



The third Gospel is the work of a disciple of Paul, probably a physician (Col 4:14) of Syrian origin. He must have converted to the Christian faith in the 40's when the persecuted Christians of Jerusalem and Caesarea took refuge outside Palestine, bringing the message with them. As early as the year 50 A.D., Luke accompanied Paul in his missions (Acts 16:10).

Luke may have concluded his Gospel and Acts in Greece. For him, these books were two halves of the same work and they were probably finished between the years 63-64 A.D.

Luke tells us that he went to seek the testimonies of the first servants of the word, namely, the apostles (1:1-5). In fact, more than once, Luke went with Paul to Jerusalem and Caesarea, two great centers of the Church in Palestine, and these first communities kept the documents that the first three Gospels used.

Luke, the same as Mark, kept the two main sections that served as the basis of the Church's early catechesis, namely: the activity of Jesus in Galilee and his final days in Jerusalem. But between them, Luke inserted the content of another document with many sayings of Jesus. He intentionally placed them during Jesus' journey from Galilee to Jerusalem to show that Christian life is placed under the sign of the cross.

Other documents of the first Christian communities of Palestine provided Luke with the content of his first two chapters devoted to the infancy of Jesus. It is the testimony of the primitive community of which Mary was a member. From the very start, these chapters give to the Gospel of Luke its own personality. If we had to characterize it in one word, we would have to say that it is the most human of the four.

We can see this profoundly human aspect of Luke in his care to recall the attitude of Jesus toward women. Luke had left his family to follow Paul in his missions and, as a result, he always lived with insecurity and provisionally and more than others, he underlined the incompatibility of the Gospel with possessions.

Luke learned a great deal from Paul, his teacher. He emphasized the words of Jesus that remind us that salvation is always, first and foremost, a personal gift of

God rather than a reward for our merits. This highlighting of the strange mercy of God has given us the unforgettable parables of Chapter 15.

After the infancy narrative (1-2), and the account of the Baptism of Jesus in Judea, the Gospel of Luke is made up of three sections:

- The ministry of Jesus in Galilee: 3:1–9:56;
- The journey through Samaria to Jerusalem: 9:57–18:17;
- The events of Jerusalem: 18:18-24.

The last chapter on the apparitions of the risen Jesus will serve as an invitation to read the Book of Acts, which is a continuation of Luke's Gospel.

Acts
4:31;
8:25

1 • ¹Several people have set themselves to relate the events that have taken place among us, ²as they were told by the first witnesses, who later became ministers of the word. ³After I, myself, had carefully gone over the whole story from the beginning, it seemed right for me to give you, Theophilus, an orderly account, ⁴so that your Excellency may know the truth of all you have been taught.

Acts 1:1

The birth of John the Baptist foretold

24:10

• ⁵In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there lived a priest named Zechariah, belonging to the priestly clan of Abiah. Elizabeth, Zechariah's wife, also belonged to a priestly family. ⁶Both of them were upright in the eyes of God, and lived blamelessly, in accordance

with all the laws and commands of the Lord, ⁷but they had no child. Elizabeth could not have any and now they were both very old.

Gen
11:30;
25:21;
29:31;
Jdg 13:2;
15:15

⁸Now, while Zechariah and those with him were fulfilling their office, ⁹it fell to him by lot, according to the custom of the priests, to enter the Sanctuary of the Lord and burn incense. ¹⁰At the time of offering incense, all the people were praying outside; ¹¹it was then, that an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing on the right side of the altar of incense. ¹²On seeing the angel, Zechariah was deeply troubled and fear took hold of him.

Mt 1:20

Jdg
6:22;
Dn 8:17

¹³But the angel said to him, "Don't be afraid, Zechariah, be assured that your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son and you

Gen
15:1;
Dn
10:12

• **1.1** Luke dedicates his work to Theophilus, who may have been a well-to-do Christian. According to the custom of the times (printing did not exist), Luke gave him his manuscript with the expectation that several copies would be made at his expense for the use of Christian communities. Luke would also dedicate the Acts of the Apostles to Theophilus.

• **5.** *In the days of Herod.* This Herod was the father of "Tetrarch Herod" who is recorded in 3:1 and whom Jesus knew. He was the last king of the Jews. When he died, Judea lost its autonomy. This Gospel begins in the temple, and will end in the temple. This first book of Luke will take place in a setting that is strictly Jewish. Only in his second book, the Acts, shall we find the extension of the Gospel to all the nations. God's work begins with simple believers—there were many of them in Israel, those who in the Psalms are called "the poor of Yahweh."

Among the Jews, there were a number of priestly families called Aaron's descendants. All the men from these families were priests from generation to generation. From time to time they had the privilege and duty to fulfill priestly functions in the Jerusalem temple, but the rest of the time they worked in their towns and villages as ordinary citizens.

Elizabeth could not have children (v. 7). As with Sarah, Rebecca and Rachel (famous ancestors of the Jewish people), and Hannah (mother of the prophet Samuel) this occurred so that God's goodness and power shown to the humble and despised would be made more obvious (1 S 1).

Your prayer has been heard (v. 13). Zechariah wanted to have a son, but no longer hoped for one. However, in the temple he prayed for the salvation God would grant his people and is promised both salvation and a son.

He shall never drink wine (v. 15). In Israel many men consecrated themselves to God in this way: they neither cut their hair nor drank alcoholic drinks and withdrew from the world for a while (Num 6). They were called *Nazirites*.

Zechariah's son was to be a Nazirite *from his mother's womb* until his death, as Samson had been (Jdg 13:5). The one who would be known as John the Baptist receives the mission to preach repentance, and his very life was to be a model of austerity (Mk 1:6). In that he will be the opposite of Jesus who, but for exceptional times such as his fasting in the desert, would live like everyone else and not request special fasts of his disciples (Lk 7:33-34).

Then, the angel indicates what John, Zechariah's son, will be: *He will go in the spirit and power of Elijah* (v. 17). In Scripture we see that after Elijah disappeared, having been taken to heaven in a flaming chariot (2 K 2:11), the community of believers kept wondering about the meaning of such an unusual event. They even thought that just as Elijah had worked during a time of religious crisis to bring his people back to faith, so he would also return from heaven before the coming of the Messiah to restore his people's faithfulness.

The text here refers to this Israelite expectation: one should not think that Elijah would return from heaven in person as Malachi 3:23 seemed to say. Rather John the Baptist would

Gen 17:19; Jdg 13:3 shall name him John. ¹⁴He will bring joy and gladness to you, and many will rejoice at his birth.

Num 6:3; Jdg 16:17; Lk 11:41; Jer 1:5 ¹⁵This son of yours will be great in the eyes of the Lord. Listen: he shall never drink wine or strong drink; but he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother's womb.

¹⁶Through him, many of the people of Israel will turn to the Lord their God.

Mal 2:6; 1K 17:1; Mal 3:1; Mt 11:14; Mal 3:24; Is 40:3 ¹⁷He, himself, will open the way to the Lord, with the spirit and power of the prophet Elijah; he will reconcile fathers and children; and lead the disobedient to wisdom and righteousness, in order to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

Dn 8:16; 9:21 ¹⁸Zechariah said to the angel, "How can I believe this? I am an old man and my wife is elderly, too." ¹⁹The angel replied, "I am Gabriel, who stands before God; and I am the one sent to speak to you, and to bring you this good news! My words will come true in their time. ²⁰But you would not believe; and now, you will be silent and

unable to speak until this has happened."

²¹Meanwhile, the people waited for Zechariah; and they were surprised that he delayed so long in the Sanctuary. ²²When he finally appeared, he could not speak to them; and they realized that he had seen a vision in the Sanctuary. He remained dumb and made signs to them.

²³When his time of service was completed, Zechariah returned home; ²⁴and, some time later, Elizabeth became pregnant. For five months she kept to herself, remaining at home, and thinking, ²⁵"This, for me, is the Lord's doing! This is his time for mercy, and for taking away my public disgrace."

Gen 21:6; 1S 1:10; Is 4:1

The annunciation

(Mt 1:18)

• ²⁶In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God, to a town of Galilee called Nazareth. He was sent ²⁷to a virgin, who was betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the family

Mt 1:18

operate with the spirit of Elijah to obtain reconciliation for all, through justice and faithfulness to God's law.

So, in this remote corner of the world, the Good News begins with an elderly and childless couple, because nothing is impossible with God.

THE VIRGIN MARY

• 26. The first two chapters of this Gospel are, like the beginning of Matthew's Gospel, an account of the infancy of Jesus. The spirit, however, is entirely different. Matthew uses without scruple stories that were not authenticated, but were in the tradition of "infancies of saints" that circulated among Jews and he used them to show what the mission of Jesus would be. Luke also gives us an account that is first of all theological but based on facts. In doing that he uses a very ancient document familiar to the Christian communities of Palestine. We find seven scenarios in the first two chapters:

- annunciation of John;
- annunciation of Jesus;
- the visitation;
- birth of John;
- birth of Jesus;
- the presentation;
- Jesus in the temple.

The account of the annunciation of Jesus marks the difference from John in his person and in his mission.

How considerate God is toward humans! He does not save them without their consent. The Savior is expected and welcomed by a mother: a young girl accepts to be the servant of the Lord and becomes the mother of God.

The virgin's name was Mary (v. 27). Luke uses the word *virgin*. Why did he not say a *young girl* or a *woman*? Simply because he was referring to the words of the prophets stating that God would be received by the *virgin of Israel*. For centuries God endured thousands of infidelities from his people, and had forgiven their sins. At his coming, the Savior was to be welcomed by a "virgin" people, that is, a people fully consecrated to him. In Jesus' time many people concluded that the Messiah would be born of a virgin mother when they read the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14. Now then, the Gospel says: Mary is *The Virgin*.

The one who, from the beginning, was chosen by God to welcome his only Son through an act of perfect faith, had to be a virgin. She, who was to give Jesus his blood, his hereditary traits, his character, his first education, must have grown under the shadow of the Almighty like a

of David; and the virgin's name was Mary.

Ru 2:4; 3:12 ²⁸The angel came to her and said, "Rejoice, full of grace, the Lord is with you!" ²⁹Mary was troubled at these words, wondering what this greeting could mean.

1:13 ³⁰But the angel said, "Do not fear, Mary, for God has looked kindly on you. ³¹You shall conceive and bear a son; and you shall call him Jesus. ³²He will be great, and shall rightly be called Son of the Most High. The Lord

God will give him the kingdom of David, his ancestor; he will rule over the people of Jacob forever; ³³and his reign shall have no end."

³⁴Then Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" ³⁵And the angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore, the holy child to be born of you shall be called Son of God. ³⁶Even your relative, Elizabeth, is expecting a son in her old age, although she was

2S 7:16; Is 9:6; Dn 7:14

Mt 1:20; Is 11:1; Num 9:18; Acts 3:14; 4:30

Is 7:14; Mt 1:21

secret flower belonging to no one else, who had made of her whole life a gift to God.

How can this be? (v. 34). The angel states that the baby will be born of Mary without Joseph's intervention. The one to be born of Mary in time is the same one who exists in God, born of God, Son of the Father (see Jn 1:1).

The power of the Most High will overshadow you (v. 35). The sacred books spoke of a cloud or shadow filling the temple (1 K 8:10) as a sign of the divine presence over the Holy City, protecting it (Sir 24:4). By using this image the Gospel conveys that Mary becomes God's dwelling place, through whom he works out his mysteries. The Holy Spirit comes, not over the Son first, but over Mary so that she may conceive through the power of the Spirit, since a man's intervention is excluded. The conception of Jesus in Mary is the result and the biological expression of her total surrender to the unique and eternal Word of the Father.

It is thus that the Alliance between God and humankind is finally realized. It will not only be the "work" of Jesus. He, himself, is already the eternal Alliance. A child born into a family belongs entirely to the family of its father and to that of its mother: he is the alliance between two families until then strangers to one another. So it is that Jesus, born of the Father and of Mary, is the Alliance between God and the human family, and it is there that the faith of the Church is rooted: Jesus is truly God and truly man.

Before the angel came, had Mary thought of consecrating her virginity to God? The Gospel gives no indication to this effect other than Mary's word: *I do not know man*. Let us recall that Mary was about to be married and was engaged to Joseph, which, according to Jewish law, gave them the rights of marriage (Mt 1:20). It is possible that this question is merely meant to invite a response from the angel on the intervention of the Spirit. The whole text however becomes more transparent if Mary had already kept herself for God alone.

"Mary ever-virgin" affirms the Christian tradition that never fails to expand the scriptural

statement. As for Mary having thought of virginity before the angel's visit, that is a different matter. Such a decision was foreign to Jewish mentality, but it is also certain that the Gospel becomes alive with new and surprising decisions. Such an unusual decision born of an unusual relationship with God is not surprising for those who have an inner experience of the Spirit.

THE ANNUNCIATION

Only Mary could make known the mystery of Jesus' conception to the primitive church. How could she express such an inner experience and how would it be reported?

Therefore, in writing, Luke had to use biblical words and forms that would allow us to understand the mysterious encounter of Mary with God.

The angel Gabriel (v. 26). For the Jews Gabriel was the name of an angel of the highest rank who appears in the Book of Daniel to announce the hour of salvation (Dn 8:16 and 9:21). So, in speaking of Gabriel, the Gospel implies that, for Mary, everything began with the assurance that this was the moment when the destiny of the world was being decided.

Rejoice (v. 28). This was the joyful way in which prophets addressed the *daughter of Zion*, that is to say, the community of the humble, who looked forward to the coming of the Savior (Zep 3:14; Zec 9:9).

Full of grace (v. 28). The word used in the Gospel means specifically: beloved and favored. Other people had been loved, chosen, favored; but in this instance it becomes the very name of Mary.

She was troubled at these words (v. 29). The text does not speak of fear as it did in the case of Zechariah (1:12). From the first moment that Mary's spirit was awakened, she was aware of the presence of God inspiring her every decision, and so the divine revelation does not cause fear in her. The divine words, revealing her unique vocation, do trouble her.

You shall conceive (v. 31). Here the Gospel makes use of several biblical texts, of which some

Gen
18:14

unable to have a child; and she is now in her sixth month. ³⁷With God nothing is impossible.”

³⁸Then Mary said, “I am the handmaid of the Lord, let it be done to me as you have said.” And the angel left her.

Mary visits Elizabeth

• ³⁹Mary then set out for a town in the hill country of Judah. ⁴⁰She entered the house of Zechariah and greeted

Elizabeth. ⁴¹When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leapt in her womb. Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and, ⁴²giving a loud cry, said, “You are most blessed among women; and blessed is the fruit of your womb! ⁴³How is it, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? ⁴⁴The moment your greeting sounded in my ears, the baby within me suddenly leapt for joy. ⁴⁵Blessed are you, who believed that the Lord’s word would come true!”

1:15;
Jdg
5:24;
Jdt
13:181:20;
Jn 20:29

foretell the future of a child, and in some others God entrusts a mission. See Genesis 16:1; Exodus 3:11; Judges 6:11. We have already mentioned Isaiah’s prophecy (7:14) announcing the one who would be *Emmanuel*, meaning God-with-us. Mary will name him Jesus, which means savior.

He will rule over the people of Jacob forever (i.e., the Israelites) (v. 32). This is a way of saying that Jesus is the Savior, the Son of David, announced by the prophets: 2 Samuel 7:16; Isaiah 9:6.

He will be great (v. 32), but not in the way that John the Baptist would be great before God, for John was only a human being (1:15). Jesus was to be *Son of the Most High*, and *Son of David*; these two attributes pointed to the expected Messiah or Savior (2 S 7:14; Ps 2:7). See also Romans 1:3-4. This is why it was made clear that Joseph was *from the family of David*: see commentary on Matthew 1:20.

THE SERVANT OF THE LORD

I am the handmaid of the Lord (v. 38). In saying this, Mary does not lower herself with false humility; instead she expresses her faith and her surrender. From her will be born the one who will be both *the servant* announced by the prophets (Is 42:1; 50:4; 52:13) and *the only Son* (Heb 1).

Many persons are mistaken about the word “servant” in that they view almighty God as using his servants to his own ends without taking time to look at them and love them. For them God would lose his greatness if he were to give Mary authentic responsibility in the incarnation of her Son.

This is quite contrary to the spirit of the Scriptures. God loves people, he wishes, he who is God, to experience human friendship (Dt 4:7; Pro 8:31). God had no need of a woman to make a human body, but he wanted to have a mother for his Son; and for Mary to really be that mother, it was necessary that God looked upon her with greater love than he had for any other creature. Thus, Mary is called *full of grace*.

Grace is what we call the power God has to heal our spirit, to instill in us the disposition to believe, and to make us resonate with the truth so that the expression of real love comes from us in a spontaneous way. We call grace that which came from the living God to blossom on earth: Isaiah 45:8; Psalm 85:11.

Mary is really full of grace because Jesus was born of her as he is born of the Father. This is why the Church believes that Mary has a unique role in the work of our salvation. She is the marvel that God achieved at the outset of transforming humankind into his image.

THE HUMBLE PEOPLE

• 39. The angel’s message has not left Mary alone with her problems. The angel spoke of her elderly cousin, Elizabeth. With her Mary will share her joy and her secret. Mary, quite young (was she more than fifteen?), will learn from her many things that Joseph could not tell her. What had been foretold to Zechariah will now be fulfilled: “Your son will be filled with the Holy Spirit while in the womb of his mother.”

What is most important in history is not what is spectacular. The Gospel prefers to draw our attention to life-filled events.

A few years later, Jewish crowds would go to John the Baptist looking for the word of God. No one would wonder how he received the Spirit of God, and no one would know that a humble girl, Mary, put God’s plan in motion on that Visitation day.

Blessed are you who believed! (v. 45). What is important is not that Mary is the mother of Jesus in the flesh, and this, Jesus will repeat (11:27).

Mary, who has become the Temple of God, communicates the Spirit—the Spirit of Jesus.

About Mary’s canticle. Mary, so unobtrusive in the Gospel, having no part in Jesus’ ministry, is the one who proclaims the historical revolution begun with the coming of the Savior.

She proclaims:

- the mercy of God who always keeps his promises,
- the change that is to take place in the human condition.

⁴⁶And Mary said,

“My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,

⁴⁷my spirit exults in God, my savior!

⁴⁸He has looked upon his servant, in her lowliness, and people, forever, will call me blessed.

⁴⁹The Mighty One has done great things for me, Holy is his Name!

⁵⁰From age to age, his mercy extends to those who live in his presence.

⁵¹He has acted with power and done wonders, and scattered the proud with their plans.

⁵²He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and lifted up those who are downtrodden.

⁵³He has filled the hungry with good things, but has sent the rich away empty.

⁵⁴He held out his hand to Israel, his servant, for he remembered his mercy,

⁵⁵even as he promised to our fathers, to Abraham and his descendants forever.”

1S 2:
1-10

1:25;
1S 1:11

Ps111:9

Is 57:15;
Ps
103:17

Job
12:19;
Ps113:7

Ps107:9

Ezk
28:25;
Ps 146

Mic
7:20;
Ps18:51

⁵⁶Mary remained with Elizabeth about three months, and then returned home.

Birth of John the Baptist

• ⁵⁷When the time came for Elizabeth, she gave birth to a son. ⁵⁸Her neighbors and relatives heard that the merciful Lord had done a wonderful thing for her, and they rejoiced with her.

⁵⁹When, on the eighth day, they came to attend the circumcision of

the child, they wanted to name him Zechariah after his father. ⁶⁰But his mother said, “Not so; he shall be called John.” ⁶¹They said to her, “But no one in your family has that name!”

⁶²and they made signs to his father for the name he wanted to give him. ⁶³Zechariah asked for a writing tablet, and wrote on it, “His name is John;” and they were very surprised. ⁶⁴Immediately, Zechariah could speak again, and his first words were in praise of God.

1:13

Gen
17:12;
Lev 12:3

This is what Martin Luther King, the emancipator of the Blacks, recalled: “Despite the fact that all too often people see in the church a power opposed to any change, in fact, the church preserves a powerful ideal which urges people toward the summits and opens their eyes as to their own destiny. From the hot spots of Africa to the black areas of Alabama, I have seen men and women rising and shaking off their chains. They had just discovered they were God’s children, and that, as God’s children, it was impossible to enslave them.”

The song of Mary also expresses the deepest feeling of the Christian soul. There is a time for us to seek truth, to discover what our major duties are and to become truly and essentially

human. There is a time for asking from and serving God. In the long run, we come to understand that divine love seeks out what is poorer and weaker to fill it and make it great. Then our only prayer becomes thanks giving to God for his understanding and merciful designs.

• 57. *What was circumcision?* (See Gen 17). *The child lived in the desert* (v. 80), that is, the desert of Judea by the Dead Sea, where some large communities of which the well-known Qumran community had settled. These communities, called the Essenes, devoted themselves to prayer and meditation on Scripture. And took part in the education of children.

⁶⁵ A holy fear came on all in the neighborhood, and throughout the hill country of Judea the people talked about these events. ⁶⁶ All who heard of

it, pondered in their minds, and wondered, "What will this child be?" For they understood that the hand of the Lord was with him.

Slk 2:5
1S
16:13;
Jn 7:42

⁶⁷ Zechariah, filled with the Holy Spirit, sang this canticle:

⁶⁸ "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,
for he has come and redeemed his people.
⁶⁹ In the house of David his servant,
he has raised up for us a victorious Savior;
⁷⁰ as he promised through his prophets of old,
⁷¹ salvation from our enemies
and from the hand of our foes.
⁷² He has shown mercy to our fathers;
and remembered his holy Covenant,
⁷³ the oath he swore to Abraham, our father,
⁷⁴ to deliver us from the enemy,
⁷⁵ that we might serve him fearlessly,
as a holy and righteous people,
all the days of our lives.
⁷⁶ And you, my child,
shall be called Prophet of the Most High,
for you shall go before the Lord,
to prepare the way for him,
⁷⁷ and to enable his people to know of their salvation,
when he comes to forgive their sins.
⁷⁸ This is the work of the mercy of our God,
who comes from on high, as a rising sun,
⁷⁹ shining on those who live in darkness
and in the shadow of death,
and guiding our feet into the way of peace."

2K 3:15;
Ezk 1:3

Ps 41:14;
72:18;
106:48;
111:9

1S 2:10;
Ps 18:3;
132:17;
Jer 23:5

Ps
106:10

2:24;
Lev
26:42

Ps
106:45;
Mic 4:10

Mt 11:10

Num
24:17;
Mal 3:20

Is 9:1;
Mic 5:4

105:8-9;
Gen 26:3

⁸⁰ As the child grew up, he was seen to be strong in the Spirit; and he lived in the desert, until the day when he appeared openly in Israel.

the whole empire to be taken. ²This first census was taken when Quirinus was governor of Syria. ³Everyone had to be registered in his own town. So everyone set out for his own city. ⁴Joseph, too, set out from Nazareth of Galilee. As he belonged to the family of David, being a descendant of

The birth of Jesus

2 ¹At that time, the emperor issued a decree for a census of

• **2.1** *The emperor issued a decree.* The Jews formed a small nation under the rule of the Roman empire, which included diverse people. The precision given by Luke presents a difficulty because Quirinus was appointed governor of Syria in the year 6 B.C. and Jesus was twelve at that time. Several explanations have been built, but very possibly Luke used a mistaken

chronology in that place like in Acts 5:36. Luke is infallible as a witness of salvation, not as an historian.

Because of the census, Joseph and Mary had to leave their Nazareth home at the time the child was to be born. Joseph, a descendant of David, must have had relatives in Bethlehem, the city of David and of his family. Jesus may

3:2;
7:24

his, he went to Judea, to David's town of Bethlehem, ⁵to be registered with Mary, his wife, who was with child.

⁶They were in Bethlehem when the time came for her to have her child; ⁷and she gave birth to a son, her firstborn. She wrapped him in torn rags, and laid him in a feeding trough, because there was no place for them in the inn.

The shepherds and the angels

• ⁸There were shepherds camping in the countryside, taking turns to watch over their flocks by night. ⁹Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared to them, with the glory of the Lord shining around them.

