to the famous African confessors and martyrs such as Cyprian, Felicity, Perpetua and – the greatest of all – Augustine, that we would one day add names so dear to us as Charles Lwanga and Matthias Mulumba Kalemba and their 20 companions? Nor must we forget those members of the Anglican Church who also died for the name of Christ. [...]

The story of the martyrs we are venerating refers to twenty-two men, for the most part young, who each would deserve special praise; they should also be joined by a double list of other victims of this ferocious persecution: one of Catholics – neophytes and catechumens – and another of Anglicans, sacrificed for Christ [...]. Few narratives of martyrs' acts have been documented like this. Here there is no legend, but the chronicle of a faithfully described "Passio martyrum". Whoever reads it contemplates it; whoever contemplates it is frightened and who is frightened, cries. In the end, all that remains is to conclude: Yes, they are martyrs: "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God" (Rev 7:14-15)

This collective martyrdom presents us with a marvelous Christian phenomenon. [...] Christianity finds in Africa a particular predisposition, which we do not hesitate to consider a mystery of God, an indigenous vocation, a historical promise. 'Africa is the land of the Gospel, Africa is a new homeland of Christ. The upright and logical simplicity and the inflexible fidelity of these young African Christians make us sure of it and demonstrate it to us; on the one hand, faith, a gift from God, and the human capacity for progress; on the other hand they are united with a prodigious correspondence. The fact that the evangelical seed finds an obstacle in the thorns of such wild ground causes pain, but it is not strange;

but that the seed takes root and immediately flourishes, and is full of flowers because of the soil's goodness – this causes joy and admiration at the same time: it is the spiritual glory of the continent of black faces and white souls, which heralds a new civilization: the Christian civilization of Africa [...].

Their testimony, for those who carefully listen to them at this decisive hour in African history, becomes a voice that calls out: a voice that seems to repeat, like a powerful echo, the mysterious invitation, heard during the night by St. Paul in a vision: "Aduva nos", come and help us (Acts 16:9). These martyrs ask for help. Africa needs missionaries: in particular priests, doctors, teachers, nuns and nurses, generous souls, who help the young and thriving, yet needy, Catholic community, to grow in number and quality to become a people: the African people of God's Church.

October 28, 2021

Feast of Saints Simon and Jude, apostles

Eph 2:19-22

Ps 19

Lk 6:12-19

On this feast of the apostles we begin our brief meditation insights with the Gospel:

Jesus went up to the mountain to pray, and he spent the night in prayer to God. When day came, he called his disciples to himself, and from them he chose Twelve, whom he also named Apostles: Simon, whom he named Peter, and his brother Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus, Simon who was called a Zealot, and Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.

And he came down with them and stood on a stretch of level ground. A great crowd of his disciples and a large number of the people from all Judea and Jerusalem and the coastal region of Tyre and Sidon came to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; and even those who were tormented by unclean spirits were cured. Everyone in the crowd sought to touch him because power came forth from him and healed them all.

Jesus prays to the Father throughout the night and then, calling to himself the disciples who followed him, he chose twelve, like the twelve tribes of Israel. These men were very different from each other, taken from all social levels. Among these, at the end of the list, Simon, called the Zealot, and Judas Thaddeus, son of James. We know very little about them: they appear in the list of twelve in the three synoptic gospels and also in the first chapter of the Acts of the Apostles.

The Gospel of John, which does not give us the list of apostles, but names most of them in the various episodes of their life with Jesus, makes mention of the question that Judas ("*not the Iscariot*", John specifies), asks Jesus: "*Master, [then] what happened that you will reveal yourself to us and not to the world?*". We can never thank Judas' curiosity enough, because without him we would not have the sublime answer of Jesus: "*Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him.*" (Jn 14:22-23). The short letter found at the end of the Catholic Letters in Sacred Scripture is also attributed to Judas, son of James.