As they were terrified, ¹⁰the angel said to them, "Don't be afraid; I am here to give you good news, great joy for all the people. ¹¹Today, a Savior has been born to you in David's town; he is the Messiah and the Lord. ¹²Let

this be a sign to you: you will find a baby wrapped in torn rags and lying in a feeding trough." 2Tim 1:10

¹³Suddenly, the angel was surrounded by many more heavenly spirits, praising God and saying, ¹⁴"Glory to God in the highest, and Peace, on earth, to those whom God loves." Ezk 3:12; Is 9:5; Ezr 7:52; Esh 12:14; Lk 19:38; 24:36

¹⁵When the angels had left them and gone back to heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go as far as Bethlehem, and see what the Lord has made known to us." ¹⁶So they came hurriedly, and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the feeding trough. ¹⁷On seeing him, they related what they had been told about the child; ¹⁸and all were astonished on hearing the shepherds.

• ¹⁹As for Mary, she treasured all these words, and pondered them in her heart. 2:51; Dn 7:28; Mt 13:52

²⁰The shepherds then returned,

have been born in the house of one of those relatives.

The chalk hill on which the village of Bethlehem was built had many natural caves used as dwelling places by the not so rich. The cave where Jesus was born consisted of two rooms separated by a rock formation. The innermost room was probably used as a shed and stable. Since there was not enough room or privacy in the common room, Joseph and Mary settled in the area where the animals were kept.

Thus, it was foreseen by the Father that Jesus would be educated in a real home, where neither work nor bread would be lacking. In his birth, however, as in his death, Jesus would resemble the most abandoned.

She gave birth to a son, her firstborn (v. 7). This term was used then to designate an only son, underscoring that this first son was consecrated to God (Ex 13:1). See also Romans 8:29; Colossians 1:15.

The liturgy of Christmas sings: "Happy mother of God! Today you gave birth to the Savior of all times, and giving birth, you remained a virgin."

• 8. With the necessary stages in the religious formation of humankind being over, God sent his Son on earth to introduce us to true religion. Now the angel proclaims peace and graciousness to humankind. See how much God

loves us! Let yourselves be caught up in his love! Why continue to fear? Have you not understood that God became a child and that from now on he will be among us as a silent and defenseless child?

Let this be a sign to you (v. 12). They will recognize God who became poor for us in order to communicate his treasures to us.

They returned giving glory to God (v. 20). While the world was in darkness, some shepherds saw the angel of the Lord. Why were they called to the manger? God delights in revealing himself to the poor, and Mary and Joseph had the joy to share with them a part of their secret.

With the birth of Jesus a new age begins (the final age as the apostles will say) in which, on one hand, people hope for the salvation of the world, and on the other they already enjoy this salvation. The shepherds are models for those dedicated to contemplation. Following them, the Church will never be totally involved in works of mercy or human development, but instead, with its truest spirit, will continue to look upon Christ present in its midst, giving thanks and rejoicing in God.

• 19. *Mary treasured all these words* (v. 19), because every event of her life was for her the way God revealed his plans to her, and all the more so now that she was living with Jesus.

giving glory and praise to God for all they had heard and seen, just as the angels had told them.

Gen 17:12 ²¹On the eighth day, the circumcision of the baby had to be performed; he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he was conceived.

Jesus is presented in the temple

13:2; Num 18:15; Lev 12:8 • ²²When the day came for the purification according to the law of Moses, they brought the baby up to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord, ²³as it is written in the law of the Lord: *Every firstborn male shall be consecrated to God.* ²⁴And they offered a sacrifice, as ordered in the law of the Lord: *a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.*

Is 40:1; 61:2 ²⁵There lived in Jerusalem, at this time, a very upright and devout man named Simeon; the Holy Spirit was in him. He looked forward to the time when the Lord would comfort Israel; ²⁶and he had been assured, by the Holy Spirit, that he would not die before seeing the Messiah of the Lord. ²⁷So, he was led into the temple by the Holy Spirit at the time the parents brought the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the law.

²⁸Simeon took the child in his arms, and blessed God, saying,

²⁹“Now, O Lord, you can dismiss your servant in peace, for you have fulfilled your word ³⁰and my eyes have seen your

Is 40:5

salvation, ³¹which you display for all the people to see.

³²Here is the light you will reveal to the nations, ³³and the glory of your people Israel.”

Is 42:6; 49:6; Jn 8:12

³⁴His father and mother wondered at what was said about the child. ³⁵Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary, his mother, “Know this: your son is a sign; a sign established for the falling and rising of many in Israel, a sign of contradiction; ³⁶and a sword will pierce your own soul, so that, out of many hearts, thoughts may be revealed.”

20:17; Is 8:14; 28:16; Acts 28:26

³⁷There was also a prophetess named Anna, daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. After leaving her father’s home, she had been seven years with her husband; and since then, she had been continually about the temple, serving God, as a widow, night and day, in fasting and prayer. ³⁸She was now eighty-four. ³⁹Coming up at that time, she gave praise to God, and spoke of the child to all who

Jn 19:25; 3:19; 9:39

1Tim 5:5; Jdt 8:4

Ps 23:6; 84:5

She wondered, marveled but was not confused, because her faith was beyond wavering. However, she too had to discover the ways of salvation slowly and painfully. *She pondered on these things* until the time of the Resurrection and Pentecost when all the words and deeds of Jesus became clear.

• 22. Mary and Joseph went to the temple to fulfill a ritual of the Jewish religion (Lev 12:8). Jesus being a firstborn male must be consecrated to God (Ex 13:1).

Simeon and Anna like Mary and Joseph belong to the “small remnant of Israel.” This minority of God’s people live their faith in humility and faithfulness to the prophets’ teaching: God knows how to make himself known to them.

What is the meaning of *the sword* that will pierce Mary’s soul? It indicates Mary’s grief upon seeing her Son die on the cross. It also sig-

nifies that Mary will suffer because she will not always understand what her Son does. The best-shared love will not prevent each from remaining a mystery to the other, and more so for God than for anyone else. God does not watch our fidelity from heaven, but rather seeks us (he tries us in the sense of asking us to reveal ourselves). The love of the Father will be Mary’s cross just as it would be for Jesus.

Christ is God’s light which enlightens people, but which also blinds and confuses them at times. He is a sign that is opposed, but this is a mystery—those who oppose him are not always the worst. There are some people who believe in Christ, but do not follow him. Unable to see his light they do not know that it condemns them. There are good people who do not believe because God wills that they seek the light their whole life long.

looked forward to the deliverance of Jerusalem.

³⁹When the parents had fulfilled all that was required by the law of the Lord, they returned to their town, Nazareth in Galilee. ⁴⁰There, the child grew in stature and strength, and was filled with wisdom: the grace of God was upon him.

I must be in my Father's house

• ⁴¹Every year, the parents of Jesus went to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover, as was customary. ⁴²And when Jesus was twelve years old, he went up with them, according to the custom of this feast. ⁴³After the festival was over, they returned, but the boy Jesus remained in Jerusalem; and his parents did not know it.

⁴⁴They assumed that he was in their group of travelers, and, after walking the whole day, they looked for him among their relatives and friends. ⁴⁵As they did not find him, they went

back to Jerusalem, searching for him; ⁴⁶and, on the third day, they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking questions. ⁴⁷And all the people were amazed at his understanding and his answers.

⁴⁸His parents were very surprised when they saw him; and his mother said to him, "Son, why have you done this to us? Your father and I were very worried while searching for you." ⁴⁹Then he said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" ⁵⁰But they did not understand this answer.

⁵¹Jesus went down with them, returning to Nazareth, and he continued to be obedient to them. As for his mother, she kept all these things in her heart.

• ⁵²And Jesus increased in wisdom and age, and in divine and human favor.

1:80;
2:52;
11:31;
21:15

4:22;
Jn 7:15

12:1...;
Dt 16:16

2:19;
1S 2:26

NAZARETH—ACHIEVING FREEDOM

• 41. During his Nazareth years Jesus discovers life as any child or youth of his age. He does not receive special education. Nor does he manifest extraordinary talents, other than perfect judgment to assess and evaluate everything according to God's criteria.

Joseph passes on to him the faith of Israel; the Nazareth community, however insignificant, makes him a practicing Jew, subject to the law. What was the deep experience of Jesus, how did the Son of God place himself in this world of humans, step by step, as he discovered it? Luke has given us but one instance that to him was significant as it had been for Mary herself.

At twelve an adolescent was to observe religious prescriptions, among them the pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the feasts. Seated in the shade of the temple galleries, the *teachers of the law* used to teach groups of pilgrims and to dialogue with them.

It is on this occasion for the first time that Jesus disconcerts his entourage. *Why have you done this?* (v. 48). The Gospel highlights this misunderstanding: Mary reproaches Jesus and Jesus reproaches his parents. It then emphasizes the awareness Jesus has of his privileged relationship with the Father and his total availability for his mission. If, the discovery of the temple,

heart of the nation, center of Israel's religion, stirred new feelings in him, he could have asked permission or forewarned his parents. How could he remain two days without thinking his parents would be anxiously searching for him? He must have thought this suffering was necessary and conquered his liberty in a radical way before returning home with them. Jesus had to experience all of human life, sin excepted; in his own way he passed through the stages of psychological development. Instead of speaking of the lost child it would be more exact to say that the youthful Jesus found himself.

It might seem strange that Mary did not think to tell Jesus one day of his origin and who Joseph was for him. If we hold to this account, it is Jesus who takes the lead over Mary and Joseph and tells them himself whose Son he is: *I must be in my Father's house.*

They did not understand this answer (v. 50). Mary had heard the message of the annunciation and knew that Jesus was the Son of God. She undoubtedly never thought that being Son of God would be what Jesus had just done. In the same way God oftentimes disconcerts us even if we know very well what he wants.

• 52. Luke does not mention anything more about the life of Jesus in Nazareth until

John the Baptist prepares the way

(Mk 1:1; Mt 3:1; Jn 1:19)

Mt 3:
1-12;
Mk 1:1-8;
Jn 1:19;
Lk 23:12;
Mk 6:17

3 • ¹It was the fifteenth year of the rule of the Emperor Tiberius: Pontius Pilatus was governor of Judea; Herod ruled over Galilee, his brother Philip ruled over the country of Iturea and Trachonitis; and Lysanias ruled over Abilene. ²Annas and Caiaphas were the High Priests at the time when the word of God came to John, the son of Zechariah, in the desert.

Acts 4:6;
Jer 1:2;
Hos 1:1

• ³John proclaimed a baptism, for repentant people to obtain forgiveness of sins; and he went through the whole country bordering the Jordan

River. ⁴It was just as is written in the book of the prophet Isaiah: *Listen to this voice crying out in the desert, 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his path straight!'* ⁵The valleys will be filled and the mountains and hills made low. *Everything crooked will be made straight and the rough paths smooth;* ⁶and every human being will see the salvation of God!^{Is 40:3-5}

Is 40:3-5
Is 11:18-14;
Is 2:2;
Ps 68:16

⁷John said to the crowds who came out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! How will you escape when divine punishment comes?" ⁸Produce now, the fruits of a true change of heart; and do not deceive yourselves

Mt 3:7-11;
Is 30:27;
1Thes 1:10

Jn 8:33

he reaches the age of thirty, when he begins to preach. He was Joseph's apprentice, and after Joseph's death became the carpenter of Nazareth. Joseph must have died before Jesus revealed himself, otherwise, when Jesus left home, Mary would have remained with Joseph (see Mk 3:31). Mary's Son was a man among people and later the Christian community of Nazareth would treasure things made by the carpenter Son of God.

Too often we read the Gospel as a "life of Jesus" and are astonished to find great blanks such as the thirty years of Nazareth. We forget that the written Gospel intended first of all to build a catechesis with the actions and words of Jesus, and not reconstitute his whole life.

• **3.1** Luke provides us with facts that enable us to situate Jesus in history. It is the year 27 after Christ and actually Jesus is about thirty to thirty-five years old. The Jews have lost their autonomy, and their country is divided into four small provinces. *Herod and Philip*, sons of the Herod mentioned at the birth of Jesus (see Mt 2:1) rule over two of these provinces.

Those interested in the chronological commentaries can also read John 2:20.

In the first two chapters Luke has shown us how the Son of God inserted himself into humanity. As Paul says in his letter to the Galatians, he was "born of a woman, subject to the law" (Gal 4:7) which means that he had to be formed by a culture, marked by his era, limited by the human context of his time. We are now going to see that he did not begin his mission in a grandiose way with prodigious miracles but very simply entered a movement initiated by another one, John the Baptist.

The first paragraph shows how the Holy Land was divided, a challenge to the promises of God. In the case of several high priests there was con-

tempt for the law of God, for the high priests should succeed each other, father to son, and remained in office all their lives. In this degrading situation a new element would rock the people: the preaching of John the Baptist.

• **3.** *Listen to this voice crying out in the desert* (v. 4). The text which follows is from Isaiah (40:3) John renews the tradition of the prophets after four centuries of interruption and like many among them, he speaks of an imminent judgment. To confront the judgment of God is always most fearful and John speaks of rebuilding a sense of justice. John speaks of the *punishment to come*. In verse 7 the text says more precisely "escape from the coming wrath". These Hebrew words refer to a condemnation already pronounced by God that will soon bring a terrible trial on a national or worldwide scale (Lk 21:23; 1 Thes 2:16) that believers recognize as a judgment of God. It is then that the wicked receive their punishment, while the just who count on God are saved (Is 1:24-27; Joel 3:1-5; Zec 14).

John awakens the expectation of a savior. It is easy for us to say that the savior was Jesus and that God's judgment would come a few years later with the war that destroyed the Jewish nation, but for those who were hearing John it was difficult to imagine what this savior might be.

We have Abraham for our ancestor! (v. 8). Just like the prophets, John warns us against fanaticism whether it be national or religious. It is not enough to walk under the flag of the God of Israel (or the Church) since many of those who pretend to defend this cause are no more than a *race of vipers*. God demands justice and reparation for the evil that has been committed.

So we see John preaching without having asked anything of the religious authorities.

by saying, 'We have Abraham for our ancestor!' For I tell you, God can make children of Abraham from these stones. ⁹The ax is already laid to the root of the tree; and every tree that fails to produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire."

¹⁰The people asked him, "What are we to do?" ¹¹And John answered, "If you have two coats, give one to the person who has none; and if you have food, do the same."

¹²Even tax collectors came to be baptized, and asked him, "Master, what must we do?" ¹³John said to them, "Collect no more than your fixed rate." ¹⁴Then some soldiers asked John, "What about us? What are we to do?" And he answered, "Don't take anything by force, or threaten the people by denouncing them falsely. Be content with your pay."

• ¹⁵The people were wondering about John's identity, "Could he be the Messiah?" ¹⁶Then John answered them, "I baptize you with water, but the one who is coming will do much more: he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. As for me, I am not worthy to untie his sandal. ¹⁷He comes with a winnowing fan, to clear his threshing floor, and gather the grain into his barn. But the chaff he will burn, with fire that never goes out."

¹⁸With these, and many other words, John announced the Good News to the people, ¹⁹until Herod put him in prison. For John had reproached Herod, for living with Herodias, his brother's wife, and for his evil deeds. ²⁰Then Herod added another crime to all the rest he had committed: he put John in prison.

Mt 7:19

Acts 2:37

Ezk 16; Is 58:7; Acts 4:32

Jn 1: 19-20

11:22; Jn 13:5; Acts 1:5

Mal 3:19; Jer 15:7; Is 5:24; 66:24

Mk 6:17

People come from all directions searching for pardon. Verses 12-14 tell us that John turned no one away: neither the prostitutes nor the collectors of Roman taxes. He does ask of all a commitment of solidarity. Once corruption has taken over and the vision of God's Alliance has faded away, those who recognize their part in the evil affecting the whole of society must make positive gestures regarding money and the enjoyment of it, which will be for all a sign and a call to conversion. Such signs should increase in Christian communities today and in the groups seeking to purify our society.

It is that which gives meaning to the total renunciation of John and his appalling austerity: in no way are we all asked to imitate him, but his sacrifices give weight to his words. The religious leaders and the Pharisees who see themselves as models keep away even sneering perhaps, (7:30 and 33) but the people come to John asking for baptism.

• 15. Baptism means to be immersed in water and to rise. The Essenes in the desert were baptized on the occasion of certain feasts to show their desire to reach a purer life when the Savior would come. John, in turn, baptizes those who wishing to straighten out their life, marking their commitment by a visible ritual.

Here the Gospel compares John with Jesus and John's baptism with Christian baptism. All of us have heard words like: since Jesus was not

baptized until he was thirty years old, one should be baptized as an adult. This is a useless argument since we are not dealing with the same baptism and the demands are different.

Baptism in water... baptism in fire (v. 16): this refers to common experiences. We wash stains off clothes in water, but what has been washed does not then resemble that which is new. Besides there are stains which remain. On the other hand, fire purifies rusted metal so that shining metal comes from the crucible as good as new. Moreover, fire can consume stains together with whatever is stained.

John baptizes with water those who want to straighten out their life. For them, baptism is a way of expressing publicly their decision and promise. Such resolutions are fallible as are any human commitments and insufficient to eradicate the root of evil from our heart.

Jesus, on the other hand, requests that his apostles baptize those who enter the church. It is then when God gives his Spirit that transforms people interiorly.

John did not baptize children (or women). As Christian baptism draws its power, not so much from the commitment of the recipient, as from the gift of God making us his children, we can baptize children as did Christians from the early times. They may receive the gift of God, provided that their family and the Christian community accept the responsibility for their growth in faith.

Jesus is baptized by John*(Mt 3:13; Mk 1:9; Jn 1:29)*

• ²¹ Now, with all the people who came to be baptized, Jesus, too, was baptized. Then, while he was praying, the heavens opened: ²² the Holy Spirit came down upon him in the bodily form of a dove, and a voice from heaven was heard, “You are my Son, in whom I am well pleased.”

• ²³ When Jesus made his appearance, he had reached the age of thirty years. He was known as the Son of

Joseph, whose father and forefathers were:

Heli, ²⁴ Matthat, Levi, Melchi, Jannai, Joseph, ²⁵ Matthatias, Amos, Nahum, Esli, Naggai, ²⁶ Maath, Mattathias, Semain, Josech, Joda, ²⁷ Joanan, Rhesa, ^{3:17} Zerubbabel, Shealtiel, Neri, ²⁸ Melchi, Addi, Cosam, Elmadam, Er, ²⁹ Joshua, Eliezer, Jorim, Matthat, Levi, ³⁰ Simeon, Judah, Joseph, Jonam, Eliakim, ³¹ Melea, Menna, Mattatha, Nathan, David, ³² Jesse, Obed, Boaz, Salmon, Nahson, ³³ Amminadab, Adnim, Arni, Hezron, Perez, Judah, ³⁴ Jacob, Isaac, ^{1:34}

• ²¹. Jesus neither needs conversion, nor John’s baptism. Being the Savior, he wishes to join sinners seeking the way to forgiveness. By receiving John’s baptism, Jesus affirms this as the right way: to seek justice and reform one’s life.

There had been no prophets for centuries. God seemed silent and the Jews often said that “the heavens were closed.” Now, God speaks again and Jesus stands in place of the prophets. *The heavens opened* means that Jesus received a divine revelation (see Ezk 1:1 and Rev 4:1).

You are my Son (v. 22). Who saw and who heard that voice is not clear from the Gospel (Mt 3:16; Mk 1:10; Jn 1:32). Studying the texts brings us to the following conclusion: Jesus was favored with a revelation from God which John the Baptist may have shared. Why such a manifestation? Did Jesus need to know that he was the Son of God?

Let us not forget that the phrase *Son of God* can be understood in various ways. In the period before Jesus, the King of Israel was called *Son of God*. *Son of God* was also used to designate the expected Messiah, chosen by God to save Israel.

Jesus was Son of God in the sense of Only Son of God, begotten of God from the time of his conception. From that moment on, he was conscious of being the Son of God.

On the other hand, it was only at the time of his baptism by John that Jesus received the call from God inviting him to begin his ministry of salvation, and that God made him his Son (in the old biblical sense), that is, prophet and king of his people. God is calling him to begin his ministry. That is why in 3:22 we read a word of Psalm 2: “You are my son, this day I have begotten you,” a word of God presenting his Messiah to the world. (A good number of ancient texts give to verse 22 the same text as Mk 1:11).

Since the word of God (if it is really from God) is always effective and accomplishes what it says, Jesus receives at the same time the fullness of the Spirit, who consecrates prophets and works

miracles. From the moment of his conception Jesus enjoyed the fullness of the Spirit bonding him in a unique relationship with his Father. Now he receives the Spirit enabling him to be *the prophet and the servant of the Father*.

Thus, Jesus is *anointed* to proclaim the reign of God and to call the poor first (4:18). Different from so many liberators who, according to Scripture, received the Spirit with a view to a specific mission, Jesus is fully savior. Different from us, who are always so concerned to leave a way out of our commitments, Jesus will not rest until his word and witness to the truth lead him to his death.

In many pages of the Gospel we see Jesus dealing with individuals. In other and more important circumstances Jesus is depicted as the savior of the whole human race as in this baptism. Scripture tells us of a God who creates, nurtures, instructs and brings to maturity the only one “Adam,” i.e.: the human race as a whole—Jesus is not the savior of “people,” i.e., of many individuals, in order to give them free entrance to heaven—*Jesus takes by the hand the human race* (Heb 2:16) and makes it one holy body in which God the Father will recognize his only Son.

• ²³. Luke then presents a list of Jesus’ ancestors, which is quite different from Matthew’s (Mt 1:1). Luke not only goes back to Abraham, he also supplies the legendary list of Abraham’s ancestors all the way back to the first human, as if to emphasize that Jesus has come to save all of humanity. He is not only the Savior of Christians: his coming is relevant for the whole of history and helps us to appreciate the contribution of all the saints and wise people God has raised throughout the world. On the other hand, from Abraham to Jesus the list is very different from Matthew’s. The list of ancestors varied depending on whether one counted natural parents or adoptive parents, since adoption was a frequent occurrence among the Jews.

Mt 3:
13-17;
Mk 1:
9-11;
Jn 1:
29-34

Ps 27:
Is 42:1

Mt 1:
1-17

Abraham, Terah, Nahor, ³⁵Serug, Reu, Peleg, Eber, Shelah, ³⁶Cainan, Arphaxad, Shem, Noah, Lamech, ³⁷Methuselah, Enoch, Jared, Malaleel, Cainan, ³⁸Enos, Seth, and Adam—who was from God.

Jesus tempted in the wilderness

(Mt 4:1; Mk 1:12)

4 • ¹Jesus was now full of the Holy Spirit. As he returned from the Jordan, the Spirit led him into the desert, ²where he was tempted by the devil for forty days. He did not eat anything during that time, and at the end he was hungry. ³The devil then said to him, “If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to turn into bread.”

⁴But Jesus answered, “Scripture says: *People cannot live on bread alone.*”

⁵Then the devil took him up to a high place, and showed him, in a flash, all the nations of the world.

⁶And he said to Jesus, “I can give you power over all the nations; and their wealth will be yours; for power and wealth have been delivered to me; and I give them to whom I wish. ⁷All this will be yours, provided you worship me.” ⁸But Jesus replied, “Scripture says: *You shall worship the Lord your God and serve him alone.*”

⁹Then the devil took him up to Jerusalem, and set him on the highest wall of the temple; and he said, “If you are God’s Son, throw yourself down from here; ¹⁰for it is written: *God will order his angels to take care of you;* ¹¹and again: *They will hold you in their hands, lest you hurt your foot on the stones.*” ¹²But Jesus replied, “It is written: *You shall not challenge the Lord your God.*”

¹³When the devil had exhausted every way of tempting Jesus, he left him, to return another time.

THE TEMPTATION

• **4.1** In secular history, people only participate and cope with other people. Sacred history views things from another perspective: God’s plan unfolds hindered by the disturbing devices of the evil spirit, and people are called to take part in this struggle that exceeds their own plans. This is why Jesus had to face the evil one.