The scarcity of certain information should not disconcert us: the apostles are the foundation, chosen and loved by Christ, who have been sent and have transmitted and witnessed the faith to us. The Church was founded on them. With good reason, therefore, the second reading is not taken from the letter of Jude, as perhaps we would expect, but from the letter to the Ephesians, in which St. Paul describes the mystery of the Church, the "apostolic and prophetic" house of God:

Brothers and sisters:

You are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the holy ones and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the Apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the capstone. Through him the whole structure is held together and grows into a temple sacred in the Lord; in him you also are being built together into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

No fear, nor uncertainty should upset us: Christ is the support of the whole building, the cornerstone; the foundation is the apostles and prophets; we are built on them like living stones, on the condition that we allow the Spirit to cement us together and make the whole building grow in an orderly manner to be a holy temple, aware of being God's dwelling. The bricks (the strongest and most beautiful stones) are the saints, but every stone, however rough and humble, is necessary for construction, since God, our Savior, wants all men to arrive at salvation and knowledge of the truth (cf. 1 Timothy 2:4).

The whole universe, even without words, proclaims God's glory and the salvation that He wants for every creature, as the responsorial psalm says. The apostles and the Church have the task of spreading this message to the ends of the world:

The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament proclaims his handiwork. Day pours out the word to day, and night to night imparts knowledge. Not a word nor a discourse whose voice is not heard; through all the earth their voice resounds, and to the ends of the world, their message.

Various traditions assign Idumea, Syria and Mesopotamia as St. Simon and St. Jude's field of apostolate. It seems that they are celebrated on the same day because of their common martyrdom. If the two apostles preached Christ in Asia Minor and the apostle Thomas went as far as India, in distant Korea we have a unique case in the history of evangelization, where the Christian faith did not enter directly through the preaching of the apostles, but rather through the study of sacred texts and books by learned people and transmission of the faith by lay people.

In fact a group of seekers of the truth, struck by the values of Christian texts, after several years, sent one of them to Beijing, to make contact with Christian missionaries and be baptized. He in turn, on his return to Korea, baptized fellow believers. "*Mission is a human contact, it is the witness of men and women who say to their fellow travelers: I know Jesus, I would like to make him known to you too*" (Pope Francis, *Without Jesus We Can Do Nothing. Being Missionary in the World Today*, Translated by Barry Hudock, Twenty-Third Publications, 2020)

Thus, in a providential way, what we read today in the epistle came about in Korea:

Brothers and sisters:

You are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the holy ones and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the Apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the capstone.

The young Church of the Far East suffered violent waves of persecution from 1836 to 1867, which killed more than 10,000 people, but also caused a springtime of the Spirit, like in the Church of

apostolic times. Saints Andrew Kim Taegŏn, the first Korean priest, and the layman Paul Chŏng Hasang are the leaders of a long line of canonized martyrs.

Here is St. Andrew Kim Taegŏn's last exhortation before being martyred in 1846, at the age of 44:

My brothers and sisters, my dearest friends, think again and again on this: God has ruled over all things in heaven and on earth from the beginning of time; then reflect on why and for what purpose he chose each one of us to be created in his own image and likeness.

In this world of perils and hardship if we did not recognize the Lord as our Creator, there would be no benefit either in being born or in our continued existence. We have come into the world by God's grace; by that same grace we have received baptism, entrance into the Church, and the honor of being called Christians. Yet what good will this do us if we are Christians in name alone and not in fact? We would have come into the world for nothing, we would have entered the Church for nothing, and we would have betrayed even God and his grace. It would be better never to have been born than to receive the grace of God and then to sin against him.

Look at the farmer who cultivates his rice fields. In season he plows, then fertilizes the earth; never counting the cost, he labors under the sun to nurture the seed he has planted. When harvest time comes and the rice crop is abundant, forgetting his labor and sweat, he rejoices with an exultant heart. But if the crop is sparse and there is nothing but straw and husks, the farmer broods over his toil and sweat and turns his back on that field with a disgust that is all the greater the harder he has toiled.

The Lord is like a farmer and we are the field of rice that he fertilizes with his grace and by the mystery of the incarnation and the redemption irrigates with his blood, in order that we will grow and reach maturity. When harvest time comes, the day of judgment, those who have grown to maturity in the grace of God will find the joy of adopted children in the kingdom of heaven; those who have not grown to maturity will become God's enemies and, even though they were once his children, they will be punished according to their deeds for all eternity.

Dearest brothers and sisters: when he was in the world, the Lord Jesus bore countless sorrows and by his own passion and death founded his Church; now he gives it increase through the sufferings of his faithful. No matter how fiercely the powers of this world oppress and oppose the Church, they will never bring it down. Ever since his ascension and from the time of the apostles to the present, the Lord Jesus has made his Church grow even in the midst of tribulations.

For the last fifty or sixty years, ever since the coming of the Church to our own land of Korea, the faithful have suffered persecution over and over again. Persecution still rages and as a result many who are friends in the household of the faith, myself among them, have been thrown into prison and like you are experiencing severe distress. Because we have become the one Body, should not our hearts be grieved for the members who are suffering? Because of the human ties that bind us, should we not feel deeply the pain of our separation? But, as the Scriptures say, God numbers the very hairs of our head and in his all-embracing providence he has care over us all. Persecution, therefore, can only be regarded as the command of the Lord or as a prize he gives or as a punishment he permits. Hold fast, then, to the will of God and with all your heart fight the good fight under the

leadership of Jesus; conquer again the diabolical power of this world that Christ has already vanquished. I beg you not to fail in your love for one another, but to support one another and to stand fast until the Lord mercifully delivers us from our trials.

There are twenty of us in this place and by God's grace we are so far all well. If any of us is executed, I ask you not to forget our families.

I have many things to say, yet how can pen and paper capture what I feel? I end this letter. As we are all near the final ordeal, I urge you to remain steadfast in faith, so that at last we will all reach heaven and there rejoice together.

I embrace you all in love.

(Liturgy of the Hours, Office of Readings for the Optional Memorial of Saints Andrew Kim Taegŏn and companion martyrs in Korea, September 20)

October 29, 2021

Friday, 30th Week in Ordinary Time

Rom 9:1-5

Ps 147

Lk 14:1-6

Brothers and sisters:

I speak the truth in Christ, I do not lie; my conscience joins with the Holy Spirit in bearing me witness that I have great sorrow and constant anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my own people, my kindred according to the flesh. They are children of Israel; theirs the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; theirs the patriarchs, and from them, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.

Paul's continuous pain and suffering regarding his people are very understandable: he belongs to the stock of Israel, to the tribe of Benjamin, he is a Jew, a son of Jews, and a Pharisee as regarded by the law (cf. Phil 3:5). The Israelites are his brothers according to the flesh and his strongest desire is that they also become so according to the Spirit. They are already adopted children of God, who chose them and gave them the covenant, the promises, the Law, and the Temple. What they freely received should have led them to Christ, who is the fulfillment of everything. Paradoxically, Paul expresses his affliction by saying that he would even will himself to be separated from Christ for their benefit.

In the responsorial psalm, the psalmist also recognizes the privileges with which God has enriched his people: he defended them, blessed them, made them live in peace, and satisfied their hunger. Above all, he announced his word, his decrees and his judgments to Israel – and only to Israel.

Glorify the Lord, O Jerusalem; praise your God, O Zion. For he has strengthened the bars of your gates; he has blessed your children within you. He has granted peace in your borders; with the best of wheat he fills you. He sends forth his command to the earth; swiftly runs his word! He has proclaimed his word to Jacob, his statutes and his ordinances to Israel. He has not done thus for any other nation; his ordinances he has not made known to them. Alleluia.

The Gospel sounds like a rebuke to this people, to their doctors of the Law and the Pharisees, who should have understood that the gifts with which God had filled Israel were certainly not given to them solely to ensure their “first place” among the people of the earth, but to make them the witness and the messenger of God's love for all mankind. On the contrary, the Chosen People had closed themselves off in a multitude of minor prescriptions and preoccupations with defending legal minutiae. They forgot not only the essentials teachings, but also lacked common sense and the sense of compassion and solidarity. If a son or an ox falls into a well on the Sabbath, isn't there a hurry to

get them out? Is it not therefore foolishness to prohibit the healing of a poor suffering man on the Sabbath? Jesus' miracles on the Sabbath certainly do not attack the holy day's sacredness, but aim to put the commandment of love of God and neighbor above all else.

On a sabbath Jesus went to dine at the home of one of the leading Pharisees, and the people there were observing him carefully. In front of him there was a man suffering from dropsy. Jesus spoke to the scholars of the law and Pharisees in reply, asking, "Is it lawful to cure on the sabbath or not?" But they kept silent; so he took the man and, after he had healed him, dismissed him. Then he said to them "Who among you, if your son or ox falls into a cistern, would not immediately pull him out on the sabbath day?" But they were unable to answer his question.