We speak of temptation when we feel the pressure of bad instincts or when we feel dragged into doing evil by circumstances. Jesus did not possess our bad instincts but the Holy Spirit led him to be tested into the desert—remember that to tempt and to test have the same meaning—and there he felt the strongest persuasion from the evil one who tried to dissuade him from his mission (see also Mt 4:1).

Jesus, *filled with the Holy Spirit*, began his ministry by undergoing a very hard test: *forty days* of total solitude and fasting. In this situation, Jesus experienced his frailty as he faced a leap into the unknown: he was about to let go of life in Nazareth in surrender to the Father’s will, and begin a mission which would lead him to death within a few years.

The devil, or the accuser, spoke to him; thus is he named in Scripture because he always criticizes. He leads us to accuse God, and when he has made us fall, he then accuses us and tries to convince us that our fall will not be forgiven by God.

If you are the Son of God (v. 3). Jesus knew

who he was, but he had not yet tested his power. Could he not, for a moment, release divine energy when his body was weak from hunger? Could he not, someday, get down from the cross to save himself?

Jesus refuses to be self-serving. He has higher goals: and so the Devil *takes him higher*. Knowing people as they are, Jesus knows that to impose oneself on others one needs to use the weapons of the devil, who respects neither the truth, nor freedom of conscience. It would then be easy to reign over the nations “in the name of God,” since the devil *gives them to whom he wishes* (v. 6).

Jesus has chosen to *serve only God*. The devil asks, “Why, then, do you not begin your preaching with something spectacular, like dropping from a high place into the midst of the crowd at prayer in the temple?—Do you not believe that God will perform a miracle for you?”—This time the devil uses the very words of Scripture: in reading them, one might think that with much faith, one would always be healthy and successful. Jesus warns against the error of a “faith” which tries to remove the cross. Jesus will not demand miracles from his Father to avoid suffering the humiliation and rejection that are the lot of God’s messengers: this would be to challenge God under the pretense of trusting him.

The devil left him, to return another time (v. 13). In the Passion of Jesus, the devil will turn the people’s wickedness against the Liberator

Jesus proclaims his mission at Nazareth

(Mt 13:53)

Mt 4:12-17, 23; Mk 1:14-15, 39; Mt 3:16
4:44
• ¹⁴ Jesus acted with the power of the Spirit; and on his return to Galilee, the news about him spread throughout all that territory. ¹⁵ He began teaching in the synagogues of the Jews and everyone praised him.

Mt 13:53-58; Mk 6:1-6; Acts 13:15
• ¹⁶ When Jesus came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, as he usually did. ¹⁷ He stood up to read, and they handed him the book of the prophet Isaiah.

Jesus then unrolled the scroll and found the place where it is written: ¹⁸ *"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me. He has anointed me, to bring good news to the poor; to proclaim liber-*

ty to captives; and new sight to the blind; to free the oppressed; ¹⁹ and to announce the Lord's year of mercy."

Is 58:6;
Lev 25:10

²⁰ Jesus then rolled up the scroll, gave it to the attendant and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. ²¹ Then he said to them, "Today, these prophetic words come true, even as you listen."

²² All agreed with him, and were lost in wonder, while he spoke of the grace of God. Nevertheless they asked, "Who is this but Joseph's Son?" ²³ So he said, "Doubtless you will quote me the saying: Doctor, heal yourself! Do here, in your town, what they say you did in Capernaum."

Acts 14:3; 20:32; Mt 13:55

Mk 15:31

²⁴ Jesus added, "No prophet is honored in his own country. ²⁵ Truly, I say to you, there were many widows in

Jn 4:44

1K 17:1;
Jas 5:17

whom he could not lead astray. See John 12:31 and 14:30.

• 14. Jesus returns home in the company of some of John's followers who become his own disciples (Jn 1:35) and he performs his first sign in Cana (Jn 2:1). This miracle launches his ministry. From Capernaum, where Jesus lives in the house of Simon and Andrew, near the lake, Jesus begins to preach in the synagogues of Galilee (Mk 1:35) and his words impress people because he works *with the power of the Spirit*, namely, he speaks with authority and his miracles confirm his words.

He began teaching in the synagogues (v. 15). Jesus does not begin by preaching to the crowds who know nothing of him; instead, for months he makes himself known in the synagogues.

• 16. In Israel there was only one temple, that of Jerusalem, where priests used to offer sacrifices. In every place where at least ten men could meet, there was a synagogue where every Sabbath a liturgical service led by community members was celebrated. It was easy to take part in the readings and commentaries on them, so Jesus made himself known by participating in the Sabbath services in the synagogues of his area, Galilee.

After some time Jesus, already famous, passed through Nazareth where he was not welcome. In this account Luke shows why Jesus attracted the people and why, particularly in Nazareth, he was rejected.

He found the place where it is written (v. 17): this paragraph is from Isaiah 61:1-2. The

prophet is referring to his own mission: God sent him to the Jews in exile to announce that soon God would visit them. Yet his words prove even more appropriate in the case of Jesus who was sent in order to bring real freedom to a people waiting for it.

The phrase *to free the oppressed* (v. 18) is not found in Isaiah's text, but Luke takes it from another text of the same prophet (Is 58:6) and inserts it here because this expression 'to set free' summarizes better than any other word the very work of Jesus in his mission.

Today these prophetic words come true even as you listen (v. 21). Jesus has come to inaugurate a new age in which God becomes present and reconciles people. Every fifty years Israel celebrated a jubilee year during which debts were forgiven and slaves recovered their freedom (Lev 25:10). In the same way a *year of mercy from the Lord* is beginning. Thus the time of promises and prophecies is over. God begins to show himself to humankind as he is: Jesus reveals the Father and the Father reveals his Son through the signs and miracles that he performs.

He has anointed me to free the oppressed (v. 18). Jesus brings real liberation to everyone since his deeds urge each one of us to live in truth: "the Son makes you free... the truth will make you free..." (Jn 8:32). The Jews, obviously, were looking first and foremost for political freedom, which is part of total human liberation. Why did Jesus not bring it? Was he only interested in "souls"?

Actually the Old Testament never promised "the salvation of souls" which is sometimes

Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heavens withheld rain for three years and six months and a great famine came over the whole land. ²⁶Yet, Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow of Zarephath, in the country of Sidon. ²⁷There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha, the prophet; and no one was healed except Naaman, the Syrian.”

²⁸On hearing these words, the whole assembly became indignant. ²⁹They rose up and brought him out of the town, ³⁰to the edge of the hill on which Nazareth is built, intending to throw him down the cliff. But he passed through their midst and went his way.

With the power of the spirit

(Mk 1:23; Mt 4:24; 8:14)

• ³¹Jesus went down to Capernaum, a town of Galilee, and began teaching the people at the Sabbath meetings. ³²They were astonished at the way he taught them, for his word was spoken with authority.

³³In the synagogue, there was a man possessed by an evil spirit, who shouted in a loud voice, ³⁴“What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I rec-

ognize you: you are the Holy One of God.” ³⁵Then Jesus said to him sharply, “Be silent and leave this man!” The evil spirit then threw the man down in front of them, and came out of him without doing him harm.

³⁶Amazement seized all these people, and they said to one another, “What does this mean? He commands the evil spirits with authority and power. He orders, and you see how they come out!” ³⁷And news about Jesus spread throughout the surrounding area.

³⁸Leaving the synagogue, Jesus went to the house of Simon. His mother-in-law was suffering from high fever, and they asked him to do something for her. ³⁹Bending over her, he rebuked the fever, and it left her. Immediately, she got up and waited on them.

⁴⁰At sunset, people suffering from many kinds of sickness were brought to Jesus. Laying his hands on each one, he healed them. ⁴¹Demons were driven out, howling as they departed from their victims, “You are the Son of God!” He rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, for they knew he was the Messiah.

• ⁴²Jesus left at daybreak and looked for a solitary place. People went out in

emphasized these days in various groups. Such believers think they are saving their souls and yet remain silent, or blind accomplices of the daily sins permeating all economic and social life.

The Old Testament foretold that Jesus would be the Savior of his people and of his race. His words and deeds were stirring people who had become helpless and were opening the way for human liberation at all levels, but they were like seeds and could not produce immediate fruits. Jesus had no desire to join the fanatics and violent among his people in order to obtain national sovereignty as oppressive as Roman domination. He was witnessing to the truth and laying the foundations for all future liberation movements.

In the same way today, if there is true evangelization, liberating deeds are seen and free persons appear, able to liberate others.

He has anointed me to bring good news to the poor (v. 18). See commentary on Luke 6:20.

Then Luke explains why the people of Nazareth rejected Jesus:

– First, because of their pride: a stranger easily dazzles us, but we fiercely deny that one of us could stand out or be our teacher: *who is this but Joseph’s Son?* See commentary on Mark 6:1.

– Secondly, because of their selfishness: they do not agree that God’s benefits should be shared with others. So Jesus reminds them that the prophets of old did not limit their favors to their compatriots alone (see 1 K 17:7 and 2 K 5).

• 31. See commentary on Mark 1:21.

• 42. Jesus is a model missionary. He no sooner gathers a few believers together than they want to keep him for themselves, either because they see in him a true prophet, or want to form a true community under his guidance.

Jesus, however, leaves the task of shepherding (in the sense of guiding a specific community)

1K 17:9

2K 5:14

13:33;
Jn 8:59Mk 1:
21-28;
Mt 4:24;
8:14Mt 7:
28-291:35;
Jn 6:69Mt 8:
14-15;
Mk 1:
29-31Acts
10:38;
19:12Mk 1:34;
3:11;
Mt 12:16Mk 1:
35-39

search of him, and finding him, they tried to dissuade him from leaving. ⁴³But he said, "I have to go to other towns, to announce the good news of the kingdom of God. That is what I was sent to do." ⁴⁴And Jesus continued to preach in the synagogues of Galilee.

You will catch people

(Mt 4:18; Mk 1:16)

5 ¹One day, as Jesus stood by the Lake of Gennesaret, with a crowd gathered around him listening to the word of God, ²he caught sight of two boats, left at the water's edge by fishermen, now washing their nets. ³He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to pull out a little from the shore. There he sat, and continued to teach the crowd.

⁴When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water and lower your nets for a catch." ⁵Simon replied, "Master, we worked hard all night and caught nothing. But if you say so, I will lower the nets." ⁶This they did, and caught such a

large number of fish that their nets began to break. ⁷They signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them. They came, and they filled both boats almost to the point of sinking.

⁸Upon seeing this, Simon Peter fell at Jesus' knees, saying, "Leave me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" ⁹For he and his companions were amazed at the catch they had made, ¹⁰and so were Simon's partners, James and John, Zebedee's sons.

Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid. You will catch people from now on." ¹¹So they brought their boats to land and followed him, leaving everything.

Cure of a leper

(Mk 1:40; Mt 8:2)

¹²One day, in another town, a man came to Jesus covered with leprosy. On seeing Jesus, the man bowed down to the ground, and said, "Lord, if you want to, you can make me clean."

¹³Stretching out his hand, Jesus touched the man and said, "Yes, I want to. Be clean." In an instant, the leprosy

to others, because he has many more people in mind still awaiting the Gospel.

• 5.1 THE APOSTLES

Jesus invites himself aboard Peter's boat, and Peter is willing to render him this service. Jesus looks for more: even though many are ready to assist him, he seeks those who are willing to totally surrender to his work. The listeners are many, but he needs apostles.

Miracles are another way in which Jesus teaches. The miracle reported here is God's word for future apostles. *Lower your nets; the nets were at the breaking point; you will catch people...*

Leave me, Lord, for I am a sinful man (v. 8). Such is the fear of the one who discovers that God has entered into his inner life: this is a first act of faith in the divinity of Jesus. Yet Jesus calls on sinners to save sinners.

Leaving everything (v. 11), they followed him. It is not that they had much, but it was their whole life: work, family and their whole past as fishermen.

Apostle means *sent*. Christ is the one who chooses his apostles and sends them in his name. Where will he find someone to send except among those who are willing to cooperate with him? One begins to be an apostle, or at least to cooperate with Christ, when one looks for something more than performing good works for the benefit of the parish, when one feels responsible for people: *fisher of people*.

Here Luke may have combined two different events: the call of the disciples briefly presented in Mark 1:16 and the miraculous catch. John also relates a miraculous catch (Jn 21) but he places it after the resurrection. We have good reason to think we are dealing with the same miracle, but it suited John to combine it with the appearance of the risen Jesus to the apostles, which occurred later in the same place.

- 12. See commentary on Mark 1:40.

Make an offering for your healing (v. 14). The same law that demanded that a leper be isolated (Lev 13:45), provided that if the leper was healed, he could, after examination by the priests

Is 52:7;
Ps 96:10;
Lk 8:1

Mt 4:23;
9:35

Mt 4:18;
Mk 1:16;
4:1

Jn 21:1-6

Mk 4:41;
Mt 13:47

14:33;
18:22

Mt 8:1-4;
Mk 1:
40-45

left him. ¹⁴ Then Jesus instructed him, “Tell this to no one. But go, and show yourself to the priest. Make an offering for your healing, as Moses prescribed; that will serve as evidence for them.”

• ¹⁵ But the news about Jesus spread all the more; and large crowds came to him, to listen and to be healed of their sickness. ¹⁶ As for Jesus, he would often withdraw to solitary places and pray.

The paralytic saved

(Mk 2:1; Mt 9:1)

• ¹⁷ One day, Jesus was teaching, and many Pharisees and teachers of the law had come from every part of Galilee and Judea, and even from Jerusalem. They were sitting there, while the power of the Lord was at work to heal the sick. ¹⁸ Then some men brought a paralyzed man who lay on his mat. They tried to enter the house to place him before Jesus, ¹⁹ but they couldn't find a way through the crowd. So they went up on the roof, and, removing the tiles, they lowered him on his mat into the middle of the crowd, in front of Jesus.

²⁰ When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the man, “My friend, your sins are forgiven.” ²¹ At once the teachers

of the law and the Pharisees began to wonder, “This man insults God! Who can forgive sins, but God alone?”

²² But Jesus knew their thoughts and asked them, “Why are you reacting like this? ²³ Which is easier to say: ‘Your sins are forgiven’ or ‘Get up and walk’? ²⁴ Now you shall know, that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.” And Jesus said to the paralyzed man, “Get up, take your mat and go home.” ²⁵ At once, the man stood before them. He took up the mat he had been lying on, and went home praising God.

²⁶ Amazement seized the people and they praised God. They were filled with a holy fear, and said, “What wonderful things we have seen today!”

Call of Levi

(Mk 2:13; Mt 9:9)

• ²⁷ After this, Jesus went out, and noticing a tax collector named Levi, sitting in the tax-office, he said to him, “Follow me!” ²⁸ So Levi, leaving everything, got up and followed Jesus.

²⁹ Levi gave a great feast for Jesus, and many tax collectors came to his house, and took their places at the table with the other people. ³⁰ Then the Pharisees and their followers complained to Jesus' disciples, “How is it,

be reintegrated into the community. Because leprosy was seen as God's punishment, healing meant that God had forgiven the sinner who was to express his gratitude with a sacrifice.

• 15. *He would often withdraw to solitary places and pray.* Luke mentions Jesus' prayer several times (3:21; 6:12; 9:28...) Jesus did not withdraw only to be still, but because, on each occasion, prayer was a necessity for him.

• 17. See commentary on Mark 2:1.

There were *many Pharisees and teachers of the law*. The Pharisees and the teachers of the law were not against Jesus yet, but being men who had received much religious formation, they were the first to wonder about Jesus' religious claims: was he only a faithful believer respectful of God's law or was he promoting a new sect?

Jesus took advantage of their presence to show that he was not simply a disciple of Moses and the prophets, but the master of them all.

We easily understand why the teachers of the law were scandalized. How could this man without studies or title, stand up to them as if he were a teacher? They were looking for the coming of a God who would confirm their teaching and acknowledge their merits. Jesus, however, was in the midst of common folk and did not pay attention to the authority of the masters of the law who looked down on them. Since the teachers of the law could not believe, their only recourse was to oppose Jesus.

• 27. See commentary on Mark 2:13.

The events related in this chapter show how Jesus situates himself in society and with what people he relates: with a small group of fishermen

Lev 14:
2:32

6:12;
9:18;
10:21;
11:1

Mt 9:1-8;
Mk 2:
1-12;
Lk 6:19;
8:46;
Acts
10:38

7:16;
13:13

Mt 9:
9-12;
Mk 2:
13-17

15:1

4:23 that you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?”³¹ But Jesus spoke up, “Healthy people don’t need a doctor, but sick people do.”³² I have not come to call the just, but sinners, to a change of heart.”

Mt 9: 14-17; Mk 2: 18-22; Lk 11:1
 Mt 9: 14-17; Mk 2: 18-22; Lk 11:1
 Is 54:4; 61:10; Jn 3:29; Rev 18:23
 Zac 12:11; Jn 16:20
³³ Some people asked him, “The disciples of John fast often and say long prayers, and so do the disciples of the Pharisees. Why is it, that your disciples eat and drink?” Then Jesus said to them, ³⁴ “You can’t make wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them. ³⁵ But later, the bridegroom will be taken from them; and they will fast in those days.”

³⁶ Jesus also told them this parable: “No one tears a piece from a new coat to put it on an old one; otherwise the new coat will be torn, and the piece taken from the new coat will not match the old coat. ³⁷ No one puts new wine into old wine skins; otherwise the new wine will burst the skins and be spilled, and the skins will be

destroyed as well. ³⁸ But new wine must be put into fresh skins. ³⁹ Yet, no one who has tasted old wine is eager to drink new wine, but says, ‘The old is good.’”

Jesus, Lord of the Sabbath
 (Mk 2:23; Mt 12:1; Mk 3:1)

6 • ¹ One Sabbath Jesus was going through a field of grain, and his disciples began to pick heads of grain, crushing them in their hands for food. ² Some of the Pharisees asked them, “Why do you do what is forbidden on the Sabbath?” ³ Then Jesus spoke up and asked them, “Have you never read what David did when he and his men were hungry? ⁴ He entered the house of God, took and ate the bread of the offering, and even gave some to his men, though only priests are allowed to eat that bread.” ⁵ And Jesus added, “The Son of Man is Lord and rules over the Sabbath.”

⁶ On another Sabbath, Jesus entered

who will be in charge of his new movement, with lepers and sick people who seek him. He calls people who, like Levi, belong to a despised group.

• **6.1** Here we have two conflicts between Jesus and the religious people of his time concerning the Sabbath.

See commentary on Mark 3:1.

Let us not forget that the word *Sabbath* means *rest*. God requested that one day be made holy each week, not primarily for religious assemblies, but to allow everyone to rest (Ex 20:10). God is glorified when people are not enslaved in order to gain their daily sustenance because of their work.

In the first episode, Jesus does not argue with the Pharisees who consider work the mere act of plucking a few ears of corn and shelling them. First he recalls that great believers, like David, at times overlooked the law. He then adds: *The Son of Man rules over the Sabbath* (v. 5). Among the Jews, however, no one, not even the High Priest, could dispense from the Sabbath observance. So Jesus leaves them perplexed and wondering: Who does he pretend to be?

In the second case, Jesus could have said to the man: “Why do you ask me to do something forbidden on the Sabbath? Come back tomorrow

to be healed.” Jesus does not avoid the confrontation because Gospel means liberation and we become free when we admit that there is nothing sacred in a society that attempts to impose its own standards. The law of rest (Sabbath) is one of the fundamental laws of the Scriptures but that does not prevent the possibility of this law causing oppression and for that reason it must at times be dispensed with.

It is the same for the most sacred laws of the Church: at a given moment they might be an obstacle to the Gospel and, if that be the case, Christian conscience, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, must find a solution for the time being. As long as people are subject to an order, to laws and authorities which are considered sacred and which no one thinks of criticizing, those people are neither free nor true sons and daughters of God. (See 1 Cor 3:21-23; 8:4-5; Col 2:20-23.)

A respect for God that would destroy our critical sense would not be in keeping with the Gospel; a religion preventing us from seeking the truth and from questioning every area of human restlessness would not be the true one. To study the Scriptures without daring to know and take into account the contributions of modern science for fear that our very naive vision of sacred history would fall apart, would be to sin against the Spirit.

Jn 3:19; 2:10
 Mt 12: 1-6; Mk 2: 23-28
 5:30
 1S 21: 2-7; Lev 24:5-9
 Mt 12: 9-14; Mk 3: 1-6;

Lk 13:
10-17;
14:1-6

the synagogue and began teaching. There was a man with a paralyzed right hand, ⁷and the teachers of the law and the Pharisees watched him: Would Jesus heal the man on the Sabbath? If he did, they could accuse him.

1Mac
2:41

⁸But Jesus knew their thoughts, and said to the man, "Get up, and stand in the middle." ⁹Then he spoke to them, "I want to ask you: what is allowed by the law on the Sabbath? To do good or to do harm, to save life or to destroy it?" ¹⁰And Jesus looked around at them all.

Then he said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was restored, becoming as healthy as the other. ¹¹But they were furious, and began to discuss with one another how they could deal with Jesus.

The Twelve

(Mk 3:13; Mt 10:1)

• ¹²At this time, Jesus went out into the hills to pray, spending the whole night in prayer with God. ¹³When day came, he called his disciples to him, and chose Twelve of them, whom he called 'apostles': ¹⁴Simon, whom he named Peter, and his brother Andrew; James and John; Philip and Bartholomew; ¹⁵Matthew and Thomas; James son of Alpheus and Simon called the Zealot; ¹⁶Judas son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who would be the traitor.

Mt 10:
1-4;
Mk 3:
13-19;
Mt 5:1;
Mk 6:7Jn 15:16;
17:9Acts
1:13;
Gen
17:5

Jn 13:18

Blessings and woes

(Mt 5-7)

• ¹⁷Coming down the hill with them, Jesus stood in an open plain. Many of his disciples were there, and a large crowd of people, who had come from

Mt 4:
24-25;
Mk 3:
7-12;
3:7;
6:54

• 12. Jesus keeps those whom he loves the most in his prayer. The success of his mission will depend upon them; other people's faith will rest on them. Jesus does not want their call to be his own will: before calling them, he wants to be certain that he is doing the Father's will (Heb 5:8). For the simple reason that Christ chose them and entrusted his Church to them, they will be tested in a thousand ways (Lk 22:31). Therefore Jesus wants to safeguard them through the power of his prayer (Jn 17:9). The day before his death he will have the consolation that *not one of those the Father gave him has been lost* (Jn 17:12).

• 17. See the commentary on the beatitudes in Matthew 5:1. Matthew adapts them for the members of the church of his time. Luke, on the other hand, puts the beatitudes here just as Jesus proclaimed them to the people of Galilee. In the words of Jesus, the beatitudes were a call and a hope addressed to the forgotten of the world, beginning with the poor among his people, heirs of God's promise to the prophets.

The Gospel, as in Mary's Canticle (1:51-53), reverses the present situation. Since then, God shows his mercy especially by his generosity towards the poor and the despised. He also entrusts his Gospel to them and makes them the first to participate in his work in the world. The poor are those whose contribution is most necessary to the building of the kingdom; when the Church forgets this, she does not delay in

returning to what Jesus criticized in God's people of his time.

There are a thousand ways to present Jesus and his work. However, in order for such teaching to deserve the name *evangelization* (or: communication of the Good News) it must be received as Good News first by the poor. If other social groups feel more identified with the teaching, or they are invited first, it means that something is lacking either in content or in the way of proclaiming the message. Most probably it is not given in such a way that it does justice to the disinherited.

In contrast with these beatitudes, Luke presents lamentations recalling those of Isaiah (65:13-14). They are lamentations as used for the dead, not maledictions. For the rich forget God and become impermeable to grace (12, 13, 16, 19). These lamentations are a sign of the love of God for the rich, as are the beatitudes for the poor, for he loves them all, but in a different way. To the first he affirms that he will destroy the structures of injustice, and to the others he gives a warning: richness brings death.

The beatitudes do not speak of the conversion of the rich, nor do they say that the poor are better, but they promise a reversal. The kingdom signifies a new society: God blesses the poor but not poverty.

When people speak well of you (v. 26) (see 1 Cor 4:8). The contrast between groups of people who are persecuted and those who are well

all parts of Judea and Jerusalem, and from the coastal cities of Tyre and Sidon. ¹⁸They gathered to hear him and to be healed of their diseases. And people troubled by unclean spirits were cured. ¹⁹The entire crowd tried to touch him, because of the power that went out from him and healed them all.

Mk 1:39

5:17;
8:46

Mt 5:1,3;
Ps 1:1;
32:1;
33:12;
84:5

²⁰Then, looking at his disciples, Jesus said,

“Fortunate are you who are poor, for the kingdom of God is yours.

Mt 5:6,5;
Is 25:6;
49:10

²¹Fortunate are you, who are hungry now, for you will be filled.

Fortunate are you, who weep now, for you will laugh.

Mt 5:
11-12;
Lk 11:49;
13:34

²²Fortunate are you, when people hate you, when they reject you and insult you and number you among criminals, because of the Son of Man.

²³Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for a great reward is kept for you in heaven. Remember, that is how the

ancestors of the people treated the prophets.

²⁴But alas for you, who have wealth, for you have been comforted now.

10:13;
11:42

²⁵Alas for you, who are full, for you will go hungry.

Is 65:13

Alas for you, who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep.

²⁶Alas for you, when people speak well of you, for that is how the ancestors of the people treated the false prophets.

Love of enemies

(Mt 5:38)

• ²⁷But I say to you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you. ²⁸Bless those who curse you, and pray for those who treat you badly. ²⁹To the one who strikes you on the cheek, turn the other cheek; from the one who takes your coat, do not keep back your shirt. ³⁰Give to the one who asks, and if anyone has

Mt 5:44

Mt 5:
39-40

Mt 5:42;
1Cor 6:7

thought of can exist within the Church itself. Many problems can remain unsolved and even mission itself be blocked because of influential groups and persons who want for nothing and know how to obtain official benedictions. Jesus recalls the example of the prophets.

In Jesus' time the religious authorities of the Jews had a very limited esteem for the writings of the prophets, giving all importance to the Books of the Law centered on the cult of the temple. Jesus would tell his disciples that they are the heirs of the prophets (Mt 13:17; Acts 3:25; Jas 5:10), and will give importance to the unassuming messengers who, within the people of God (and often in contradiction with dominant ideas) proclaim the word of God. A Christian should never be surprised by weakness or any other defect that he meets in the Church; let him be happy to be faithful even when persecuted.

• 27. Here Luke presents only a few of Jesus' sayings which Matthew combines in Chapters 5 to 7 of his Gospel, and which we have explained.

Some people feel cheated when they see that Jesus speaks about changing our life rather than about reforming society. Let us not reproach Jesus for not mentioning social reform at a time when few understood what it was. The reason is elsewhere: Jesus deals with the essential.

The root of evil is within people. It is obvious that evil structures prevent people from living and growing. It is equally obvious that not a single revolution, however many benefits it may bring, can establish a less oppressive society, as long as people themselves are not transformed according to the Gospel. Jesus teaches us the way towards growth and freedom.

All need conversion to Jesus' word. Jesus' obvious predilection for the poor and oppressed does not mean they are better. It means God is compassionate, sharing a deeper mercy where misery is deeper, offering hope and total liberation where hope is dimmest. The oppressed person is not innocent; if he were not paralyzed by fear, divisiveness, and greed for the advantages offered to him by his oppressor, he would attain a moral power capable of renewing the world. Thus, the oppressed will not be freed unless they grow in confidence in God, which will enable them to understand each other and risking a way of reconciliation.

The following sayings of Jesus point out the indispensable changes of heart and approach.

Give to the one who asks (v. 30). Jesus does not give a rule which is automatically applicable in all situations: we know there are times when we should not give because it would encourage bad habits. Jesus wants to challenge our conscience: Why do you refuse to give? Are you afraid you will not be paid back? What if this

taken something from you, do not demand it back.

Mt 7:12
Mt 5:46

• ³¹ Do to others as you would have others do to you. ³² If you love only those who love you, what kind of grace is yours? Even sinners love those who love them. ³³ If you do favors to those who are good to you, what kind of grace is yours? Even sinners do the same. ³⁴ If you lend only when you expect to receive, what kind of grace is yours? For sinners also lend to sinners, expecting to receive something in return.

Mt 5:45;
Lk 14:12;
34:12;
Dt 4:31;
Sir 4:10

• ³⁵ But love your enemies and do good to them, and lend when there is nothing to expect in return. Then will your reward be great, and you will be sons and daughters of the Most High. For he is kind toward the ungrateful and the wicked. ³⁶ Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

34:6-7;
Mt 5:48

Mt 7:1;
10:24;
Rom
14:10

³⁷ Don't be a judge of others and you will not be judged; do not condemn and you will not be condemned; forgive and you will be forgiven; ³⁸ give

and it will be given to you, and you will receive in your sack good measure, pressed down, full and running over. For the measure you give will be the measure you receive back.”

Mt 7:2;
Mk 4:24;
Lk 19:26;
Mt 25:29;
Ru 3:15

³⁹ And Jesus offered this example, “Can a blind person lead another blind person? Surely both will fall into a ditch. ⁴⁰ A disciple is not above the master; but when fully trained, he will be like the master. ⁴¹ So why do you pay attention to the speck in your brother's eye, while you have a log in your eye, and are not conscious of it? ⁴² How can you say to your neighbor, ‘Friend, let me take this speck out of your eye,’ when you can't remove the log in your own? You hypocrite! First remove the log from your own eye, and then you will see clearly enough to remove the speck from your neighbor's eye.

Mt 15:14;
Lk 8:16

Mt 10:
24-25;
Jn 13:16;
15:20

Mt 7:3-5

• ⁴³ No healthy tree bears bad fruit, no poor tree bears good fruit. ⁴⁴ And each tree is known by the fruit it bears: you don't gather figs from thorns, or grapes from brambles. ⁴⁵ Similarly, the

Mt 12:
33-35

Mt 7:
16-18

was the opportunity to trust your Father and to let go of something which is “your treasure” (12:34)? You who wish to be perfect, why do you ignore so many opportunities to give up your own wisdom in order to let God take care of you?

• 31. Here, as in Matthew 5:43, Jesus does not refer mainly to personal resentment and friendships, but to opposition in the social, political or religious order: treating differently the people of one's group or party and those of the opposite side. We love and respect those of our own group and are only moderately concerned about the rights of others: they are probably sinners and even in the best of circumstances of small interest...

Jesus invites us to overcome such differences: what counts is the individual and when my neighbor needs me, I must forget his color or whatever label has been given him.

If you lend only when you expect to receive (v. 34). Once again, we are dealing with a social attitude: people who look for friends among those who can promote their social climbing and who avoid all who might be a burden be-

cause they are people without influence: Luke 14:12.

• 35. See commentary on Matthew 7:1. Perfection for us consists in imitating the Father. He is God by being compassionate; his compassion is his ability to be touched by the poverty and the anguish of his creatures, and to lavish upon them what he can give. The attitude of the person who judges his brothers and sisters is the very opposite of mercy.

Jesus speaks of the way in which God already leads us in the present life. A rationalist culture has often convinced us that God lets the laws of nature and humankind go their own way while he remains a passive spectator, but the kingdom of God is the presence of God himself who even today has liberty to reverse all situations, even if for that purpose he has his own time.

• 43. *No healthy tree...* (v. 43). These sayings were already mentioned in Matthew 7:15. Here, however, Luke gives them a different meaning by referring to a pure conscience. We must purify our mind and our spirit to become the tree that produces good fruits.

good person draws good things from the good stored in his heart, and an evil person draws evil things from the evil stored in his heart. For the mouth speaks from the fullness of the heart.

Mt 7:21

Mt 7:24-27

⁴⁶Why do you call me, 'Lord! Lord!' and do not do what I say? ⁴⁷I will show you what the one is like, who comes to me, and listens to my words, and acts accordingly. ⁴⁸That person is like the builder who dug deep, and laid the foundations of his house on rock. The river overflowed, and the stream dashed against the house, but could not carry it off because the house had been well built.

⁴⁹But the one who listens and does not act, is like a man who built his house on the ground without a foundation. The flood burst against it, and the house fell at once: and what a terrible disaster that was!"

Cure of the centurion's servant

(Mt 8:5; Jn 4:46)

Mt 8:5-10, 13; Jn 4:46-54; Mt 7:28

7 • ¹When Jesus had finished teaching the people, he went to Capernaum.

Acts 10:28

²A Roman military officer lived there, whose servant was very sick and near to death, a man very dear to him. ³So when he heard about Jesus, he sent some elders of the Jews to persuade him to come and save his

servant's life. ⁴The elders came to Jesus and begged him earnestly, saying, ⁵"He deserves this of you, for he loves our people and even built a synagogue for us."

Acts 10:2

⁶Jesus went with them. He was not far from the house, when the Roman officer sent friends to give this message, "Sir, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to welcome you under my roof. ⁷You see, I didn't approach you myself. Just give the order, and my servant will be healed. ⁸For I myself, a junior officer, give orders to my soldiers, and I say to this one, 'Go!' and he goes; and to the other, 'Come!' and he comes; and to my servant, 'Do this!' and he does it."

⁹On hearing these words, Jesus was filled with admiration. He turned and said to the people with him, "I say to you, not even in Israel have I found such great faith." ¹⁰The people, sent by the captain, went back to his house; there they found that the servant was well.

The son of a widow restored to life

• ¹¹A little later, Jesus went to a town called Naim. He was accompanied by his disciples and a great number of people. ¹²As he reached the gate of the town, a dead man was being carried out. He was the only son

8:42; 9:38

• 7.1 THE POWER OF GOD

This captain of a foreign army earned the esteem of the Jews. The amazing thing was not that he should have contributed to the building of the synagogue, but rather that the Jews should have accepted it from him. He must have been a good man. He knew the Jews' prejudices too well to have dared to personally approach this Jesus of whom they spoke. Indeed, up to what point did Jesus share his compatriots' pride? Would he respond to the petition of a Roman official? That was why he sent his Jewish friends to Jesus.

The man is really troubled: will Jesus consent to go to a pagan's house and "become impure"? (Jn 18:28). The captain goes one step further: Jesus does not have to come to his house.

While other sick people seek to be touched by the Master thinking that Jesus possesses some healing power, this man, has instead grasped that Jesus has the very power of God and does not need to go to the sick servant: it would not be any more difficult to give a command from a distance to a life that was slipping away.

• 11. No one has ever attributed power over death to any person. Only Jesus conquers death and he does so very simply.

Jesus only knew this young man through his mother and it is for her that he has restored him to life. To be a widow without children is the height of distress (see Ruth), and it will be the lot of Mary.

The woman represents suffering humanity.

of his mother, and she was a widow; there followed a large crowd of townspeople.

¹³On seeing her, the Lord had pity on her and said, "Don't cry." ¹⁴Then he came up and touched the stretcher, and the men who carried it stopped. Jesus then said, "Young man, I say to you, wake up!" ¹⁵And the dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother. ¹⁶A holy fear came over them all, and they praised God saying, "A great prophet has appeared among us. God has visited his people." ¹⁷This news spread throughout Judea and the surrounding places.

Jesus answers the messengers of John (Mt 11:2)

• ¹⁸John's disciples informed him about all these things. So John called two of his disciples, ¹⁹and sent them to the Lord with this message, "Are you

the one we are expecting, or should we wait for another?" ²⁰These men came to Jesus and said, "John the Baptist sent us to ask you: Are you the one we are to expect, or should we wait for another?"

²¹At that time, Jesus healed many people of their sicknesses and diseases; he freed them from evil spirits and he gave sight to the blind. ²²Then he answered the messengers, "Go back and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind see again, the lame walk, lepers are made clean, the deaf hear, the dead are raised to life, and the poor are given good news. Now, listen: ²³Fortunate are those who meet me, and are not offended by me."

• ²⁴When John's messengers had gone, Jesus began speaking to the people about John. And he said, "What did you want to see, when you went to the desert? A reed blowing in

"You will suffer because of your children": this was said after the first sin. Humanity cannot avoid accompanying the dead after depriving them of their reasons for living. Humanity buries their young with tears, while continuing to kill them.

THOSE WHO DOUBT

• 18. Jesus and John the Baptist. The situation has been reversed. John appeared as a great prophet, while Jesus began preaching in John's wake but without the same impact (3:18-20). Now John is in prison and Jesus is known as a healer. Has John doubts in prison? It is possible even if he had told some of his followers that Jesus would take his place. It might be more accurate to interpret his question as a pressing invitation: "If you are the one who is to come, why so much delay?"

John's disciples did witness the cures, but the cures are not everything and Jesus adds: the poor hear good news because real evangelization restores hope and leaves people renewed.

The blind see, the lame walk... (v. 22). The prophets foretold these signs (Is 35:5) that were really something new, because in the past God usually manifested himself as a powerful savior. These healings pointed to the liberation that Jesus was bringing: not punishment of sinners (which was a great part of John the Baptist's preaching) but, before all else, reconciliation

sued to healing a world of sinners, of violent and resentful people.

Fortunate are those who meet me, and are not offended by me (v. 23). And fortunate are those who do not doubt Christ's salvation after seeing the fruits of evangelization. Fortunate are those who do not say: this way is too slow. The Gospel shows its richness in giving life to people, in restoring hope to those who have experienced weakness and sin. It is necessary to have seen and understood that this is most important.

It does not matter if the world seems to continue to surrender to the forces of evil. The presence of liberated people compels others to define themselves in terms of good and evil and this makes the world grow.

With this, Jesus answers the disciples of John, men who are self-sacrificing and concerned for the triumph of God's cause. Perhaps they are so absorbed in their search for justice that they fail to recognize God's powerful working in Jesus' actions, which appeared so gentle and mild.

• 24. *When John's messengers had gone.* Most of John's disciples continued to follow him and did not acknowledge Jesus. Jesus did not accuse them, instead he praised John and situated himself in respect to John.

A prophet and more than a prophet (v. 26): Jesus clearly takes a stand in favor of John; yet

1K
17:23

Gen
21:11;
3:16;
Lk 1:
68, 76

Mt 11:
2-15

Ps
118:26;
Jn 6:14;
11:27

Is 29:18;
35:5;
61:1

7:35

16:16

1:15 the wind? ²⁵What was there to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? But people who wear fine clothes and enjoy delicate food are found in palaces. ²⁶What did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. ²⁷For John is the one foretold in Scripture in these words: *I am sending my messenger ahead of you to prepare your way.* ²⁸No one may be found greater than John among those born of women; but, I tell you, the least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.

3:1-6;
Jn 1:23;
Mal 3:1

Mt 21:32

Acts
2:23

²⁹All the people listening to him, even the tax collectors, had acknowledged the will of God in receiving the baptism of John, ³⁰whereas the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, in not letting themselves be baptized by him, ignored the will of God.

³¹And Jesus said, "What comparison can I use for the people? What are

they like? ³²They are like children sitting in the marketplace, about whom their companions complain, 'We piped you a tune and you wouldn't dance; we sang funeral songs and you wouldn't cry.'

³³Remember John: he didn't eat bread or drink wine, and you said, 'He has an evil spirit.'³⁴Next, came the Son of Man, eating and drinking; and you say, 'Look, a glutton for food and wine, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.'³⁵But the children of Wisdom always recognize her work."

Jn 7:20

Jesus, the woman and the Pharisee

• ³⁶One of the Pharisees asked Jesus to share his meal, so he went to the Pharisee's home, and as usual reclined at the table to eat. ³⁷And it happened that, a woman of this town, who was known as a sinner, heard that he was in the Pharisee's house.

Mt 26:
6-13;
Lk 11:37;
14:1

John was the subject of many reservations in Jewish circles. No one (the Gospel uses the Jewish term: among those born of woman, that simply means: no one) *could be found greater than John*. For the common people John was the greatest contemporary figure. Jesus agreed with them for this reason: John introduced the Savior and the kingdom of God.

The least in the kingdom of God is greater than he (v. 28): in the sense that Jesus' disciples entered the kingdom that John only announced. However holy John may have been, he was not given the knowledge of God that permeated Jesus. Actually Jesus emphasized the superiority, not of his disciples as compared to John, but of his own mission when compared with that of John.

John said that each one had to straighten out his life. Jesus rather insists that all efforts are useless if a person does not believe in the Father's love. John's disciples used to fast; Jesus' disciples will know how to forgive. John attracted to the desert those who knew how to let go of conveniences that they were accustomed to; Jesus lives among people and heals their wounds. The baptism of John signified a person's willingness to give up his vices, while the baptism of Jesus bestows the Spirit of God.

They are like children sitting... (v. 32). They do everything at the wrong time; they reproach John for his austerity and Jesus for his lack of austerity. There is no "one" way of serving God;

there is no "one" model of holiness, "one" style of Christian life. God acts in thousands of ways throughout history, encouraging at a given time what he will censure later in another milieu. The extreme asceticism of hermits in the desert or that of the ancient Irish monks has been a richness for Christianity. Modern Christianity that appears more human may look easier to follow but the demands of the cross are always there. Jesus went further than John but he needed John: the Gospel is heard with pleasure but is not taken seriously as long as repentance and sacrifice are brushed aside. Perhaps the renewal of our faith today is waiting for prophets and for movements that dare to question a culture and a society that has become sterile.

• 36. The Pharisee, Simon, had some clear and simple religious principles: The world is divided between good people and sinners. Those who obey are the good people; sinners are those with notorious sins. God loves the good and does not love sinners: God stays away from sinners. Being good, Simon stays away from sinners. Since Jesus does not move away from the sinful woman, then it follows that Jesus is not guided by the Spirit of God.

Simon was a Pharisee, and Pharisee means: "separated" (apart). Let us not condemn him: a constant theme running through Scripture invites the righteous to separate themselves from sinners; it was thought that the "uncleanness"

Mk 14:3;
Jn 12:3

She brought an alabaster jar of perfume, ³⁸and stood behind him, at his feet, weeping. She wet his feet with tears; she dried them with her hair; she kissed his feet and poured the perfume on them.

Jn 4:
18-19

³⁹The Pharisee who had invited Jesus was watching, and thought, “If this man were a prophet, he would know what sort of person is touching him; isn’t this woman a sinner?”

⁴⁰Then Jesus spoke to the Pharisee and said, “Simon, I have something to ask you.” He answered, “Speak, master.” And Jesus said, ⁴¹“Two people were in debt to the same creditor. One owed him five hundred silver coins, and the other fifty. ⁴²As they were unable to pay him back, he graciously canceled the debts of both. Now, which of them will love him more?”

⁴³Simon answered, “The one, I suppose, who was forgiven more.” And Jesus said, “You are right.” ⁴⁴And turning toward the woman, he said to Simon, “Do you see this woman?” ⁴⁵You gave me no water for my feet when I entered your house; but she has washed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. You didn’t welcome me with a kiss; but she has not stopped kissing my feet since she came in. ⁴⁶You provided no oil for my head; but she has poured perfume on my feet. ⁴⁷This is why, I tell you, her sins, her many sins, are forgiven, because of her great love. But the one who is forgiven little, has little love.”

⁴⁸Then Jesus said to the woman, “Your sins are forgiven.” ⁴⁹The others reclining with him at the table began to wonder, “Now this man claims to

of a sinner necessarily contaminates the others. Jesus shows that this need to separate, like awaiting the punishment of sinners, disregards both the wisdom of God and the reality of the human heart. God knows that we need time to test good and evil and also to arrive at a mature and stable orientation. He lets us sin because, in the end, we will know more clearly that we are bad and that we need only Him. Thus God easily forgets our sins and our excesses, if in spite of them or through them, we come to genuine love.

Simon did not welcome Jesus with the customary signs of hospitality at that time. In those days, people reclined on sofas around the table according to the custom of rich people and thus Jesus did as well. How could he dialogue with this respectable man who believed he knew the things of God but was incapable of feeling them? Jesus was waiting for the arrival of the sinful woman.

The one who is forgiven little (v. 47). This is a maxim rather than a valid affirmation in every case. Many who were not great sinners have loved Jesus passionately. Here Jesus speaks with irony to a very “decent” man: Simon, you think you owe little (and you are wrong in that), and for this reason you do not love much.

This is why her sins are forgiven (v. 47). Some see a contradiction between this verse and verse 42, where great love is the fruit of greater forgiveness. In verse 47 great love obtains this forgiveness. Jesus does not attempt to say which of the two—love or forgiveness—comes first: in fact, the two go together. Here Jesus is contrasting two forms of religion. The religion

of the Pharisee is something like bookkeeping: God takes note of good and bad works to later reward more fully the person with more entries for good works. True religion, focuses instead, only on the quality of love and trust, and usually we love to the degree that we become aware of how much God has forgiven us.

Your sins are forgiven (v. 48). Try to understand the scandal such words must have caused. Actually, whom had the woman loved except Jesus? Who could forgive sins, except God?

It is easy for us at a distance to side with Jesus against Simon and his friends, but in fact Jesus went against all the reasons that usually help religious persons in their own decision-making.

From early times a question has been raised: what relationship is there between the *sinful woman* of this paragraph, Mary of Magdala of the following paragraph, and Mary of Bethany who, during another meal, pours perfume on the feet of Jesus (a very strange gesture) in the house of another Simon, and becomes the subject of criticism? Are they one, or two or three? The Gospel does not tell us clearly, given also the fact that the evangelists never hesitate to relocate a word or conversation of Jesus to put them in a context better suited to their account.

Whatever the answer may be, there are links between these various episodes. The scandal for religious persons was not that on one occasion Jesus allowed a sinful woman to approach him, but that women who belonged to the group of disciples familiarly approached him. One of them, Mary of Magdala, could have been less than a model at the time of her demons (8:2).

8:48 forgive sins!"⁵⁰ But Jesus again spoke to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace!"

The women who followed Jesus

Mt 4:23;
9:35;
Mk 1:39;
15:41;
Lk 4:
43-44

8 • ¹Jesus walked through towns and countryside, preaching and giving the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve followed him, ²and also some women, who had been healed of evil spirits and diseases: Mary called Magdalene, who had been freed of seven demons; ³Joanna, wife of Chuza, Herod's steward; Suzanna; and others, who provided for them out of their own funds.

8:38;
Jn 19:25;
Lk 23:49;
Mk 16:9;
Mt 27:55

The parable of the sower

(Mk 4:1; Mt 13:1)

Mt 13:
1-9;
Mk 4:1-9

⁴As a great crowd gathered, and people came to him from every town, Jesus began teaching them with a

story: ⁵"The sower went out to sow the seed. And as he sowed, some of the seed fell along the way, was trodden on, and the birds of the sky ate it up. ⁶Some seed fell on rocky ground; and no sooner had it come up than it withered, because it had no water. ⁷Some seed fell among thorns; the thorns grew up with the seed and choked it. ⁸But some seed fell on good soil and grew, producing fruit, a hundred times as much!" And Jesus cried out, "Listen then, if you have ears to hear!"

Dt 29:3

• ⁹The disciples asked him, "What does this story mean?" ¹⁰And Jesus answered, "To you it has been given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God. But to others it is given in the form of stories, or parables, so that, *seeing, they may not perceive; and hearing, they may not understand.*

Mt 13:
10-11, 13;
Mk 4:
10-12
Is 6:10

JESUS AND THE CULTURE OF HIS TIME

• **8.1** See the commentary of Matthew 1:18 concerning the inferior status of women in the time of Jesus and especially in Jewish society. No spiritual master would have spoken to a woman in public: women were not even admitted to the synagogues. Nevertheless, Jesus did not pay the least attention to such universally accepted prejudices. Various women took Jesus' words and attitude as a call to freedom. They even joined the circle of his intimate friends while ignoring the gossip. Here we have a fundamental testimony about the freedom of the Gospel.