Even today, in our highly technical societies, there is no dearth of attachment to exclusivity for diverse and unjustified reasons, whether social, cultural, or religious. It is painful to note, for example, that coexistence between people of different races, especially in Africa and America, has given rise to so many injustices and discrimination, legalized almost to the present day. In the United States, state schools only opened up to everyone without any racial discrimination in 1954. In South Africa apartheid – racial separation – ended only with Nelson Mandela's election as president in 1994.

But there were always men and women in the Church who loved Christ with the same love as St. Paul and fought against injustices for the sake of their brothers who were persecuted and oppressed, vilified and despised, and they in turn were persecuted and hindered in every way: Katharine Mary Drexel (United States of America - USA) was one of these.

Torn between the yearning to consecrate herself to God in the contemplative life and the mission on behalf of Native Indians and African-Americans, she left her spiritual director, Fr. O'Connor, perplexed. Finally, she obeyed the voice of the Church, which spoke to her through her Pastor: in fact she had the opportunity to be received in audience by Pope Leo XIII during a trip to Europe. She herself tells the episode:

*Kneeling at his feet, my girlish fancy thought that surely God's Vicar would not refuse me. So I pleaded missionary priests for Bishop O'Connor's Indians. To my astonishment His Holiness responded, 'Why not, my child, become yourself a missionary?' (Duffy, S.B.S., Sr. Consuela. *Katharine Drexel: A Biography*. Philadelphia: Reilly Co., 1966, p. 100 – This is the official biography of Drexel.)*

Thus it was that this American billionaire, with great desires that had always remained vague and inaccurate, in 1891 founded the *Congregation of the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament for Indians and Colored People*. She worked tirelessly for sixty years and managed to found, albeit amidst enormous difficulties, 145 missions among the Indians, 50 schools for African-Americans, 12 schools for Indians and 49 convents. In 1917 she founded Xavier's School in New Orleans, which was transformed into a university in 1932 and became the prestigious Xavier University.

On 26 September 2015, the Holy Father Francis celebrated Mass with the bishops, priests and religious of Pennsylvania in the Philadelphia cathedral. During the homily he recalled the beginning of Saint Katharine Mary Drexel's vocation with these words:

Most of you know the story of Saint Katharine Drexel, one of the great saints raised up by this local Church. When she spoke to Pope Leo XIII of the needs of the missions, the Pope – he was a very wise Pope! – asked her pointedly: “What about you? What are you going to do?” Those words changed Katharine’s life, because they reminded her that, in the end, every Christian man and woman, by virtue of baptism, has received a mission. Each one of us has to respond, as best we can, to the Lord’s call to build up his Body, the Church.

“What about you?” I would like to dwell on two aspects of these words in the context of our specific mission to transmit the joy of the Gospel and to build up the Church, whether as priests, deacons, or men and women who belong to institutes of consecrated life.

First, those words – “What about you?” – were addressed to a young person, a young woman with high ideals, and they changed her life. They made her think of the immense work that had to be done, and to realize that she was being called to do her part. How many young people in our parishes and schools have the same high ideals, generosity of spirit, and love for Christ and the Church! I ask you: Do we challenge them? Do we make space for them and help them to do their part? To find ways of sharing their enthusiasm and gifts with our communities, above all in works of mercy and concern for others? Do we share our own joy and enthusiasm in serving the Lord?

One of the great challenges facing the Church in this generation is to foster in all the faithful a sense of personal responsibility for the Church’s mission, and to enable them to fulfill that responsibility as missionary disciples, as a leaven of the Gospel in our world. This will require creativity in adapting to changed situations, carrying forward the legacy of the past not primarily by maintaining our structures and institutions, which have served us well, but above all by being open to the possibilities which the Spirit opens up to us and communicating the joy of the Gospel, daily and in every season of our life.