Jesus was truly human, and as such he belonged to a race and a culture: he was a Jew of his time and his gospel was attuned to the culture that he shared. Yet Jesus did not adopt the inhuman traits of his culture; nor did he accept the prejudices of the Jews of his time with regard to women, to public sinners, to pagans and so on, nor did he share their views in regard to the Sabbath. His gospel is a leaven that changes cultures for the better; in many respects his way of life goes against the mainstream of cultures.

Mary of Magdala (Magdala was a village on the shore of Lake Tiberias) will be at the foot of the cross along with Mary, the wife of Cleophas, the mother of James and Joset. These two women, along with *Joanna*, will receive the first news of the Resurrection (Lk 24:10).

- 9. See commentary on Matthew 13:1-23. *This is the point of the parable* (v. 11). The

comparison (or parable) of the sower helps us to understand what is happening around Jesus. Many people became very enthusiastic at the beginning, then, after a while they left. Only a few persevered and the apostles wondered: How will the kingdom of God come if no one is interested?

The Gospel records Jesus' explanation about the fields on which the seed fell. There was a lot more to explain. First, his comparing the kingdom of God with something that is sown must have surprised the listeners. Throughout Sacred History, there had been abundant sowing and Jesus' contemporaries were expecting a harvest (see Rev 14:15).

We, like Jesus' contemporaries, want to reap, that is to enjoy the fruits of the kingdom of God, namely, social peace, justice and happiness. Many wonder how it is possible that people continue to be so evil two thousand years after Christ.

If the kingdom of God has come and it is already in our midst, that does not mean we are going to enjoy its fruits. The kingdom of God is where God rules, and God rules where people accept him for what he is, where he can be Father and where his sons and daughters can accept his plan for them.

From that moment on, people grow in a thousand ways, and social consciousness also develops. People become aware of their dignity and their common destiny, in spite of the fact that it seems more impossible every day to reach the goal.

Mt 13:
18-23;
Mk 4:
14-20

¹¹ Now, this is the point of the parable: The seed is the word of God. ¹² Those along the wayside are people who hear it; but immediately, the devil comes and takes the word from their minds, for he doesn't want them to believe and be saved. ¹³ Those on the rocky ground are people who receive the word with joy; but they have no root; they believe for a while, and give way in time of trial. ¹⁴ Among the thorns

9:23

are people who hear the word, but, as they go their way, they are choked by worries, riches, and the pleasures of life; they bring no fruit to maturity. ¹⁵ The good soil, instead, are people who receive the word, and keep it, in a gentle and generous mind, and, persevering patiently, they bear fruit.

21:19;
1Thes
1:3;
2Cor 1:6;
6:4;
12:12;
Rom 5:3;
8:25

Mk 4:
21-22;
Mt 5:15;
Lk 11:33

¹⁶ No one, after lighting a lamp, covers it with a bowl or puts it under the bed; rather, he puts it on a lamp stand, so that people coming in may see the light. ¹⁷ In the same way, there is nothing hidden that shall not be uncovered; nothing kept secret, that shall not be known clearly. ¹⁸ Now, pay attention and listen well, for whoever produces, will be given more; but from those who do not produce, even what they seem to have will be taken away from them."

Mt 10:26;
Lk 12:2

Mt 13:12;
25:29;
Mk 4:
24-25

Jesus' mother and brothers

(Mk 3:31; Mt 12:46)

Mt 12:
46-50;
Mk 3:
31-35

- ¹⁹ Then his mother and his rela-

tives came to him; but they could not get to him because of the crowd. ²⁰ Someone told him, "Your mother and your brothers are standing outside and wish to meet you." ²¹ Then Jesus answered, "My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it."

11:28

Jesus calms the storm

(Mk 4:35; Mt 8:23)

²² One day, Jesus got into a boat with his disciples and said to them, "Let us go across to the other side of the lake." ²³ So they set out, and as they sailed he fell asleep. Suddenly, a storm came down on the lake, and the boat began to fill with water; and they were in danger. ²⁴ The disciples then went to Jesus to wake him, saying, "Master! Master! We are sinking!" Jesus woke up. He rebuked the wind and the rolling waves; the storm subsided, and all was quiet.

Mt 8:
23-27;
Mk 4:
35-41

²⁵ Then Jesus said to them, "Where is your faith?" They had been afraid; now they were astonished and said to one another, "Who can this be? See, he commands even the wind and the sea and they obey him!"

The possessed man and the pigs

(Mk 5:1; Mt 8:28)

• ²⁶ And they sailed to the country of the Gerasenes, which is across the lake from Galilee. ²⁷ As Jesus

Mt 8:
28-34;
Mk 5:
1-20

KINGDOM OR REIGN OF GOD

Jesus spoke Aramaic, a language in which a single term means three different things: the *kingdom*, that is the place where God acts as King; the *reign*, or the fact that God acts as King; *royalty*, or the dignity of God the King.

Jesus often speaks of the kingdom proper: "you will not enter the kingdom of God"; elsewhere, however, the meaning is debatable as for example in the Our Father. Should we say: "Your kingdom come" or "Your reign come"?

In the present parables, traditionally called the parables of the kingdom, the two meanings go together. The great news that Jesus proclaimed

was the coming of an age totally different from the times of sacred history that the Jews had experienced. God was obviously present throughout human history, especially Israel's history, yet now he was coming in a different way. Now, and only now, would people know him as he is.

The reign of God began with Jesus revealing the true face of God; then at his rising as Lord of the living and the dead, he would begin to rule and personally reorient human history.

- 19. See commentary on Mark 3:31.
- 26. See commentary on Mark 5:1.

stepped ashore, a man from the town approached him. This man was possessed by demons, and for a long time he had not worn any clothes. He would not live in a house, but stayed among the tombstones. ²⁸When he came nearer to Jesus, he screamed and threw himself on the ground before him; and then he shouted, "What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me," ²⁹for Jesus had ordered the evil spirit to leave the man.

11:24

This spirit had seized him many times, when he had been bound with ropes and chains and kept under control. He would then suddenly break the chains, and be driven by the evil spirit into wild places.

When Jesus asked him, ³⁰"What is your name?" the man said, "I am Legion," because many demons had entered into him. ³¹And they begged Jesus not to command them to go into the bottomless pit. ³²Nearby, on the hillside, a great herd of pigs was feeding; so the demons asked to be allowed to enter the pigs, and Jesus gave them permission. ³³The demons then left the man and entered the pigs, and the herd rushed down the hillside into the lake and was drowned.

³⁴When the herdsmen saw what had happened, they fled, and reported it in the town and in the countryside. ³⁵Then people went out to see what had happened and came to Jesus. There, they saw the man from whom the demons had been driven out. He was clothed and in his right mind, and was sitting at the feet of Jesus. They were afraid. ³⁶Then people, who had seen it, told them how the man had been healed; ³⁷and all this crowd from the Gerasene country asked Jesus

to depart from them, for a great fear took hold of them. So Jesus got into the boat to return.

³⁸It was then, that the man freed of the demons asked Jesus if he could stay with him. ³⁹But Jesus sent him on his way; "Go back to your family, and tell them how much God has done for you." So the man went away, proclaiming through the whole town how much Jesus had done for him.

A woman is healed and a child raised to life

(Mk 5:21; Mt 9:18)

• ⁴⁰When Jesus returned, the people welcomed him, for all had been waiting for him. ⁴¹At that time, a man named Jairus, an official of the synagogue, threw himself at Jesus' feet, and begged him to come to his house ⁴²because his only daughter, about twelve years old, was dying.

As Jesus was on his way, the crowd pressed from every side. ⁴³There was a woman who had suffered from a bleeding for twelve years. This woman had spent everything she had on doctors, but none of them had been able to cure her. ⁴⁴Now, she came up behind Jesus and touched the fringe of his cloak, and her bleeding stopped at once. ⁴⁵Jesus said, "Who touched me?" Everyone denied it; and Peter said, "Master, the crowd is pushing all around you." ⁴⁶But Jesus insisted, "Someone touched me, for I felt power go out from me."

⁴⁷The woman knew she had been discovered. She came trembling, and knelt before Jesus. Then she openly confessed why she had touched him, and how she had been instantly cured. ⁴⁸And Jesus said to her, "Daughter, your faith has saved you. Go in peace."

Mt 9:
18-26;
Mk 5:
21-43;
10:52;
Lk 7:50

Num
15:38

• 40. See commentary on Mark 5:21.

⁴⁹While Jesus was still speaking, a messenger arrived from the official's home to tell him, "Your daughter has just died; don't trouble the master any further." ⁵⁰But Jesus heard the news, and said to the official, "Do not fear, only believe."

⁵¹When he entered the house, Jesus allowed no one to follow him, except Peter, James and John, with the father and mother of the child.

⁵²As all the people were weeping and wailing loudly, Jesus said to them, "Do not weep, she is not dead, but asleep." ⁵³And they laughed at him, knowing that she was dead. ⁵⁴As for Jesus, he took the child by the hand and said to her, "Child, wake up!"

⁵⁵And her spirit returned, and she got up at once; then Jesus told them to give her something to eat. ⁵⁶The parents were amazed, but Jesus ordered them not to let anyone know what had happened.

Jesus sends the Twelve on a mission

(Mt 10:5; Mk 6:7)

9 ¹Then Jesus called his Twelve disciples and gave them power and authority to drive out all evil spirits and to heal diseases. ²And he sent them to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal the sick. ³He instructed them, "Don't take anything for the journey, neither staff, nor bag, nor

bread, nor money; and don't even take a spare tunic. ⁴Whatever house you enter, remain there until you leave that place. ⁵And wherever they don't welcome you, leave the town and shake the dust from your feet: it will be as a testimony against them."

⁶So they set out, and went through the villages, proclaiming the good news and healing people everywhere.

⁷King Herod heard of all this, and did not know what to think, for people said, "This is John, raised from the dead." ⁸Others believed that Elijah, or one of the ancient prophets, had come back to life. ⁹As for Herod, he said, "I had John beheaded. Who is this man, about whom I hear such wonders?" And he was anxious to see him.

¹⁰On their return, the apostles told Jesus everything they had done. Then he took them with him and they withdrew by themselves to a town called Bethsaida. ¹¹But the crowd heard of this and caught up with him. So he welcomed them, and began speaking about the kingdom of God, curing those who needed healing.

Miracle of the loaves

(Mk 6:30; Mt 14:13; Jn 6:1)

• ¹²The day was drawing to a close, and the Twelve drew near to tell him, "Send the crowd away, and let them go into the villages and farms around,

- **9.12** See commentary on Mark 6:35.

This multiplication of the loaves occurs in all four Gospels, which is true of very few events in the Gospel. Besides this account, another multiplication of the loaves is related in Matthew 15:32 and Mark 8:1. It is likely due to the fact that one could see in it the announcement of the Eucharist as will be emphasized in the Gospel of John (Chap. 6).

This abundance of accounts may be due to the fact that the multiplication of bread is one of the miracles of Jesus which best shows his absolute power over the laws of nature (see commentary on Mk 8:1).

Remember that the Jews of Jesus' time were a poor people, too numerous for a fertile, but

limited territory. The Roman occupants claimed a good portion of the resources, and politicians like Herod imposed heavy taxes, which were partly justified by the need to occupy the extra manpower in grandiose projects.

Many people had no security in employment, as is true today in many countries, and Jesus along with his followers shared that situation. In that desolate area, Jesus felt responsible for all his brothers and sisters who became his guests (as also happens in Luke 11:5), and he acted according to faith. Every day, in those times until now, many people must have shared their last resources with someone poorer, confident that God would pay them back. Jesus, in turn, would do no less. The miracle he performed at

Acts
9:43;
16:15
Acts
13:51

Mt 14:
1-2;
Mk 6:
14-16

Mal
3:23;
Mt 17:10
23:8

Mt 14:
13-14;
Mk 6:
30-34;
Jn 6:1-4;
Lk 10:17

Mk 6:34

Jn 11:11;
1Cor
15:18

1K
17:21

Mt 10:
5...14;
Mk 6:
7-13;
Lk 10:1

Mt 14:
15-21;
Mk 6:
35-44;
Jn 6:
5-13

to find lodging and food, for we are here in a lonely place.”¹³ But Jesus replied, “You, yourselves, give them something to eat.” They answered, “We have only five loaves and two fish. Do you want us to go and buy food for all this crowd?”¹⁴ for there were about five thousand men. Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Make them sit down in groups of fifty.”

¹⁵ So they made all of them sit down.

¹⁶ Jesus then took the five loaves and two fish, and, raising his eyes to heaven, pronounced a blessing over them; he broke them, and gave them to the disciples to distribute to the crowd.

¹⁷ They ate and everyone had enough; and when they gathered up what was left, twelve baskets were filled with broken pieces.

Peter's profession of faith

(Mk 8:27; Mt 16:18)

¹⁸ One day, when Jesus was praying alone, not far from his disciples, he asked them, “What do people say

about me?”¹⁹ And they answered, “Some say, that you are John the Baptist; others say, that you are Elijah; and still others, that you are one of the prophets of old, risen from the dead.” Again Jesus asked them,²⁰ “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered, “The Messiah of God.”²¹ Then Jesus spoke to them, giving them strict orders not to tell this to anyone.

²² And he added, “The Son of Man must suffer many things. He will be rejected by the elders and chief priests and teachers of the law, and be put to death. Then after three days he will be raised to life.”

²³ Jesus also said to all the people, “If you wish to be a follower of mine, deny yourself and take up your cross each day, and follow me!²⁴ For if you choose to save your life, you will lose it; but if you lose your life for my sake, you will save it.²⁵ What does

that moment confirms the faith of many humble believers, who are perhaps not too devoted to the Church, but who often know how to risk all they have.

Jesus is not concerned that this miracle awakens in them a misguided enthusiasm that will end up with a split among his followers (see Mk 6:45). Jesus had not fed them to attract them to his church, but to fulfill God's promises to the poor.

• 18. This occurred near Caesarea Philippi, a famous spa located in the far north of Palestine, at the foot of Mount Hermon. Jesus had gone away from Galilee because he was not safe there. As was his custom, he sent the Twelve ahead of him to the villages he would visit, to prepare for his coming.

What do people say about me? And you, what did you tell them about me when you were among them? Who did you tell them I was? Peter answers first, confident that they were not wrong in presenting their teacher as the Messiah, the One sent by God.

Jesus does not deny that he is, but he forbids them to make it known from then on, because, according to the people, the Liberator had to crush his enemies. Can the apostles simply call Liberator, one who will die on a cross?

By comparing this text with Mark 8:27 and Matthew 16:13, we come to the following conclusion: Matthew combined in a single story two different events in which Peter was first in proclaiming his faith. The first episode is the one that Luke relates at this point.

In the second, Peter recognized Jesus as the Son of God and received the promise that Matthew recalls. Perhaps this took place after the multiplication of the loaves: compare with John 6:66-69, or perhaps after the Resurrection: compare with John 21:15-17, which insists not on faith, but on the love that Jesus can see in Peter. See also Galatians 2:7-8.

• 22. Why did Jesus ask his apostles the questions we have just read? The Gospel answers clearly: because the time had come for Jesus to announce his passion to them. Jesus had not only come to teach people but to open for them the door leading to the Resurrection. Since his apostles now know him to be the Savior promised to Israel, they must learn that there is no salvation if death is not conquered (1 Cor 15:25). Jesus will obtain this victory when he freely chooses the way of the cross: the Son of Man has to suffer much and be rejected by the authorities.

Immediately after that, Jesus adds that we

9:8
1:32;
2:26;
4:41;
Jn 6:69

Mt 16:21;
Mk 8:31

Mt 16:
24-27;
Mk 8:
34-38;
Mt 10:38;
Lk 14:27;
12:9

Mt 10:39;
Mk 8:35;
Lk 17:33;
Jn 12:25

Mt 26:26

Ps 78:29

Mt 16:
13-16,20;
Mk 8:
27-30

it profit you to gain the whole world, if you destroy or damage yourself?²⁶ If someone feels ashamed of me and of my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him, when he comes in his glory, and in the glory of his Father, with his holy angels.²⁷ Truly, I say to you, there are some here who will not taste death, before they see the kingdom of God.”

Mt 10:33;
Lk 12:9

Mt 16:28;
Mk 9:1;
Lk 9:1-2;
22:69

The transfiguration

(Mk 9:2; Mt 17:1; Jn 12:28)

• ²⁸About eight days after Jesus had said all this, he took Peter, John and James, and went up the mountain

Mt 17:
1-9;
Mk 9:
2-10

must all share in his victory over death: *You must deny yourself*: this is the fundamental orientation of our life. We must choose between serving and being served, sacrificing ourselves for others or taking advantage of them. Or, as a well-known prayer puts it: Let me seek not so much to be consoled as to console, to be understood as to understand, to be loved as to love.

It is in his early years that a child is helped towards this choice. In a true family he is not the center and king, with his parents as slaves, but he learns how to serve and give himself. He must accept his brothers and sisters, share with them and at times limit his own future for their good.

Take up your cross each day (v. 23). Here comes the acceptance of the cross which the Lord gives to each one of us and which we do not have to choose because we find it in our destiny. We must not carry it because we are compelled to, but rather we must love it because the Lord wished it for us.

In a world where it has become usual to live one's own life—and in so doing, to waste it, many difficult, even abnormal children, will cause their parents to become true followers of Jesus in bearing their cross.

If you choose to save your life (v. 24). Jesus refers to the general orientation of our life. He has nothing in common with those who are only concerned about avoiding “sins,” while they pursue their ambitions and their desire to enjoy this life to the fullest. The mere fact of seeking to live without risks separates us from God's way.

If someone feels ashamed of me (v. 26). Besides the cross given to us each day, God will ask us to witness to our faith and in that we will have to run risks, even if it is nothing more than the risk of being ridiculed by our friends and our boss. During periods of violence, can Christians remain silent, limit themselves to their “spiri-

to pray.²⁹ And while he was praying, the aspect of his face was changed, and his clothing became dazzling white.³⁰ Two men were talking with Jesus: Moses and Elijah.³¹ Appearing in the glory of heaven, Moses and Elijah spoke to Jesus about his departure from this life, which was to take place in Jerusalem.

8:51;
Jn 12:28;
Lk 24:4

³²Peter and his companions had fallen asleep; but they awoke suddenly, and they saw his glory and the two men standing with him.³³ As Moses and Elijah were about to leave, Peter—not knowing what to say—said to Jesus, “Master, how good it is

tual” reunions, give no concrete indication of what they themselves think and live?

• 28. Recall the divine revelation Jesus received at the beginning of his ministry (Lk 3:21). This other divine manifestation Jesus receives at the Transfiguration is due to the beginning of a new stage: the Passion.

Jesus has already been preaching for two years, but there is no hope that Israel will overcome the violence that will lead to its ruin. Even if Jesus' miracles do not convince his compatriots, Jesus will have to face the forces of evil: his sacrifice will be more effective than his words in arousing love and the spirit of sacrifice in all the people who will continue his saving work in the future.

He took Peter, John and James with him: these men had a privileged place among the Twelve (Mk 1:29; 3:16; 5:37; 10:35; 13:3). Most probably the rest of the “apostles” only reacted very slowly. All the patience and pedagogy of Jesus did not make them grow more quickly and they were not ready to enter the cloud with him.

He went up the mountain to pray. It is quite possible that it was during a night of prayer that the event that Jesus expected took place. This transfiguration of Jesus has first of all a meaning for himself. Jesus did not know everything beforehand; he was not spared doubts and anxieties. It does not seem that the Father manifested himself with abundant favors for him: Jesus served without expecting heavenly rewards. On this occasion however he received certitude concerning the purpose of his mission.

For the apostles it is a decisive witness that will help them to believe in the Resurrection. (The letter headed “Second Letter of Peter” makes no mistake when it insists on this witness of God, even if done in an awkward way (2 P 1:17), because it claims to be written by Peter

for us to be here! Let us make three tents, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.”³⁴ And no sooner had he spoken, than a cloud appeared and covered them; and the disciples were afraid as they entered the cloud.

³⁵Then these words came from the cloud, “This is my Son, my Beloved, listen to him.”³⁶ And after the voice had spoken, Jesus was there alone.

The disciples kept this to themselves at the time, telling no one of anything they had seen.

The epileptic demoniac

(Mk 9:14; Mt 17:14)

³⁷The next day, when they came down from the mountain, a large crowd met Jesus. ³⁸A man among them called out, “Master, I beg you to look at my son, my only child. ³⁹When the evil spirit seizes him, he suddenly screams. The spirit throws him into a fit, and he foams at the mouth; it scarcely ever leaves him after wearing him out. ⁴⁰I begged your disciples to drive it out, but they could not.”

⁴¹Jesus answered, “You faithless people! how disoriented you are! How long must I be with you and put up with you? Bring your son here.”⁴² And while the boy was being brought, the

demon beat him to the ground and threw him into a fit. But Jesus spoke sharply to the evil spirit, healed the boy, and gave him back to his father. ⁴³And all who saw it were astonished at God’s wonderful work.

(Mk 9:30)

But while all were amazed at everything Jesus did, he said to his disciples, ⁴⁴“Listen, and remember what I tell you now: The Son of Man will be betrayed into hands the of men.”⁴⁵ But the disciples didn’t understand this saying; something prevented them from grasping what he meant, and they were afraid to ask him about it.

Who is the greatest?

• ⁴⁶One day, the disciples were arguing about which of them was the most important. ⁴⁷But Jesus knew their thoughts, so he took a little child and stood him by his side. ⁴⁸Then he said to them, “Whoever welcomes this little child in my name, welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me, welcomes the one who sent me. And listen: the one who is found to be the least among you all, is the one who is the greatest.”

⁴⁹Then John spoke up, “Master,

himself). It is a fact that many persons throughout history have been considered as prophets or even as “the” prophet, but none of them have pretended to have a witness from God in his favor, other than his own successes. Jesus counted on witnesses, beginning with John the Baptist. In all biblical revelation faith is supported by these witnesses. Here it is Moses, the founder of Israel, and Elijah, father of prophets, who recognize Jesus.

Luke tells us that Moses and Elijah spoke to Jesus about his *departure* (v. 31) (in Greek this is “exodus”). Jesus then becomes the new Moses who will bring God’s people from this world of slavery to the Promised Land.

This is my Son (v. 35). See the commentary on these same words in 3:22. Here, however, Jesus appears as the one for whom Moses and Elijah were waiting, the one for whom they had prepared, even if for this moment they can con-

sole him for he still carries the weakness of our human condition. See in relation to this Transfiguration of Jesus the commentary of Mark 9:1.

• 46. See commentary on Mark 9:33.

Mark remarks that Jesus took a child in his arms: something unusual for people of that time since children did not count, and religious teachers only urged that they be well disciplined. The model of religion seemed to be a serious man who did not laugh, did not run, did not look at people in lower positions, especially women and children. Oftentimes, such a mentality is seen in those who criticize child baptism and first communion.

Jesus does not answer the apostles’ question: Who is the greatest? Because what matters is not to become great, but to be close to Christ. In order to receive Christ, we must welcome him in the person of the little ones.

40:35

3:22;
23:35;
Dt 18:15

Mt 17:
14-18;
Mk 9:
14-27

Dt 32:5;
Mk
11:22;
Lk 17:6

Mt 17:22;
Mk 9:
30-32

18:34

Mt 18:
1-5;
Mk 9:
33-37;
Lk 22:24

Mt 10:40;
Jn 13:20;
Lk 10:16;
22:26

Mk 9:
38-40;
Acts
16:18;
19:13

we saw someone who drives out demons by calling upon your name, and we tried to forbid him, because he doesn't follow you with us." ⁵⁰But Jesus said, "Don't forbid him. He who is not against you is for you."

11:23

Jesus unwelcome in a Samaritan village

• ⁵¹As the time drew near when Jesus would be taken up to heaven, he made up his mind to go to Jerusalem. ⁵²He sent ahead of him some messengers, who entered a Samaritan village to prepare a lodging for him. ⁵³But the people would not receive him, because he was on his way to Jerusalem. ⁵⁴Seeing this, James and John, his disciples, said, "Lord, do you want us to call down fire from heaven

Mt 19:1;
Mk 10:1Sir
50:26;
Jn 4:9;
Acts 8:5

2K 1:10

to reduce them to ashes?" ⁵⁵Jesus turned and rebuked them, ⁵⁶and they went on to another village.