“What about you?” It is significant that these words of the elderly Pope were also addressed to a lay woman. We know that the future of the Church in a rapidly changing society will call, and even now calls, for a much more active engagement on the part of the laity. The Church in the United States has always devoted immense effort to the work of catechesis and education. Our challenge today is to build on those solid foundations and to foster a sense of collaboration and shared responsibility in planning for the future of our parishes and institutions. This does not mean relinquishing the spiritual authority with which we have been entrusted; rather, it means discerning and employing wisely the manifold gifts which the Spirit pours out upon the Church. In a particular way, it means valuing the immense contribution which women, lay and religious, have made and continue to make, in the life of our communities.

October 30, 2021

Saturday, 30th Week in Ordinary Time

Rom 11:1-2a,11-12,25-29

Ps 94

Lk 14:1,7-11

In today's Eucharistic celebration, the first reading and the responsorial psalm exalt God's unfailing fidelity to his people. Chapter 9 of the letter to the Romans manifested the torment of St. Paul's heart: *"I have great sorrow and constant anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and separated from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kin according to the flesh. They are Israelites; theirs the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises"*.

It is impossible that God would have abandoned them forever, Paul is very sure of this and reveals the mystery of Israel's obstinacy: if their refusal of Christ allowed the Gentiles to know salvation, Israel too will be saved when all peoples have received the gospel, because *the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable*.

Brothers and sisters:

I ask, then, has God rejected his people? Of course not! For I too am a child of Israel, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew. Do you not know what the Scripture says about Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel?

Hence I ask, did they stumble so as to fall? Of course not! But through their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make them jealous. Now if their transgression is enrichment for the world, and if their diminished number is enrichment for the Gentiles, how much more their full number.

I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers and sisters, so that you will not become wise in your own estimation: a hardening has come upon Israel in part, until the full number of the Gentiles comes in, and thus all Israel will be saved, as it is written: The deliverer will come out of Zion, he will turn away godlessness from Jacob; and this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins.

In respect to the Gospel, they are enemies on your account; but in respect to election, they are beloved because of the patriarch. For the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable.

Yes, the Lord does not reject his people and does not abandon his inheritance. Even during the ancient covenant, how many times was God abandoned and betrayed! And how many times have each of us preferred our own idols to him! We thank the Lord because his fidelity has always sustained us.

The Lord will not abandon his people.

Blessed the man whom you instruct, O Lord, whom by your law you teach, giving him rest from evil days. For the Lord will not cast off his people, nor abandon his inheritance; but judgment shall again be with justice, and all the upright of heart shall follow it.

Were not the Lord my help, my soul would soon dwell in the silent grave. When I say, "My foot is slipping," your mercy, O Lord, sustains me.

If the epistle and the psalm proclaim God's fidelity, the Gospel, which speaks to us of humility, affirms this same fidelity in its own way: it is as if Christ were suggesting to us the way to overcome our incurable need to excel with advice full of wisdom:

On a sabbath Jesus went to dine at the home of one of the leading Pharisees, and the people there were observing him carefully. He told a parable to those who had been invited, noticing how they were choosing the places of honor at the table. "When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not recline at table in the place of honor.

A more distinguished guest than you may have been invited by him, and the host who invited both of you may approach you and say, 'Give your place to this man,' and then you would proceed with embarrassment to take the lowest place. Rather, when you are invited, go and take the lowest place so that when the host comes to you he may say, 'My friend, move up to a higher position.'

Then you will enjoy the esteem of your companions at the table. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted."

The Pharisees are watching Jesus to catch him in error, but it is Jesus who notices their need to put themselves first. The advice he gives them is not a cunning strategy, but a methodical education, revealing the Lord's patience and faithfulness.

St. Paul also underlines this:

Do nothing out of selfishness or out of vainglory; rather, humbly regard others as more important than yourselves. (Phil 2:3)

Shortly after, in fact, he explains:

Who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross.

Because of this, God greatly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (Phil 2:6-11)

The only way to follow is the way of humility in order to be glorified by God's faithfulness. Jesus, who himself is the way, showed us this.

Among the many others who have walked the way of the Lord, preaching the Gospel with their lives, today we point out two great Peruvian saints, who lived in Lima at the same time: St. Martin of Porres and St. Rose of Lima.

Christ's humility and the joy in suffering, lived with love, shine in them. The veneration that has been paid to them over the centuries, not only in Latin America but throughout the world, is a clear testimony of how true the Gospel's final words are: *"everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted"*. The inexhaustible charity of one and the loving penance of the other are the clearest proof of their hearts' desire: the saints longed that all may be saved and enjoy eternal happiness.

St. Martin did not leave behind any writings, but his life was a living gospel: in 1945 Pius XII proclaimed him patron of social justice. Martino was a mulatto, the natural son of a Spanish knight who had become impoverished and of a black ex-slave. He learned the trades of barber and herbalist. At the age of 15 he entered the Order of Dominican Friars as a "donor", assigned to the humblest material occupations. After his profession as a lay brother, he became a community nurse, dentist and phytotherapist for all kinds of diseases. Having become an expert in caring for the sick, he sometimes collected them in the streets and even took them to the convent, to his cell. To his prior, who had naturally forbidden him to do such things, Martin replied: *"I did not know that the precept of obedience took precedence over that of charity"*. At a time when his community was suffering from economic problems, he offered himself to his prior to be sold as a slave. He taught Christian doctrine to blacks and Indians and, with the help of the rich in the city, he founded the Holy Cross kindergarten school to educate and assist orphans, the poor, and the homeless. He would have liked to go everywhere to make Christ known, especially to Asia and Japan, which he described perfectly, as if he had visited that distant country in person.

While Martin was still alive, people attributed to him miracles of prophecy, healing, extraordinary conversions, bilocation, and even of ubiquity. All Lima spoke of him as the "holy brother Martin". Upon his death, the entire city bade him their final farewell with a unanimous participation in his funeral.

St. Rose, Martin's contemporary, was a Dominican tertiary and undoubtedly knew her holy brother, although there is no documentation of their meetings.

Like St. Martin, she was confirmed by St. Turibius of Mogrovejo. The holy archbishop of Lima confirmed the girl with the name Rose, which was not her baptismal name but had been given to her by an Indian servant because of her extraordinary beauty. St. Turibius, however, completed Rose's name: Rose of Holy Mary.

Penitent, mystic, favored by visions, she also exercised works of mercy, just like St. Martin. She was full of compassion for the Indians, whose suffering she shared, and was allowed to set up a shelter to assist the poor, the needy, abandoned children and the elderly – especially of Indian origin – in the affluent maternal house in downtown Lima. She died at age 31, and throughout her short life loved the poor and abused Indians, considering them brothers. Rose is the first saint of the American continent: she was canonized by Clement X in 1671.

We here present one of her writings:

Our Lord and Savior lifted up His voice and said with incomparable majesty: "Let all men know that grace comes after tribulation. Let them know that without the burden of afflictions it is impossible to reach the height of grace. Comprehend that, in conformity to the increase

in works, the measure of charisms justly increases. Let nobody deceive themselves: this is the only true stairway to paradise, and outside the Cross there is no road through which one may climb to Heaven." When I heard these words, a strong impetus came over me to place myself in the middle of the town square so that I might say in a loud voice to people of every age, sex, status and life condition: "Hear, O people; hear, all types of people: on behalf of Christ and with words taken from His own lips, I advise you: Grace is not acquired without suffering afflictions; one must perform good works and more good works so as to acquire the intimate participation of the divine nature, the glory of the children of God and the perfect beauty of the soul."

That same impetus urged me to proclaim the beauty of divine grace; it anguished me and made me sweat and yearn. It seemed like my soul could no longer be detained in the prison of the body, but that it had to break the prison and, free and alone, with more agility, it was to go throughout the world, giving a voice to this acclaim: "If only mortals would know how great is grace, how beautiful, how noble, how precious; how many riches it hides within itself, how many treasures, joys and delights! Without doubt they would employ all their diligence, goals and sleepless nights in searching for pains and afflictions. They would wander throughout the world in search of annoyances, infirmities and torments, instead of good adventures, in order to attain the inestimable treasure of grace. This is the reward and the ultimate goal of constancy and suffering. No one would complain about his Cross or her labors that luck may hand them, if they would come to know the scales on which they are weighed so as to be distributed to men."

(To Doctor Castillo; ed. L. Getino, *La Patrona dell'America*, Madrid 1928, pp. 54-55
Translated from the Spanish Office of the Hours by Jan Paul von Wendt)

The remains of these two great missionaries, which never left their city, rest together in the Basilica of the Holy Rosary of the Dominican convent in Lima.