The cost of following Jesus

(Mt 8:19)

• ⁵⁷As they went on their way, a man said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." ⁵⁸Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head."

Mt 8:
19-22

⁵⁹To another, Jesus said, "Follow me!" But he answered, "Let me go back now, for, first, I want to bury my father." ⁶⁰And Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their dead; as for you, leave them, and proclaim the kingdom of God."

⁶¹Another said to him, "I will follow

1K 19:
19-21

• 51. After having recalled the actions of Jesus in Galilee, Luke begins the second part of his Gospel, where he brings together words of Jesus spoken on different occasions. In order to preserve continuity in his account, he imagines that Jesus is giving these responses while on the way from Galilee to Jerusalem where the third part of his gospel will take place.

The first paragraph reminds us that between the two provinces of Galilee and Judea, there was Samaria. Its people were Samaritans, non-Jews, and the two people really hated each other. When Jews from Galilee were going on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, every door was closed to them throughout Samaria.

It would seem that each time Jesus meets Samaritans, it is to teach us a new way of seeing those who do not share our faith. Religions have often been aggressive, at times very violent, especially those religions that see themselves as a revelation of the only God. This was already the case in the Old Testament. Jesus is not part of such fanaticism, teaching us not to confuse God's cause with ours nor with the interests of our religious community. There is absolute respect for those God leads by another road. What a contrast with the legends of the past that this account awakens in verse 54 (see 2 K 1:9).

Here Jesus tells his apostles to be less impulsive: the Samaritans who refuse to welcome Jesus on this occasion are not guiltier than those who close their doors to a stranger. Why destroy this little village, if by doing this they still had to look for a place in another village? It was better to move on without delay.

BREAKTHROUGHS—BECOMING FREE

• 57. In contrast with Jesus' customary understanding attitude about human nature, here we see Jesus very demanding with the disciple who wants to follow him: Jesus cannot waste his time in forming those who are not ready to sacrifice everything for the sake of the Gospel.

The third of these would-be disciples, perhaps, was secretly hoping that at the time of saying goodbye, his family would beg him not to do such a foolish thing, and so he could remain with his good intentions: I would like to, but...

The second case is different: *Let the dead bury their dead* (v. 60). Faced with these abrupt words that we occasionally meet in the Gospel, there are two attitudes to be avoided. The first would be to take these words as a general rule, a precept addressed to everyone without nuance, the second, more frequent, would be to say: "That must not be taken literally, it's an oriental way of speaking." One of the effects of the establishment of the reign of God is justice, solidarity, and fraternity; there will be people to take care of those parents. One does not follow Jesus in order to "obtain" freedom; Jesus must be followed in freedom.

First I want to bury my father (v. 59). This means perhaps that he should bury his father who has died. Most probably it means that he wanted to look after his aging father up to the time of his burial (Tb 6:15). It is difficult to think one is truly free if he had not had the opportunity to prove it by acting differently from what is understood and accepted around him. Think of Francis of Assisi begging for bread in his own town after having lived there as the son of a rich family.

you, Lord, but first let me say goodbye to my family.”⁶² And Jesus said to him, “Whoever has put his hand to the plow, and looks back, is not fit for the kingdom of God.”

Jesus sends out the seventy-two

(Mt 10:5; Mk 6:7)

Mt 10:
5-16;
Mk 6:
7-11;
Lk 9:1-5

10 • ¹After this, the Lord appointed seventy-two other disciples, and sent them, two by two, ahead of him, to every town and place, where he himself was to go. ²And he said to them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. So you must ask the Lord of the harvest to send workers to his harvest. ³Courage! I am sending you like lambs among wolves. ⁴Set off without purse or bag or sandals;

Mt 9:
37-38;
Jn 4:38

9:3-5;
22:35;
2K 4:29

and do not stop at the homes of those you know.

⁵Whatever house you enter, first bless them, saying, ‘Peace to this house!’ ⁶If a friend of peace lives there, the peace shall rest upon that person. But if not, the blessing will return to you. ⁷Stay in that house, eating and drinking at their table, for the worker deserves to be paid. Do not move from house to house.

1Cor
9:14;
2Cor
11:7;
1Tim
5:18

• ⁸When they welcome you to any town, eat what they offer you. ⁹Heal the sick who are there, and say to them: ‘The kingdom of God has drawn near to you.’

Acts
28:8

¹⁰But in any town where you are not welcome, go to the marketplace

Leave them and proclaim the kingdom of God. When a call from Jesus reaches you, it is the complete will of God for you in this precise moment. Leave there your excuses, your duties: perhaps these would be duties only in a world of the dead. God has provided that others, perhaps his angels, will see to them.

• **10.1** See commentary on Matthew 10:5 and Mark 6:7.

Luke reports a mission of the *seventy* (or *seventy-two*) after the mission of the Twelve (9:1).

There were *Twelve* apostles, according to the number of the tribes of Israel: this means that, at first, the Gospel was proclaimed to the people of Israel. Then came the mission of the seventy-two (or of the seventy): these numbers symbolized the multitude of pagan nations. This mission, then, is a figure of the task that is the responsibility of the Church until the end of the world: to evangelize all nations (Mt 28:19).

When the Church has been present long enough in a particular place, we tend to believe that everyone has had the opportunity to receive the Gospel: this is an illusion. Even in the best of circumstances, many families, especially the poorest ones, have waited for years for some missionary’s visit.

Do not stop at the homes of those you know (v. 4). The Gospel says: “do not greet anyone.” Missionaries would soon lose their wings if they stayed to chat or asked hospitality from friends who had not welcomed the kingdom. They should rather count on the Providence of the Father who will open to them the heart and house of one of those who have listened to the Good News.

In visiting homes, the first thing to do is to

give peace, that is, to come as a friend on behalf of Christ and his Church, taking time to listen to the people visited and to find out their concerns. Then, and only then, will we be able to give them a good answer and to tell them: *the kingdom has drawn near to you* (v. 9); even though you may have a thousand problems, believe that today God has come closer to you to reconcile you. This is the time to be reconciled with family members and neighbors, to let go of resentments. Begin doing what you can do, and trust that, in his own way, God will solve what is beyond your own power.

Many of the people who welcome the missionaries with joy are not going to persevere: they are not going to enter a Christian community. That does not necessarily mean that the missionaries’ efforts have been wasted. These people will remember this moment of grace from the Lord, and it will help them in living with more faith. In any case, there will be some whose hearts were touched by the Lord at that time and they will become active members of his Church.

The mission helps form the missionaries and also awakens those they visit. Jesus formed his disciples, not only through his teaching, but also by sending them on missions. That is the way he formed the seventy a few months after they met him. Likewise now, the best people for missionary work are often those who have been recently converted.

HEALING THE SICK

• 8. Heal the sick, Jesus says. We have already mentioned that Jesus did not come to bring good health to all the sick people, but rather to bring us salvation. Since we are sin-

Acts 13:51; 18:6 and proclaim: ¹¹‘Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off and leave with you. But know for a certainty that the kingdom of God has drawn near to you.’ ¹²I tell you, that on the Day of Judgment it will be better for Sodom than for this town.

Gen 19:24; 2P 2:6; Jud 1:7

Mt 11: 21-24; Lk 16:31

Is 14:13

¹³Alas for you, Chorazin! Alas for you, Bethsaida! So many miracles have been worked in you! If the same miracles had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would already be sitting in ashes and wearing the sackcloth of repentance. ¹⁴Surely for Tyre and Sidon it will be better on the Day of Judgment than for you. ¹⁵And what of you, city of Capernaum? Will you be lifted up to heaven? You will be thrown down to the place of the dead.

¹⁶Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me; and he who rejects me, rejects the one who sent me.”

Mt 10:40; Mk 9:37; Mt 18:5; Lk 9:48; Jn 13:20

Jesus gives thanks to the Father (Mt 11:25)

• ¹⁷The seventy-two disciples returned full of joy. They said, “Lord, even the demons obeyed us when we called on your name.” ¹⁸Then Jesus replied, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. ¹⁹You see, I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the Enemy, so that nothing will harm you. ²⁰Nevertheless, don’t rejoice because the evil spirits submit to you; rejoice, rather, that your names are written in heaven.”

Mk 6:30; Lk 9:10

Ps 91:13

Dn 12:1; Rev 3:5; 13:8

ners, our salvation is worked out through suffering and through the cross.

Jesus’ messengers do not try to replace doctors. They do not proclaim faith as a means to be cured: that would cheapen it. They do, however, offer “healing” to the people who have not yet discovered that the *kingdom of God* and his mercy have come to them.

Wherever there are communities of Christians, they must care for the sick and visit them as a sign of their being concerned for everyone and being everyone’s family. The love shown by a visitor encourages the sick person, gives him joy and arouses gratitude in him, and thus disposes him for an in-depth renewal and for the forgiveness of sins. See also James 5:13.

In his first letter to the Corinthians 12:9, Paul speaks of the various gifts that the spirit gives to the Christian community and he makes a distinction between the gifts to work miracles and to heal the sick. This last gift may correspond to a natural talent the person had before.

Obviously we should encourage those who can pray and lay their hands on the sick. Doctors and health care workers must look on their skillful care of patients as a service done for the sick on behalf of God.

• 17. At first, the person who preaches Christ and works for him is scared. Then follows the joy of having surpassed oneself, and even more the joy of having believed and worked with the very power of Jesus. Jesus gives thanks for the seventy (or seventy-two) and for all those who will follow them.

What are *these things* (v. 21) that God has

revealed to the *little ones* but the mysterious power of the Gospel to transform people and show them the truth? The apostles marvel at the power coming from *the name of Jesus* (Mk 16:17). Jesus underlines the defeat of the Adversary, Satan.

The learned and the clever think they know, but do not know what is essential. They speak of a God who is no more than a shadow of the true God as long as they do not recognize him in Jesus. They do not know where the world is heading because they do not see how God’s power is working wherever Jesus is being proclaimed.

The *little ones*, on the other hand, have understood. Before they saw themselves as a sacrificed generation. For the little ones are used to sacrificing themselves for their children from generation to generation, or they are sacrificed by powers, under the pretext of bringing happiness to their descendants. They did not live for themselves; rather they were preparing a place for others. Now the little ones, namely, the humble believers, have everything if they have Jesus, the Father has given everything to him.

Little ones live their faith in simple ways but they know that none of their sacrifices are lost. It is Jesus who *reveals the Father to us* and, knowing him in truth, we also share in his control over events. Our desires and our prayers are powerful because we have come to the center from which God directs the forces saving humankind: because we work for eternity, our names are already *written in heaven* (v. 20).

To evangelize does not mean to sell the Gospel but rather to prove its power to

Mt 11: 25-27; Lk 8:10; Jn 7:48; 1Cor 1:17; 1:26

²¹ At that time, Jesus was filled with the joy of the Holy Spirit, and said, “I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and made them known to little ones.”

Mt 28:18; Jn 3:35; 13:3; 17:2; Phil 2:9

²² Yes, Father, such has been your gracious will. I have been given all things by my Father, so that no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son, and he to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.”

Mt 13: 16-17

²³ Then Jesus turned to his disciples and said to them privately, “Fortunate are you to see what you see,” ²⁴ for I tell you, that many prophets and kings would have liked to see what you see, but did not see it; and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it.”

11:31; 1P 1:12

The good Samaritan

(Mt 22:34; Mk 12:28)

Mt 22: 34-40; Mk 12: 28-31

• ²⁵ Then a teacher of the law came and began putting Jesus to the test. And he said, “Master, what shall I do to receive eternal life?” ²⁶ Jesus

heal people from their demons. We need not become activists in order to accomplish that. We must admit that we have no power in these things and we must give thanks to God who enabled us to see, to hear and to communicate his salvation.

Fortunate are you to see... (v. 23). Stop being envious of famous people, kings and prophets of the past. You who are alive now, and who are neither kings nor prophets, have been given the better part.

• ²⁵. *Who is my neighbor?* (v. 29). The teacher of the law expected to be given the precise limits of his obligation. Whom was he supposed to look after? Members of his family? People of his own race? Or perhaps everybody?

It is significant that Jesus concludes his story with a different question: *Which of these three made himself neighbor?* (v. 36). It is as if he said: do not try to figure out who is your neighbor, listen instead to the call within you, and become a neighbor, be close to your brother or sister in need. As long as we see the command to love as an obligation, we are not loving as God wants.

Love does not consist simply in being moved by another person's distress. Notice how the

replied, “What is written in the law? How do you understand it?” ²⁷ The man answered, “It is written: *You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength and with all your mind. And you shall love your neighbor as yourself.*” ²⁸ Jesus replied, “What a good answer! Do this and you shall live.” ²⁹ The man wanted to justify his question, so he asked, “Who is my neighbor?”

Dt 6:5; Lev 19:18; Mt 5:43

³⁰ Jesus then said, “There was a man going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him, beat him and went off, leaving him half-dead.

³¹ It happened that a priest was going along that road and saw the man, but passed by on the other side.

³² Likewise a Levite saw the man, and passed by on the other side. ³³ But a Samaritan also was going that way; and when he came upon the man, he was moved with compassion.

³⁴ He went over to him, and cleaned his wounds with oil and wine, and

Is 1:6

Samaritan stopped by in spite of it being a dangerous place, how he paid for the expenses and promised to take care of whatever else might be necessary. Instead of just ‘being charitable’ he took unconditional and uncalculated risks for a stranger.

On one occasion, Martin Luther King pointed out that love is not satisfied with comforting those who suffer: “To begin with, we must be the good Samaritan to those who have fallen along the way. This, however, is only the beginning. Then, some day we will necessarily have to realize that the road to Jericho must be made in such a way that men and women are not constantly beaten and robbed while they are traveling along the paths of life.”

With this example, Jesus also makes us see that, many times, those who seem to be religious officials, or who believe they fulfill the law, are incapable of loving. It was a Samaritan, considered a heretic by the Jews, who took care of the wounded man.

For the Jews, neighbors were the members of Israel, their own people, dignified by sharing the same religion; in fact, this familial relationship came from “flesh and blood.” For Jesus, true love leads one to give up any discrimination.

wrapped them in bandages. Then he put him on his own mount, and brought him to an inn, where he took care of him.

³⁵The next day, he had to set off; but he gave two silver coins to the innkeeper, and said, "Take care of him, and whatever you spend on him, I will repay when I return."

³⁶Jesus then asked, "Which of these three, do you think, made himself neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" ³⁷The teacher of the law answered, "The one who had mercy on him." And Jesus said, "Then go and do the same."

Martha and Mary

• ³⁸As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he entered a village, and a woman called Martha welcomed him to her house. ³⁹She had a

sister named Mary, who sat down at the Lord's feet to listen to his words. ⁴⁰Martha, meanwhile, was busy with all the serving, and finally she said, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do all the work? Tell her to help me!"

⁴¹But the Lord answered, "Martha, Martha, you worry and are troubled about many things, ⁴²whereas only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen the better part, and it will not be taken away from her."

Lord, teach us to pray

(Mt 6:9; 7:7)

11 • ¹One day, Jesus was praying in a certain place; and when he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples." ²And Jesus said to them, "When you pray, say this:

1Cor
7:35;
Mt 6:33;
Lk 12:31;
Jn 6:27;
Acts 6:2

5:33

Mt 6:
9-13;
Lk 14:36;
Gal 4:6

Jn 11:1;
12:1

• ³⁸. Many things seem to be necessary in a family: cleaning, preparing meals, looking after the children. If there is no time to listen to others, what is life worth? Perhaps we do many things in the service of God and our neighbor; *only one thing* nevertheless is necessary for us all: being available for Jesus when he is present.

Martha is working and worrying and does not have time to be with Jesus. Jesus is peace and the person who does not attend to him in peace does not receive him. There is a way of serving and working feverishly which leaves us empty, whether it is at home or in the community; instead Jesus wants us to find him in our daily work.

Our prayer can also be a way of fidgeting like Martha: when we fret in saying prayers, when we use a lot of words to present our worries to the Lord a hundred times over; when the person responsible for the celebration becomes nervous and overly concerned about the perfection of the singing or the homily.

To pray is to take the time to listen, to meditate in silence on the work of God, it is to slow our desires, so as to pay attention only to God, secretly present, and slip into his will.

How strange that in some non-Christian religions, people learn to bring their minds to peace and silence and reach true serenity. Meanwhile, we enter prayer with our concerns and do not let go of them until the prayer is ended.

Mary sat down at the Lord's feet (v. 39). It is

the traditional attitude of the disciple, at the feet of her Master. Surely Jesus was not continually teaching, but being himself the word of God, he brought God to all that he touched. Mary felt it was good to be there and she was aware that her presence was not to displease Jesus.

Mary has chosen the better part (v. 42). She followed only her instinct, but Jesus sees more: he will not be there much longer, and in any case his presence among us is always brief. Mary has been able to take hold of these brief moments when Jesus could be hers, and she is his while listening to him.

If the Mary in this episode were the same as Mary of Magdala who accompanied Jesus (Lk 8:2) we could imagine the following:

Mary is among the disciples who, along with Jesus, are received by Martha, her sister or "relative". Mary is not in the least concerned about preparing the food and Martha complains. Jesus then praises Mary, not only because she is listening to him, but also because she had already decided to follow him. Like the apostles, Mary has chosen the better part.

• **11.1** The apostles already knew how to pray and they prayed in common, as all the Jews did, in the synagogue and at key times during the day. Yet, in living close to Jesus they discovered a new way to live in close fellowship and they felt a need to address the Father differently. Jesus waited for them to ask him to teach them how to pray. See Matthew 6:9.

Father, may your name be held holy,

may your kingdom come;

Mt 6:34 ³give us, each day, the kind of bread we need,

Jas 1:13 ⁴and forgive us our sins; for we also forgive all who do us wrong; and do not bring us to the test.”

• ⁵Jesus said to them, “Suppose one of you has a friend, and goes to his house in the middle of the night and says, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves, ⁶for a friend of mine who is traveling has just arrived, and I have nothing to offer him.’ ⁷Maybe your friend will answer from inside, ‘Don’t bother me now; the door is locked, and my children and I are in bed, so I can’t get up and give you anything.’ ⁸But I tell

18:4

you, even though he will not get up and attend to you because you are a friend, yet he will get up because you are a bother to him, and he will give you all you need.

⁹And so I say to you, ‘Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. ¹⁰For the one who asks receives, and the one who searches finds, and to him who knocks the door will be opened.

Mt 7: 7-11; Jn 14: 13-14

¹¹If your child asks for a fish, will you give him a snake instead? ¹²And if your child asks for an egg, will you give him a scorpion? ¹³If you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him.”

• 5. Jesus urges us to ask with perseverance without ever getting tired of asking but, rather, “tiring” God. God will not always give us what we ask for, nor in the way we ask, since we do not know what is good for us. He will give us a holy spirit, or a clearer vision of his will and, at the same time, the courage to follow it.

Knock and it will be opened to you (v. 9). A page from Father Molinie is a commentary on this verse. “If God does not open up at once, it is not because he enjoys making us wait. If we must persevere in prayer, it is not because we need a set number of invocations, but rather because a certain quality, a certain way of prayer is required. If we were able to have that at the beginning, our prayer would be heard immediately.

“Prayer is the groaning of the Holy Spirit in us as Saint Paul says. Yet, we need repetition for this groaning to open a path in our stony heart, just as the drop of water wastes away the hardest rocks. When we have repeated the Our Father and the Hail Mary with perseverance, one day we can pray them in a way that is in perfect harmony with God’s will. He himself was waiting for this groaning, the only one which can move him since, in fact, it comes from his own heart.

“As long as we have not played this note, or rather, drawn it from within, God cannot be conquered. It is not that God defends himself since he is pure tenderness and fluidity, but as long as there is nothing similar in us, the current cannot pass between him and us. Man gets tired of praying, yet if he perseveres instead of losing heart, he will gradually let go of his pride until being exhausted and overcome, he obtains much more than he could have wished for.”

PETITIONS—THE SAINTS

Jesus invites us to ask with perseverance: persevering petitions cease being self-centered and become prayer, that is, they lift us up and bring us closer to God.

What about asking the saints? We must admit that, very often, the person who begs from the saints takes a road opposed to real prayer. Such a person is not interested in discovering God’s mercy, but in obtaining some favor. She does not care whom she addresses as long as she finds an efficient and automatic dispenser of benefits. So begins the search for saints, shrines and devotions.

The Church is a family. Just as we ask our friends to pray for us, so too and much more should we ask our brothers and sisters, the saints. No one will criticize us if, at times, we show our confidence in their intercession, especially the intercession of those whom we admire more because we know their lives and their deeds. This “petition” to the saints should not, however, be confused with perseverance in asking, which introduces us into God’s mystery. Only Mary, the mother of God can accompany us in that prayer because God made her our mother; because he deposited in her all the compassion he has for us; and because he united her to himself in such a way that when we look at her, we always find the living presence of God.

• 14. See commentary on Mark 3:22 and Matthew 12:23.

By the finger of God (v. 20). In Exodus 8:15 the same expression is used to designate the power of God working miracles.

Jesus and Beelzebul*(Mk 3:22; Mt 12:23; Mk 4:21; 9:40)*Mt 12:
22-29;
Mk 3:
22-27;
Mt 9:
32-34

• ¹⁴One day, Jesus was driving out a demon, which was mute. When the demon had been driven out, the mute person could speak, and the people were amazed. ¹⁵Yet some of them said, "He drives out demons by the power of Beelzebul, the chief of the demons." ¹⁶Others wanted to put him to the test, by asking him for a heavenly sign.

Mt 16:1;
Mk 8:11;
Lk 11:29

¹⁷But Jesus knew their thoughts, and said to them, "Every nation divided by civil war is on the road to ruin, and will fall. ¹⁸If Satan also is divided, his empire is coming to an end. How can you say that I drive out demons by calling upon Beelzebul? ¹⁹If I drive them out by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons drive out demons? They will be your judges, then.

8:15;
Lk 17:21

²⁰But if I drive out demons by the finger of God; would not this mean that the kingdom of God has come upon you? ²¹As long as a man, strong and well armed, guards his house, his goods are safe. ²²But when a stronger man attacks and overcomes him, the challenger takes away all the weapons he relied on, and disposes of his spoils.

• 23. *Whoever is not with me...* This phrase seems to contradict Luke 9:50: *Who is not against you is for you.* In fact, in Luke 9:50 Jesus admits that his spiritual family goes much beyond the visible group of his disciples: those who, without belonging to the church, work for the same goals, must be considered as friends.

In Luke 11:23, on the other hand, Jesus speaks of people who refuse to stand with him and his message and who want to remain uncommitted: they do not join him, and later they will criticize him.

• 24. The Jews believed that evil spirits preferred to live in the desert or, rather, that God had banished them there (Tb 8:3). Here Jesus is speaking of people who only believe for a while because they do not repent enough of their past sins. They enjoyed listening to the word, but they did not take the costly measures that would

• ²³Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me, scatters. Mt 12:30;
Lk 9:50

• ²⁴When the evil spirit goes out of a person, it wanders through dry lands, looking for a resting place; and finding none, it says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' ²⁵When it comes, it finds the house swept and everything in order. ²⁶Then it goes to fetch seven other spirits, even worse than itself. They move in and settle there, so that the last state of that person is worse than the first." Mt 12:
43-45;
Lk 4:36

• ²⁷As Jesus was speaking, a woman spoke from the crowd and said to him, "Blessed is the one who gave you birth and nursed you!" ²⁸Jesus replied, "Truly blessed are those who hear the word of God, and keep it as well." 8:21;
1:45;
2:19;
Rev 1:3

• ²⁹As the crowd increased, Jesus spoke the following words: "People of the present time are troubled people. They ask for a sign, but no sign will be given to them except the sign of Jonah. ³⁰As Jonah became a sign for the people of Nineveh, so will the Son of Man be a sign for this generation. ³¹The Queen of the South will rise up on Judgment Day with the people Mt 12:
38-42;
Lk 12:
54-56;
Mt 16:4;
Mk 8:11;
Jn 6:
30-31;
1Cor
1:22
Jon 3
1K 10:1

have allowed them to heal the root of evil. See commentary on Matthew 12:43.

• 27. *Blessed is the one who gave you birth!* This woman envies the mother of Jesus and is full of admiration for his way of speaking. She is mistaken if she thinks that Jesus' relatives can be proud on his account, and she is wasting her time if she admires his words instead of making them her own. So Jesus turns her towards the Father, whose word he gives, and to herself, whom God invites to the family of his sons and daughters.

As for Mary, the mother of Jesus, the one who believed (1:45), she kept all the words and deeds of the Lord in her heart (Lk 2:51).

• 29. The Ninevites, being sinners, received no other divine sign than the coming of Jonah, who invited them to repent. Jesus' contemporaries

of these times and accuse them, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and here, there is greater than Solomon.

Jon 3:1 ³²The people of Nineveh will rise up on Judgment Day with the people of these times and accuse them, for Jonah's preaching made them turn from their sins, and here, there is greater than Jonah.

Mt 5:15; Mk 4:21; Lk 8:16 ³³You do not light a lamp to hide it; rather, you put it on a lamp stand, so that people coming in may see the light.

Mt 6: 22-23 ³⁴Your eye is the lamp of your body. If your eye sees clearly, your whole person benefits from the light; but if your eyesight is poor, your whole person is without light. ³⁵So be careful, lest the light inside you become darkness. ³⁶If your whole person receives the light, having no part that is dark, you will become light, as when a lamp shines on you."

Woe to you, Pharisees!
(Mt 23:13)

7:36; 14:1 • ³⁷As Jesus was speaking, a Pharisee asked him to have a meal with him. So he went and sat at table. ³⁸The Pharisee then wondered why Jesus did not first wash his hands before

dinner. ³⁹But the Lord said to him, "So then, you Pharisees, you clean the outside of the cup and the dish, but inside yourselves you are full of greed and evil. ⁴⁰Fools! He who made the outside, also made the inside. ⁴¹But according to you, by the mere giving of alms everything is made clean.

Mt 23: 25-26

⁴²A curse is on you, Pharisees! To the temple you give a tenth of all, including mint and rue and other herbs, but you neglect justice and the love of God. These ought to be practiced, without neglecting the other obligations. ⁴³A curse is on you, Pharisees, for you love the best seats in the synagogues and to be greeted in the marketplace. ⁴⁴A curse is on you, for you are like tombstones of the dead which can hardly be seen; people don't notice them, and make themselves unclean by stepping on them."

Mt 23:23; Lk 18:12; Dt 14:22

Mt 23: 6-7; Mk 12: 38-39; Lk 20:46; Mt 23:27

⁴⁵Then a teacher of the law spoke up and said, "Master, when you speak like this, you insult us, too." ⁴⁶And Jesus answered, "A curse is on you also, teachers of the law. For you prepare unbearable burdens and load them on the people, while you yourselves do not move a finger to help them. ⁴⁷A curse is on you, for you

Mt 23:4

Mt 23: 29-31; Lk 7:30; 13:33

believe they are "good" because they belong to the people of God, and they do not realize that the hour has come for them to repent as well.

The people of Nineveh will rise up with these people and accuse them (v. 32). Jesus again uses the traditional image of collective judgment where each one excuses himself by pointing out that others have done worse. This image retains a deep truth: all that God has given to each one of us should produce fruits for all humanity.

- 37. See commentary on Matthew 23.

Scripture does not demand these ritual purifications that Mark also mentions in 7:3, but the teachers of Jesus' time insisted that they were necessary. Jesus rebels against these new religious obligations. Why do they not pay more attention to inner purification?

Then we read about the reproaches Jesus addressed to the Pharisees on various occasions. If Luke like Matthew has kept these very hard

words of Jesus, it was perhaps a reminder that the Gospel goes much further than the vision of the Pharisees, so concerned, as they claimed, for the service of God. Some of them were part of the first Christian community, and were influential (Acts 15:5). Doubtless, the hostile attitude adopted by the party of the Pharisees in the following years accounts for the remembrance of these reproaches. There are surely others and deeper reasons for the many warnings we read in Scripture about Pharisees.

Entering the new Covenant is a free gift from God. It is also a gift from God to possess a good knowledge of Christian doctrine, or exercise a special ministry in the Church, or belong to a Christian group committed for their faith. Nevertheless there is always the danger to behave as an elite group, thus losing the true humility that should lead us to occupy the last places, where we really should be.

build monuments to the prophets your ancestors killed. ⁴⁸So you approve and agree with what your ancestors did. Is it not so? They got rid of the prophets, and you build monuments to them!

Mt 23: 34-36 • ⁴⁹For that reason the wisdom of God also said: I will send prophets and apostles and these people will kill and persecute some of them. ⁵⁰But the present generation will have to answer for the blood of all the prophets that has been shed since the foundation of the world, ⁵¹from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who was murdered between the altar and the Sanctuary. Yes, I tell you, the people of this time will have to answer for them all.

Gen 4:8; 24: 20-22 ⁵²A curse is on you, teachers of the law, for you have taken the key of knowledge. You yourselves have not entered, and you prevented others from entering.”

Mt 23:13 ⁵³As Jesus left that place, the teachers of the law and the Pharisees began to harass him, ⁵⁴asking him endless questions, setting traps to catch him in something he might say.

Open and fearless speech

(*Mk 3:28; Mt 10:19; 12:31; Mk 8:38*)

Mt 16: 6, 12; Mk 8:15 **12** • ¹Meanwhile, such a numerous crowd had gathered that they

crushed one another. Then Jesus spoke to his disciples in this way,

“Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. ²Nothing is covered that will not be uncovered; or hidden, that will not be made known. ³Whatever you have said in darkness will be heard in daylight, and what you have whispered in hidden places, will be proclaimed from housetops.

Mt 10: 26-27; Mk 4:22; Lk 8:17; Mk 8:38 ⁴I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who put to death the body and, after that, can do no more. ⁵But I will tell you whom to fear: Fear the one who, after killing you, is able to throw you into hell. This one you must fear. ⁶Don't you buy five sparrows for two pennies? Yet not one of them has been forgotten by God. ⁷Even the hairs of your head have been numbered. Don't be afraid! Are you less worthy in the eyes of God than many sparrows?

Mt 10: 28-31; Jn 15:15; Jas 4:12 ⁸I tell you, whoever acknowledges me before people, the Son of Man will also acknowledge before the angels of God. ⁹But the one who denies me before others will be denied before the angels of God.

Mt 10: 32-33; Mk 3:38; Lk 9:26 ¹⁰There will be pardon for the one who criticizes the Son of Man, but there will be no pardon for the one who slanders the Holy Spirit.

Mt 12:32; Mk 3:29; Acts 3:17; 13:46 ¹¹When you are brought before the

• ⁴⁹. Those who, before Luke, wrote down this saying of Jesus: *I will send prophets...* (which we also read in Mt 23:34), introduced it with the formula: “Wisdom says,” which was a way of designating Jesus. When Luke placed these lines within Jesus' discourse, he forgot to take out these words. Removing them would have made the text a lot clearer.

See commentary on Matthew 23:34. Jesus states that the Pharisees and the teachers of the law will be mainly responsible for the persecution against the first Christians (against those apostles and prophets he is going to send).

The warning of Jesus is equally relevant for Christian institutions and all those who in one way or another guide the community. We too, perhaps, build a church for the “elite” who un-

consciously despise the poor and the lowly. So very quickly were the prophets paralyzed or eliminated.

You yourselves have not entered, and you prevented others from entering (v. 52). Is not this one of the reasons why so many simple people go to other churches?

• **12.1** *Nothing is hidden that will not be made known:* this could be interpreted in different ways. In these paragraphs, Jesus refers to the courageous testimony of faith. We have to speak the truth without worrying about what people will think of us. Here *hypocrisy* is attributed to those who are always trying to be diplomatic, and whose primary concern is not to lose friends.

Mk 13:11; Lk 21:12-15; Mt 24:9; Acts 4:8; 5:32

synagogues, and before governors and rulers, don't worry about how you will defend yourself, or what to say; ¹² for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you have to say."

The rich fool

• ¹³ Someone in the crowd spoke to Jesus, "Master, tell my brother to share with me the family inheritance." ¹⁴ He replied, "My friend, who has appointed me as your judge or your attorney?" ¹⁵ Then Jesus said to the people, "Be on your guard and avoid every kind of greed, for even though you have many possessions, it is not that which gives you life."

¹⁶ And Jesus continued, "There was a rich man, and his land had produced a good harvest. ¹⁷ He thought, 'What shall I do, for I am short of room to store my harvest?' ¹⁸ Alright, I know what I shall do: I will pull down my barns and I will build bigger ones, to store all this grain, which is my wealth.

¹⁹ Then I will say to myself: My friend, you have a lot of good things put by for many years. Rest, eat, drink and enjoy yourself.' ²⁰ But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be taken from you. Tell me, who shall get all you have put aside?' ²¹ This is the lot of the one who stores up riches for himself and is not wealthy in the eyes of God."

Do not worry!

(Mt 6:25)

²² Then Jesus said to his disciples, "I tell you not to worry about your life: What are we to eat? or about your body: What are we to wear? ²³ For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. ²⁴ Look at the crows: they neither sow nor reap; they have no storehouses and no barns; yet God feeds them. In so much, truly, are you different from birds! ²⁵ Which of you, for all your worrying, can add a moment to your span of life? ²⁶ And

Do not fear (v. 4): see commentary on Matthew 10:28.

The one who criticizes the Son of Man (v. 10): see commentary on Mark 3:29.

GREED—PRODUCTIVITY

• ¹³ *Who has appointed me as your judge?* Jesus does not resolve legal differences as do the teachers of the law since it was the law that decided civil and religious questions. Jesus reserves his authority for what is essential: suppressing the greed ingrained in our hearts is more important than looking at every person's right with a magnifying glass.

Avoid every kind of greed (v. 15): Jesus does not say people should be resigned to mediocrity or destitution, satisfied to have ten people sleep in the same room, and without any opportunity for education. We know that all this prevents the growth of people in awareness of their dignity and their divine vocation. Jesus does not criticize our efforts to achieve a more just society, since the whole Scripture requires it.

It is one thing to seek justice, knowing that without justice there is neither peace nor communion; it is quite another to look at what others have with the desire to share their greed. Today we clamor for justice, but tomorrow we may only seek more superfluous "necessities." Such greed will never let us rest and, what is

more, it will close the door of the kingdom on us (Mk 10:23; 1 Tim 6:8).

Possessions do not give life (v. 15). Make sure that your concern to have what you lack does not make you neglect what could give you life now.

In this regard, we should allow the poor to speak, all those brothers and sisters of ours who, though immersed in poverty, continue to be persons who live, in the strongest sense of this word. Should we pity them, or should we count them among the few who already enjoy the kingdom of God? One of the greatest obstacles preventing the liberation of people is their own greed. The day they agree to participate in powerful boycotts and not go their own way in the pursuit of advantages for one or other category, they shall begin to live as people.

What shall I do? (v. 17). The *rich man* in the parable planned for larger barns for his sole profit and Jesus condemned him. We too must consider what we should do to bring about a better distribution of the riches of the world.

The person *who is wealthy in the eyes of God* (v. 21) knows how to find happiness in the present moment. Wherever she is, she tries to create a network of social relationships through which everyone gives to others and receives from them instead of wanting and getting things in a selfish way.

Mt 6:19-21; Jas 4:13; 1Cor 15:32

Mt 6:25-33

Sir 11:19; Rev 3:17

if you are not able to control such a small thing, why do you worry about the rest?

²⁷ Look at the wild flowers: they do not spin or weave; but I tell you, even Solomon with all his wealth was not clothed as one of these flowers. ²⁸ If God so clothes the grass in the fields, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, people of little faith.

²⁹ Do not set your heart on what you are to eat and drink; stop worrying! ³⁰ Let all the nations of the world run after these things; your Father knows that you need them. ³¹ Seek, rather, his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.

• ³² Do not be afraid, little flock, for it has pleased your Father to give you the kingdom. ³³ Sell what you have and

give alms. Get yourselves purses that do not wear out, and an inexhaustible treasure in the heavens, where no thief comes and no moth destroys. ³⁴ For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

Be ready

(Mk 13:33; Mt 24:43; 6:19)

• ³⁵ Be ready, dressed for service, and keep your lamps lit, ³⁶ like people waiting for their master to return from the wedding. As soon as he comes and knocks, they will open the door to him. ³⁷ Happy are those servants whom the master finds wide-awake when he comes. ³⁸ Truly, I tell you, he will put on an apron, and have them sit at table, and he will wait on them. Happy are those servants, if he finds them awake when he comes at midnight or daybreak!

³⁹ Pay attention to this: If the master

19:8;
Acts
9:36;
10:2;
11:29

Mt 25:
1-13;
12:11

Mt 24:42

Mt 24:
43-44

Mt 6:20

Jn 10

6:30;
16:9;

A CHURCH POOR LIKE JESUS

• 32. *Do not be afraid little flock.* Nowhere in the Gospel does Jesus lead us to believe that with time most people will be converted.

We know that the non-Christian world is numerically much more important than the "Christian" world and it grows more rapidly. When large numbers in the "Christian" world give up the practice of religion, we understand that the Church is both a sign and a little flock.

Jesus asks each one of us to be detached from earthly things and he also asks the same of the flock. What matters for the church is not the building of powerful institutions nor the holding of key posts in society "for the greater glory of God." A Church which *awaits the return of the Master* is careful to be ready to pack their bags, wherever it may be, when the Lord will send them out and ask them to become missionary again.

Sell what you have and give alms (v. 33). Are ordinary people convinced that the Church has done this? Christians rejoice when their bishop and pastors condemn injustice and remind them of the rights of the working class and the marginalized. It is not enough for us to preach to others. God asks justice of the world and poverty of his Church. Our call for justice will not be heard as long as the Church does not accept for herself the whole Gospel.

It has pleased your Father to give you the kingdom: compare this with Luke 10:23 and

Matthew 16:16. The Church is in the world, this little flock that seeks what is essential.

• 35. Jesus develops the parable of the servant expecting his master's return. This servant is here contrasted with the rich of the preceding paragraph (12:13) who was only concerned about a long and comfortable life. The servant works for God.

Happy are those servants whom the master finds wide-awake (v. 37). Wide-awake, that is, concerned about tomorrow's world. Wide-awake also means being aware of the truth; we do not consent to call 'good' evil, and 'evil' good; we do not forgive ourselves for allowing evil and we are not intimidated before injustice.

The Son of Man will come at an hour you do not expect (v. 40). We should not think that this refers only to the day of death, nor should we be afraid of God's judgment if we live in his grace. Jesus tells us about the master returning from the wedding, who is so happy that he reverses the usual order and begins to serve his servants. If we have been serving God for years, how could we not reach another phase of spiritual life in which it would seem that God is concerned only in giving and feasting with us?

Peter said: (v. 41). This new paragraph is aimed at those who hold responsible positions in the Church.

My Lord delays in coming (v. 45). Those in responsible positions may betray their mission.

of the house had known at what time the thief would come, he would not have let his house be broken into.

1Thes
5:2;
Rev 3:3;
3:20;
Mk13:35

⁴⁰You also must be ready, for the Son of Man will come at an hour you do not expect.”

⁴¹Peter said, “Lord, did you tell this parable only for us, or for everyone?”

Mt 24:
45-51

⁴²And the Lord replied, “Imagine, then, the wise and faithful steward, whom the master sets over his other servants, to give them wheat at the proper time. ⁴³Fortunate is this servant if his master, on coming home, finds him doing his work. ⁴⁴Truly, I say to you, the master will put him in charge of all his property.

⁴⁵But it may be that the steward thinks, ‘My Lord delays in coming,’ and he begins to abuse the male servants and the servant girls, eating and drinking and getting drunk.

⁴⁶Then the master will come on a day he does not expect, and at an hour he doesn’t know. He will cut him off,

and send him to the same fate as the unfaithful.

⁴⁷The servant who knew his master’s will, but did not prepare and do what his master wanted, will be soundly beaten; ⁴⁸but the one who does unconsciously what deserves punishment, shall receive fewer blows. Much will be required of the one who has been given much, and more will be asked of the one who has been entrusted with more.

(Mt 10:34; 5:25; 16:2)

• ⁴⁹I have come to bring fire upon the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! ⁵⁰But I have a baptism to undergo, and what anguish I feel until it is finished!

⁵¹Do you think that I have come to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. ⁵²From now on, in one house five will be divided: three against two, and two against three.

⁵³They will be divided, father against

Mk
10:38;
Lk 3:16;
Mal 3:19;
Acts 2:3

Jn 12:27

Mt 10:34;
Jer 6:14;
8:10;
Ezk
13:10

21:16;
Mic 7:6

More often, they make the mistake of seeing only to the good functioning of the institution and they forget that Christ is coming.

God comes all the time through events that, unexpectedly, ruin our plans. Therefore, the Church must not rely too much on planning its activity: who knows what God has in store for us tomorrow? Instead the Church should see to its prayer and its availability so that the Lord will let her be in the best situation when he shakes up our little universe.

Be awake to admire, rejoice in and discover the presence of God and his blessings that enlighten our lives.

• 49. *I have come to bring fire.* Must we think of fire as referring to something precise such as love, the Gospel or the gift of the Holy Spirit? It is better to stay with the image of fire that purifies, burns all that is old, gives warmth and fosters life; fire of the judgment of God destroying all that is not surrendered to its reforming action.

Jesus comes to remake the world and to bring the jewels that will remain for eternity out of the rubble. Those who follow Jesus must participate in this work of salvation directed at a situation combining work, violence, suffering as well as great dreams wise or mad.

I have a baptism to undergo... (v. 50). Jesus is the leader and will be the first one to face death as a means of obtaining resurrection. This step, as ‘agonizing’ for Jesus as it is for us, is the baptism of fire (see Lk 3:16) that introduces us into a glorious and eternal life. It is the true baptism of which the others, baptisms of water and Spirit, are only a preparation (Rom 6:3-5).

I have come to bring division (v. 51). This is followed by words of Jesus that are so upsetting for those who expect of him a peaceful life. Jesus is a source of division among nations (see commentary on Jn 10:1-4) and social groups. Often people have tried to use religion as cement for national unity or family peace. It is true that faith is a factor in peace and understanding; but it also separates those who are truly alive from those others, be they relatives or friends, who cannot have all that is now the most important to these true believers. Many times, the wound and the scandal of this separation are so painful for them, that they turn into our persecutors.

The Gospel does not put this world on the road to an earthly paradise, but it challenges it to grow. The death of Jesus brings into full light what was hidden in hearts (Lk 2:35); likewise it reveals the lies and the violence underlying our societies, just as it revealed those which underlay the Jewish society of his time.

son and son against father; mother against daughter and daughter against mother; mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law, and daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.”

Mt 16:
2-3;
Lk 11:29

7:22;
11:20

Mt 5:
25-26

• ⁵⁴ Jesus said to the crowds, “When you see a cloud rising in the west, you say at once, ‘A shower is coming’; and so it happens. ⁵⁵ And when the wind blows from the south, you say, ‘It will be hot’; and so it is. ⁵⁶ You superficial people! You understand the signs of the earth and the sky, but you don’t understand the present times. ⁵⁷ And why do you not judge for yourselves what is fit? ⁵⁸ When you go with your accuser before the court, try to settle the case on the way, lest he drag you before the judge, and the judge deliver you to the jailer, and the jailer throw you into prison. ⁵⁹ I tell you, you

will not get out until you have paid the very last penny.”

The fig tree without fruit

13 • ¹ One day, some people told Jesus what had occurred in the temple: Pilate had had Galileans killed, and their blood mingled with the blood of their sacrifices. ² Jesus asked them, “Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered this? ³ No, I tell you. But unless you change your ways, you will all perish, as they did.

Jn 9:2

⁴ And those eighteen persons in Siloah, who were crushed when the tower fell, do you think they were more guilty than all the others in Jerusalem? ⁵ I tell you: no. But unless you change your ways, you will all perish, as they did.”

• ⁵⁴. *When you see a cloud.* The signs which are seen around Jesus are enough for everyone to understand that now is the time announced by the prophets, when people must be converted and Israel must acknowledge its Savior: tomorrow will be too late (vv. 57-59).

When you go with your accuser before the court (v. 58). In Matthew’s Gospel this refers to reconciliation between brothers and sisters. Luke, instead, uses this phrase in reference to our conversion. We are on our way to God’s judgment and it is the same as going before the authorities; therefore we must take advantage of the time given to us to straighten out our situation. We must not waste this moment when we can be saved from Judgment by believing in Christ’s message.

• **13.1** *People told Jesus...* about an uprising of Galileans in the temple court and the immediate intervention of the Roman guard stationed at a nearby fortress. They profaned the holy grounds strictly reserved for the Jews and shed blood in the Holy Place.

Those relating the story expect that Jesus will answer in a way expressing his national and religious indignation over the killing of his compatriots and the offense against God. Jesus does not choose to focus on these issues: as usual he shows that people are more absorbed in human rather than divine causes and he calls their attention to what counts: those Galilean patriots were violent men, just like the Roman soldiers who killed them. Right then, God was calling

everyone to a conversion on which their survival depended. In such a violent atmosphere there was no way out for the dominated Jewish people except through faith, because faith works through the spirit of forgiveness.

GOD’S PUNISHMENT

In this passage Jesus questions the idea we have of God’s punishment. We cannot believe in God without believing in justice. For the Greeks whose gods were capricious and not very honest, justice was a divine power superior to the gods. We always tend to make ourselves the center of the world and believe we are better than others. If misfortune falls on someone else, we think it is just, but when it is our turn, we ask: “What have I done against God that this should happen to me?”

The Gospel deals with several aspects of the question. First of all let us try to be free of a ghetto mentality (see 6:32): the evil done by our enemies is not worse than the evil we do.

The justice of God goes far beyond our justice, and is only really fulfilled in the next life (the case of Lazarus, 16:19).

The misfortune, which to us here below appears as the “punishment of God,” is no more than a sign, a pedagogical measure used by God to make us aware of our sin. And God often converts a sinner by granting him unexpected favors (see the case of Zaccheus, 19:1).

Then why is there so much about God’s punishment in the Old Testament? God’s people did not know yet an afterlife, so it was necessary

⁶And Jesus continued, “A man had a fig tree growing in his vineyard, and he came looking for fruit on it, but found none. ⁷Then he said to the gardener, ‘Look here, for three years now I have been looking for figs on this tree, and I have found none. Cut it down, why should it continue to deplete the soil?’ ⁸The gardener replied, ‘Leave it one more year, so that I may dig around it and add some fertilizer; ⁹perhaps it will bear fruit from now on. But if it doesn’t, you can cut it down.’”

The healing on a Sabbath day

• ¹⁰Jesus was teaching in a synagogue on the Sabbath, ¹¹and a crippled woman was there. An evil spirit had kept her bent for eighteen years, so that she could not straighten up at all. ¹²On seeing her, Jesus called her and said, “Woman, you are freed from your infirmity.” ¹³Then he laid his hands upon her, and immediately she was made straight and praised God.

¹⁴But the ruler of the synagogue was indignant, because Jesus had performed this healing on the Sabbath day, and he said to the people, “There are six days in which to work. Come on those days to be healed, and not on the Sabbath!”

¹⁵But the Lord replied, “You hypocrites! Everyone of you unties his ox or

his donkey on the Sabbath, and leads it out of the barn to give it water. ¹⁶And here you have a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan had bound for eighteen years. Should she not be freed from her bonds on the Sabbath?”

¹⁷When Jesus said this, all his opponents felt ashamed. But the people rejoiced at the many wonderful things that happened because of him.