October 31, 2021

Sunday, 31st Week in Ordinary Time – Year B

Dt 6:2-6

Ps 18

Heb 7:23-28

Mk 12:28b-34

On this Sunday, which closes out the Missionary Month, the texts of the Liturgy of the Word of Year B are kerygmatic, particularly suggestive and present a profound unity. In them the essentials of the faith are expressed. The first reading contains the *Shema Israel*, Israel's daily prayer, taken from Deuteronomy: *Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone! Therefore, you shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength.* We Christians repeat it with love, knowing well that the Lord our God is truly unique, but not solitary, and we adore his unity in the Trinity of Persons:

Moses spoke to the people, saying: "Fear the Lord, your God, and keep, throughout the days of your lives, all his statutes and commandments which I enjoin on you, and thus have long life. Hear then, Israel, and be careful to observe them, that you may grow and prosper the more, in keeping with the promise of the Lord, the God of your fathers, to give you a land flowing with milk and honey.

"Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone! Therefore, you shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength. Take to heart these words which I enjoin on you today."

In the responsorial psalm, love truly erupts from the whole heart, from the whole soul, with all the psalmist's might: God is everything in his life, the protector, the savior, the liberator, the defender, the one who grants him victory, the one who is always faithful:

I love you, O Lord, my strength, O Lord, my rock, my fortress, my deliverer. My God, my rock of refuge, my shield, the horn of my salvation, my stronghold! Praised be the Lord, I exclaim, and I am safe from my enemies. The Lord lives! And blessed be my rock!

Extolled be God my savior. You who gave great victories to your king and showed kindness to your anointed.

God already commanded us to love him with our whole being in the Old Testament, but this love is made possible only because he first loved us. He has always loved us and forever. Precisely because he loves us, he sent his Son, the Beloved, as mediator of the new covenant: Jesus is the measure of the Father's love.

Christ is the one mediator between God and men: "For there is one God. There is also one mediator between God and the human race, Christ Jesus, himself human, who gave himself as ransom for all. This was the testimony at the proper time. For this I was appointed preacher and apostle (I am speaking the truth, I am not lying), teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth." (1 Tm 2:5-7; cf. Heb 4:14-16)

*No one, therefore, can enter into communion with God except through Christ, by the working of the Holy Spirit. Christ's one, universal mediation, far from being an obstacle on the journey toward God, is the way established by God himself, a fact of which Christ is fully aware. Although participated forms of mediation of different kinds and degrees are not excluded, they acquire meaning and value only from Christ's own mediation, and they cannot be understood as parallel or complementary to his. (John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio* 5, Vatican December 7, 1990)*

Priest and victim, He has no need, as did the high priests, to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins and then for those of the people; he did this once for all when he offered himself. Ancient mediations have been abolished: through his sacrifice, he is always able to save those who approach God through him:

Brothers and sisters:

The levitical priests were many because they were prevented by death from remaining in office, but Jesus, because he remains forever, has a priesthood that does not pass away.

Therefore, he is always able to save those who approach God through him, since he lives forever to make intercession for them.

It was fitting that we should have such a high priest: holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners, higher than the heavens. He has no need, as did the high priests, to offer sacrifice day after day, first for his own sins and then for those of the people; he did that once for all when he offered himself. For the law appoints men subject to weakness to be high priests, but the word of the oath, which was taken after the law, appoints a son, who has been made perfect forever.

In the Gospel, Jesus intertwines love for God and love for neighbor, showing us that charity towards both is necessary to reach holiness. It is not only the fulfillment of norms, but requires living out true love, because God is Love.

One of the scribes came to Jesus and asked him, "Which is the first of all the commandments?" Jesus replied, "The first is this: Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is Lord alone! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is this: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these." The scribe said to him, "Well said, teacher. You are right in saying, 'He is One and there is no other than he.' And 'to love him with all your heart, with all your understanding, with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself' is worth more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices." And when Jesus saw that he answered with understanding, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." And no one dared to ask him any more questions.

Jesus praises the scribe who questioned him and showed wisdom and a sincere desire to follow the path of love. We know that this way is Christ, who has given us salvation. Only through imitating and conforming ourselves to him, can we rediscover his divine likeness and recognize the kingdom of God made manifest within us and in all those who become capable of sincere charity.

The Doctor of the Church Saint John of Avila, writing to Saint Teresa of Jesus – also a Doctor of the Church – does not need to waste many words in this respect. He writes: "Holiness consists only in humble love of God and neighbor" (September 12, 1568).

This is the mission of every Christian: to abandon selfishness (exaggerated love of oneself) and to let God who is Love himself shine through oneself and be recognized in daily conduct. If we allow ourselves to be attracted by God and live in his love amongst our brothers, we also attract others into this circuit of love. Just as faith and hope are communicated, so too – and above all – charity is communicated and attracts: it is missionary. The Lord calls some people to offer the first proclamation of the gospel of salvation, but he calls everyone to proclaim it through prayer and witness of life. This is love.

At the end of these brief ideas for meditation on the scriptural texts of the missionary month, we present the homily that Pope Francis gave during one of his daily Masses:

"Without witness and prayer, apostolic preaching is not possible"

"No one can come to me unless he is drawn by the Father" (Jn 6:4). Jesus recalls that even the prophets had prophesied that "they will all be taught by God". And God who draws us to the knowledge of the Son. Without this, no-one can know Jesus. Yes, one can study, also study the Bible, even know how He was born, what He did, all this, yes. But to know Him from within, to know the mystery of Christ, is only for those who are drawn to this by the Father. [...]

And this – that no one can know Jesus without the Father having drawn him or her – (cf. Jn 6:44) – this is valid for our apostolate, for our apostolic mission as Christians.

I also think of the missions. "What do you go to do in the missions?" – "I go to convert people" – "But stop, you will never convert anyone! It will be the Father who attracts those hearts to acknowledge Jesus". Going to the missions is to go and bear witness to one's own faith. Without witness, you will do nothing. To go to the missions, and there are some really good missionaries, is not merely about building big structures and things, and stopping there. No, the structures must be testimonies. You can make a hospital structure, an educational structure of great perfection, of great development, but if it is without Christian witness, your work will not be a work of witness, a work of the true proclamation of Jesus: it will be a charitable institution, very good – very good! – but nothing more.

If I want to go to the missions, if I want to carry out the apostolate, I must go with the disposition that the Father draws people to Jesus, and must bear witness to this. Jesus Himself says it to Peter, when he professes that He is the Messiah: "Blessed are you Simon, because it was the Father who revealed this to you" (cf. Mt 16:17). It is the Father who draws us to him through our own witness. "I will do a lot of works here, there and everywhere, this and that", but without witness they are good things, but they are not the proclamation of the Gospel, there are not places that might give people knowledge of Jesus. Work and witness.

“But what can I do so that the Father will make it His business to attract people?” It is prayer. This is prayer for the missions: to pray that the Father will draw people towards Jesus. Witness and prayer, they go together. Without witness and prayer one cannot carry out apostolic preaching, one cannot proclaim. You will give a good moral sermon, but the Father will not have the possibility of drawing people to Jesus. And this is the center: this is the center of our apostolate, that the Father may attract the people to Jesus (cf. Jn 6:44). Our witness opens the doors of the people and our prayer opens the heart of the Father, so that it may attract people. Witness and prayer. And this is not only for the missions, it is also for our work as Christians. Do I truly bear witness to Christian life, with my style of life? Do I pray for the Father to draw people to Jesus?

This is the great rule for our apostolate, everywhere, and in a special way for the missions. To go to the missions is not to carry out proselytism. Once a woman – a good person, you could see she had good will – came up to me with two young people, a boy and a girl, and she said to me: “This boy, Father, was a protestant and I converted him; I convinced him. And this girl was...”, I don’t know, animist, I don’t know what she said, “and I converted her”. And the woman was good, good. But she was mistaken. I lost my patience a little and I said to her, “Listen, you haven’t converted anyone; it was God who touched the heart of the people. And do not forget: witness, yes; proselytism, no”. Let us ask the Lord for the grace to live our work with witness and prayer, so that He, the Father, may draw people to Jesus.

(Homily of His Holiness Pope Francis, Morning Mass in the chapel of the *Domus Sanctae Marthae*, April 30, 2020)