Two parables

(Mt 13:31; Mk 4:30)

• ¹⁸And Jesus continued, “What is the kingdom of God like? What shall I compare it to? ¹⁹Imagine a person who has taken a mustard seed, and planted it in his garden. The seed has grown, and become like a small tree, so that the birds of the air shelter in its branches.”

²⁰And Jesus said again, “What is the kingdom of God like? ²¹Imagine a woman who has taken yeast, and hidden it in three measures of flour, until it is all leavened.”

• ²²Jesus went through towns and villages teaching, and making his way to Jerusalem. ²³Someone asked him, “Lord, is it true that few people will be saved?”

And Jesus answered, ²⁴“Do your best to enter by the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able. ²⁵When once the

to speak of God’s punishments in this life, for these people to believe in his justice. In fact God continues to give such signs both for persons and for communities. It is good to know how to recognize them, keeping in mind they are not the last word of God’s justice.

• 10. The word *untie* (v. 15) was used by the Jews to express that someone’s sin or penalty was canceled. It also meant freeing an animal from its yoke. Jesus frees the human person and invites us to follow his example.

We should not be surprised at the indignation of the chief of the synagogue. Since he had never been able to help his sick sister, he must have felt discredited by Jesus’ move. Would it

not be the same with us? It never occurred to Jesus to ask the authorities for permission to save people.

• 18. See commentary on Matthew 13:31. At the conclusion of his Galilean ministry, Jesus invites optimism: although the results are few, a seed has been sown and the kingdom of God is growing.

• 22. See commentary on Matthew 7:13. *Is it true that few people will be saved?* Jesus considered this a useless question. What should have been asked, instead, was whether Israel listened to God’s call, and if she was following the narrow road that would save her.

6:6-11;
14:1-6;
Mt 12:1

Mt 13:
31-32;
Mk 4:
30-32

Dn 4:9

Mt 13:33

Mt 7:
13-14

Mt 25:
10-12

master of the house has gone inside and locked the door, you will stand outside. Then you will knock at the door, calling, 'Lord, open to us!' But he will say to you, 'I do not know where you come from.'

Mt 7: 22-23
Ps 6:9
²⁶Then you will say, 'We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets!' ²⁷But he will reply, 'I don't know where you come from. *Away from me, all you workers of evil.*'

Mt 6: 11-12
²⁸You will weep and grind your teeth, when you see Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves left outside. ²⁹Others will sit at table in the kingdom of God, people coming from east and west, from north and south. ³⁰Some who are among the last, will be first; and some who are among the first, will be last!"

14:15; 22:16; Is 25:6
Mt 19:30; 20:16; Mk 10:31
³¹At that time some Pharisees came to Jesus and gave him this warning, "Leave this place and go on your way, for Herod wants to kill you." ³²Jesus said to them, "Go and give that fox my answer: 'I drive out demons, and I heal today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my course!' ³³Nevertheless, I must go on my way today, and tomorrow, and for a little longer; for it would not be fitting for a prophet to be killed outside Jerusalem."

Alas for you, Jerusalem

22:53; Jn 7:30; 11:47
Mt 23: 37-39
• ³⁴O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you slay the prophets and stone those

who are sent to you! How often have I tried to bring together your children, as a bird gathers her young under her wings. But you refused! ³⁵From now on, *you will be left, with your temple.* And you will no longer see me until the time when you will say, *Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!*"

Jer 12:7; Mic 3:12; Ezk 8; Ps 118:26

14 ¹One Sabbath Jesus had gone to eat a meal in the house of a leading Pharisee, and he was carefully watched. ²In front of him was a man suffering from dropsy; ³so Jesus asked the teachers of the law and the Pharisees, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?" ⁴But no one answered. Jesus then took the man, healed him, and sent him away. ⁵And he said to them, "If your lamb or your ox falls into a well on a Sabbath day, who among you doesn't hurry to pull it out?" ⁶And they could not answer.

7:36; 11:37

6:6; 13:10

Mt 12:11; Lk 13:15

The first places

• ⁷Jesus then told a parable to the guests, for he had noticed how they tried to take the places of honor. And he said, ⁸"When you are invited to a wedding party, do not choose the best seat. It may happen that someone more important than you has been invited; ⁹and your host, who invited both of you, will come and say to you, 'Please give this person your place.' What shame is yours when you take the lowest seat!"

Pro 25:6-7

People coming from east and west (v. 29) People from all nations will be converted and come into the Church while the Jewish people—for the most part—would remain outside.

• 34. See commentary on Matthew 23:37.

Note however a little difference: *until the time when you will say* (v. 35). For Luke, disciple of Paul, it is certitude: the day will come when Israel will recognize Christ (see Rom 11:25-32). For Jesus has come to save Israel, which means to give sense to its history. It will then, doubtless be the end of all other histories.

• **14.7** Here Jesus develops a biblical proverb inviting us to be modest in social gatherings (Pro 25:6-7). Such behavior befits God's children. Whatever the area of human activity may be, we should let others seek the first place, while stepping on other people as they do so. We know that what matters is not what is seen: God knows how to exalt the humble and place them where it best suits him.

Moreover, when we go from the earthly church to the kingdom of heaven, there will be changes in who occupies the first places. Someone who was pope, or bishop or a prominent

¹⁰Whenever you are invited, go rather to the lowest seat, so that your host may come and say to you, 'Friend, you must come up higher.' And this will be a great honor for you in the presence of all the other guests. ¹¹For whoever makes himself out to be great will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted."

Mt 23:12;
Lk 1:52;
18:14;
Ezk
21:31

• ¹²Jesus also addressed the man who had invited him, and said, "When you give a lunch or a dinner, don't invite your friends, or your brothers and relatives, or your wealthy neighbors. For surely they will also invite you in return, and you will be repaid. ¹³When you give a feast, invite instead the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind. ¹⁴Fortunate are you then, because they cannot repay you. You will be repaid at the resurrection of the upright."

6:32;
Sir 12:1

14:21;
6:35

A man once gave a feast

(Mt 22:1)

• ¹⁵Upon hearing these words, one of those at the table said to Jesus, "Happy are those who eat at the banquet in the kingdom of God!"

Rev
19:9

"Catholic" may count less than the little old lady who was selling newspapers.

• 12. Everyone of us seeks to be near those who are above us, since we think we benefit more from being connected with those who are superior than with those who are inferior.

Jesus' warning points to one of the main causes of injustice. We all share in the guilt when we decide with whom it is more beneficial to be associated; consequently everyone tries to climb higher, always leaving the weakest in the most isolated and helpless position.

It would be a strange sight to see public officials pay more attention to the poorly dressed, or to see the poorest areas supplied with water and power before the residential districts, or to see doctors go to the rural areas to practice.

EXCUSES

• 15. In many parts of the Old Testament there was talk of a "banquet" that God would prepare for good people, for his servants, when he would come to establish his kingdom. Jesus

¹⁶Jesus replied, "A man once gave a feast and invited many guests. ¹⁷When it was time for the feast, he sent his servant to tell those he had invited to come, for everything was ready. ¹⁸But all alike began to make excuses. The first said, 'Please excuse me. I must go and see the piece of land I have just bought.' ¹⁹Another said: 'I am sorry, but I am on my way to try out the five yoke of oxen I have just bought.' ²⁰Still another said, 'How can I come, when I've just got married?'"

Mt 22:
1-10

²¹The servant returned alone, and reported this to his master. Upon hearing his account, the master of the house flew into a rage, and ordered his servant, 'Go out quickly, into the streets and alleys of the town, and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.'

10:21;
14:13

²²The servant reported after a while, 'Sir, your orders have been carried out, but there is still room.' ²³The master said, 'Go out to the highways and country lanes, and force people to come in, to ensure that my house is full. ²⁴I tell you, none of those invited will have a morsel of my feast.'

13:28

also developed this theme many times because the banquet represents the communion of saints. The parable here is very similar to the one which Matthew relates in 22:1.

Happy are those who eat at the banquet in the kingdom of God, says the man speaking to Jesus. Perhaps he did not suspect that in order to participate in the eternal feast, it was necessary to respond then to the call from God inviting everyone to gather in his community, the church, and to build a more loving world. The one who turns away from his brothers and sisters today will not eat with others at the banquet.

We are given the reasons why those invited did not respond to the call of the Lord, when he summoned them to build a better world along with him. *I have bought a land... I just got married...* These are all good reasons. Yet financial concerns of the family must not stop our community involvement, nor prevent us from participating in the Christian assembly. Many times, those who enjoy greater cultural formation allow themselves to be paralyzed by

The cost of following Jesus

(Mt 10:37)

Mt 10:37; 16:24
18:29-30
Mt 10:38; Lk 9:23; Jn 12:26

• ²⁵ One day, when large crowds were walking along with Jesus, he turned and said to them, ²⁶ “If you come to me, unwilling to sacrifice your love for your father and mother, your spouse and children, your brothers and sisters, and indeed yourself, you cannot be my disciple. ²⁷ Whoever does not follow me, carrying his own cross, cannot be my disciple.

²⁸ Do you build a house without first sitting down to count the cost, to see whether you have enough to complete it? ²⁹ Otherwise, if you, have laid the foundation and are not able to finish it, everyone will make fun of you: ³⁰ “This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.”

³¹ And when a king wages war against another king, does he go to fight without first sitting down to consider whether his ten thousand can stand against the twenty thousand of

his opponent? ³² And if not, while the other is still a long way off, he sends messengers for peace talks. ³³ In the same way, none of you may become my disciple, if he doesn’t give up everything he has.

³⁴ However good the salt may be, if the salt has lost taste, you cannot make it salty again. ³⁵ It is fit for neither soil nor manure. Let them throw it away. Listen then, if you have ears!”

Mt 5:13; Mk 9:50

The lost sheep

(Mt 18:12)

15 ¹ Meanwhile tax collectors and sinners were seeking the company of Jesus, all of them eager to hear what he had to say. ² But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law frowned at this, muttering, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.”

Mt 9:11

³ So Jesus told them this parable:

Mt 18:12-14

• ⁴ “Who among you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, will not leave the ninety-nine in the

Ezk 34:4, 16

the needs of a “happy home” with well-educated children. If we are not very demanding with ourselves we will be soon among those in whom the thorns have choked the seed.

Bring the poor... compel them to come to my church; force them also to fulfill the role fitting to them in society. God relies on the poor and the marginalized to maintain the aspirations toward peace and justice in the world, to awaken the consciences of those “good” people who are too comfortable.

• 25. Jesus thinks about people who, after becoming enthusiastic about him and giving up their personal ambitions to dedicate themselves to the work of the Gospel, turn back to seek what ordinary people see as a more “normal” and secure life. Jesus needs disciples who commit themselves once and for all.

Why this comparison with *the king going to war*? Because the person who frees himself for the service of the Gospel is, in fact, a king to whom God will give greater rewards than anyone else would give (see Mk 10:30). He must also know that the fight is against the “owner” of this world, the devil, who will stop him with a thousand unexpected tests and traps. Had he not totally surrendered, the disciple would surely fail and be worse off than if he had not even begun.

If he doesn’t give up everything he has (v. 33). Jesus asks some people to give up their loved ones and their family problems. To all he shows that we shall never be free to answer God’s call, if we do not want to rethink our family links, our use of time and all that we sacrifice in order to live “like everyone else.”

Unwilling to sacrifice your love for your father and mother, your spouse and children... (v. 26). This is found in Matthew 10:37. Luke adds: your wife.

THE BLACK SHEEP

• 15.4 Why do the Pharisees complain? Because they are scrupulously concerned about ritual purity. In this perspective—present in the Old Testament—in a relationship between two people, the one who is unclean will contaminate the other. Since “sinners” by definition never think of purifying themselves of the hundred and one impurities of daily life, Jesus could then be considered a teacher ready to become impure at any moment. So it is that Jesus will speak of God’s mercy that has not swept away sinners from his presence.

Then again, is not there something more human in the indignation of “good” people: let everyone see the difference between the rest and us! Once more Jesus battles against the old

wilderness, and seek the lost one till he finds it? ⁵And finding it, will he not joyfully carry it home on his shoulders? ⁶Then he will call his friends and neighbors together, and say, 'Celebrate with me, for I have found my lost sheep!' ⁷I tell you, in the same way, there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one repentant sinner, than over ninety-nine decent people, who do not need to repent.

⁸What woman, if she has ten silver coins and loses one, will not light a lamp, and sweep the house in a thorough search, till she finds the lost coin? ⁹And finding it, she will call her friends and neighbors, and say, 'Celebrate with me, for I have found the

silver coin I lost!' ¹⁰I tell you, in the same way, there is rejoicing among the angels of God over one repentant sinner."

The prodigal son

• ¹¹Jesus continued, "There was a man with two sons. ¹²The younger said to his father, 'Give me my share of the estate.' So the father divided his property between them.

¹³Some days later, the younger son gathered all his belongings and started off for a distant land, where he squandered his wealth in loose living. ¹⁴Having spent everything, he was hard pressed when a severe famine broke out in that land. ¹⁵So he hired

idea of merits that have been gained and therefore worthy of God's reward.

Happy the one sheep Jesus went after, leaving the ninety-nine! Poor righteous ones who do not need God's forgiveness!

In large cities today, the church seems to be left with only one sheep. Why does she not get out, namely, let go of her income, privileges or devotions of a commercial style, to go out looking for the ninety-nine who got lost? To leave the comfortable circle of believers who have no problems, to look beyond our renewed rituals, and to be ready to be criticized just as Jesus was criticized, is the challenge today.

Who *lights the lamp*, sweeps the house and searches except God himself? Out of respect for God, the Jews of Jesus' time preferred not to name him, and they used expressions such as *the angels or heaven*.

ORIGINAL SIN

THE PRODIGAL FATHER

• 11. There are three characters in this parable: the *father*, representing God; the *older son*, the Pharisee. Who is the younger son? Is he the sinner or perhaps Man?

The *Man* wants freedom and thinks, many times, that God takes it away from him. He begins by leaving the Father, whose love he does not understand and whose presence has become a burden to him. After having wasted the heritage whose value he does not appreciate, he loses his honor and becomes the slave of others and of shameful actions (pigs were unclean animals to the Jews).

The son returns. Having become aware of his slavery, he convinces himself that God has a better destiny in mind for him, and he begins on the road back to his home. Upon returning,

he discovers that the Father is very different from the idea that he had formed of him: the father is waiting for him and runs to meet him; he restores his dignity, erasing the memory of the lost inheritance. There is a celebration of the *feast* to which Jesus referred so many times.

At last we understand that God is Father. He did not put us on earth to collect merits and rewards but to discover that we are his children. We are born sinners: from the start of our lives we are led by our feelings and the bad example of the society in which we have been raised. There is still more: as long as God does not take the initiative and reveal himself to us, we cannot think of freedom other than in terms of becoming independent of him.

God is not surprised by our wickedness since, in creating us free, he accepted the risk that we might fall. God is with all of us in our experience of good and evil, until he can call us his sons and daughters, thanks to his only Son, Jesus. Note this marvelous phrase: *I have sinned against God and before you* (v. 17). Sin goes *against Heaven*, that is, against God who is truth and holiness. But God is also the Father concerned for his son; the son has sinned before the one who draws good from evil.

Such is our God and Father, the one who creates us day after day, without our being aware of it, while we go on our way; the one who seeks sinners whom he can fill with his treasures.

The older son, the one who obeys, though with a closed heart, understands none of this. He has served with the hope of being rewarded, or at least, the hope of being seen as superior to others; and he is incapable to welcome sinners or to participate in the feast of Christ, because, in fact, he does not know how to love.

himself out to a well-to-do citizen of that place, and was sent to work on a pig farm. ¹⁶So famished was he, that he longed to fill his stomach even with the food given to the pigs, but no one offered him anything.

¹⁷Finally coming to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired workers have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! ¹⁸I will get up and go back to my father, and say to him, Father, I have sinned against God, and before you. ¹⁹I no longer deserve to be called your son. Treat me then as one of your hired servants.' With that thought in mind, he set off for his father's house.

²⁰He was still a long way off, when his father caught sight of him. His father was so deeply moved with compassion that he ran out to meet him, threw his arms around his neck and kissed him. ²¹The son said, 'Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before you. I no longer deserve to be called your son.'

²²But the father turned to his servants: 'Quick!' he said. 'Bring out the finest robe and put it on him! Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet! ²³Take the fattened calf and kill it! We shall celebrate and have a feast, ²⁴for this son of mine was dead, and has come back to life; he was lost, and is found!' And the celebration began.

²⁵Meanwhile, the elder son had been working in the fields. As he returned and approached the house, he heard the sound of music and danc-

ing. ²⁶He called one of the servants and asked what it was all about. ²⁷The servant answered, 'Your brother has come home safe and sound, and your father is so happy about it that he has ordered this celebration, and killed the fattened calf.'

²⁸The elder son became angry, and refused to go in. His father came out and pleaded with him. ²⁹The son, very indignant, said, 'Look, I have slaved for you all these years. Never have I disobeyed your orders. Yet you have never given me even a young goat to celebrate with my friends. ³⁰But when this son of yours returns, after squandering your property with loose women, you kill the fattened calf for him!'

³¹The father said, 'My son, you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. ³²But this brother of yours was dead, and has come back to life; he was lost, and is found. And for that we had to rejoice and be glad.'

The crafty steward

16 • ¹At another time Jesus told his disciples, "There was a rich man, whose steward was reported to him because of fraudulent service. ²He summoned the steward and asked him, 'What is this I hear about you? I want you to render an account of your service, for it is about to be terminated.'

³The steward thought to himself, 'What am I to do now? My master will surely dismiss me. I am not strong enough to do hard work, and I am

• **16.1** Jesus is not concerned about condemning the improper actions of the administrator, but rather points out his cleverness in providing for his future: this man was able to discover in time that friends last longer than money. In the same way, in promoting a new way of living, *the people of light* must strip money of its halo as Supreme Good. It seems that putting money in a safe place is the best way to assure our existence and our future.

On the contrary, Jesus tells us to use it and to exchange it without hesitation for something much more valuable such as bonds of mutual appreciation.

We are not owners but administrators of our wealth and we must administer it for the good of all. Money is not a bad thing as long as we use it as a means to facilitate exchanges. Jesus, however, calls it "unjust" (we use the word *filthy*) because money is not a true good (it is

ashamed to beg. ⁴I know what I will do: I must make sure that when I am dismissed, there will be people who will welcome me into their homes.'

⁵So he called his master's debtors, one by one. He asked the first debtor, 'How much do you owe my master?' ⁶The reply was, 'A hundred jars of oil.' The steward said, 'Here is your bill. Sit down quickly and write fifty.' ⁷To the second debtor he put the same question, 'How much do you owe?' The answer was, 'A hundred measures of wheat.' Then the steward said, 'Take your bill and write eighty.'

⁸The master commended the dishonest steward for his astuteness: for the people of this world are more astute, in dealing with their own kind, than are the people of light. ⁹And so I tell you: use filthy money to make friends for yourselves, so that, when it fails, these people may welcome you into the eternal homes.

¹⁰Whoever can be trusted in little things can also be trusted in great ones; whoever is dishonest in slight

matters will also be dishonest in greater ones. ¹¹So if you have been dishonest in handling filthy money, who would entrust you with true wealth? ¹²And if you have been dishonest with things that are not really yours, who will give you that wealth which is truly your own?

• ¹³No servant can serve two masters. Either he does not like the one and is fond of the other, or he regards one highly and the other with contempt. You cannot give yourself both to God and to Money."

¹⁴The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all this and sneered at Jesus. ¹⁵He said to them, "You do your best to be considered righteous by people. But God knows the heart, and what is highly esteemed by human beings is loathed by God.

• ¹⁶The time of the law and the prophets ended with John. Now the kingdom of God is proclaimed, and everyone tries to enter it by force.

¹⁷It is easier for heaven and earth

not money that makes us just before God); and because it is impossible to accumulate money without failing in trust in the Father and without hurting our neighbors.

Money is something that people acquire and lose; it does not make anyone greater. Therefore, money is not part of the *goods that are our own* (v. 12).

THE RICH

• 13. *The Pharisees, heard all this and sneered at Jesus* (v. 14). More than the other evangelists, Luke notes the incompatibility between true religion and *love of money*. The Pharisees could justify their love of money by quoting some saying from the Scripture. In fact, in the beginning the Jews saw wealth as a blessing from God. It seemed just to them that God should reward in this way those who are faithful to him when they know how to deal with the riches of this world. Then, with the passing of time, they came to see that money was more of a danger and that, often, it was the privilege of those without faith (Ps 49, Job).

Nevertheless, as soon as someone has money he is convinced that he possesses truth, and thus the Pharisees felt authorized to judge and decide

on things of God. After them, many Christians belonging to influential circles have wished to use money and power for the service of the kingdom of God and quickly established themselves as managers. Money in turn possesses those who possess it. Very soon one is ready to approve a moral order that justifies one's own privileges and forgets the Gospel values of justice, humility and poverty. In the end, it is the Church itself that is despised by those who seek God.

Why have so many people of humble origin felt inferior to the rich in the church? They got used to seeing the rich heading church organizations and accustomed to receiving the word of God from them, in spite of Jesus' warnings.

THE LAW

• 16. We are about to read three of Jesus' sayings whose only connection is their reference to the *law*. The *law* meant the laws that God had given to the Jews. Besides, *the law and the prophets* were a way the Jews used to refer to their Holy Writings that we call the Old Testament. Jesus uses this expression here to point to Old Testament times, to all that prepared for his own coming.

14:11;
18:14

19:17

12:15

Mt 6:24

11:41;
12:16-21

Mt 11:
12-13

Mt 5:18

to pass away than for a single letter of Scripture not to be fulfilled.

Mt 5:32; 19:9 ¹⁸Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery; and whoever marries a woman divorced by her husband also commits adultery.

The rich man and Lazarus

6:24 • ¹⁹Once there was a rich man who dressed in purple and fine linen and feasted every day. ²⁰At his gate lay Lazarus, a poor man covered with sores, ²¹who longed to eat just the scraps falling from the rich man's table. Even dogs used to come and lick his sores. ²²It happened that the poor man died, and angels carried him to take his place with Abraham.

Mt 15:27

For a single letter of Scripture not to be fulfilled (v. 17): that means that everything in it had its significance even though Jesus states that the decisive point has come with him. The law was needed to prepare for his coming, but it will no longer be observed in the same way as before (see Mt 5:17-20).

For Jews who observed the law and in particular for those who had followed John the Baptist, another step was needed: faith in Jesus and, by this, to *conquer the kingdom of God* (Lk 7:24). Despite appearances, it is much easier to follow religious practices, to observe laws and to fast, than it is to believe and to risk the unknown by following the crucified Jesus.

• 19. This parable deals with the worldwide gap between the rich and the inhumanly poor. There is a deadly law of money which makes the rich live separately: housing, transportation, recreation, medical care. The wall the rich man willingly built in this life becomes, after his death, an abyss that no one will be able to bridge. The one who accepts this separation will find himself on the other side forever.

A poor man named Lazarus: Jesus names the poor man, but not the rich one, thus reversing the order of the present society that treats the well to do as a person but not the ordinary worker. We also see that, on dying, Lazarus finds many friends: the angels, Abraham, the father of believers. The rich man finds neither friends nor lawyers to relieve his situation: hell is isolation.

Some people would like to know what was the rich man's sin for which he was condemned to hell. Was it that he denied some crumbs from his table to Lazarus? The Gospel does not say

The rich man also died, and was buried. ²³From the netherworld where he was in torment, the rich man looked up and saw Abraham afar off, and with him Lazarus at rest. ^{23:43}

²⁴He called out, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me, and send Lazarus, with the tip of his finger dipped in water, to cool my tongue, for I suffer so much in this fire!'

²⁵Abraham replied, 'My son, remember that in your lifetime you were well-off, while the lot of Lazarus was misfortune. Now he is in comfort, and you are in agony. ²⁶But that is not all. Between your place and ours a great chasm has been fixed, so that no one can cross over from here to you, or from your side to us.'

this. Instead it shows that the rich man did not even see Lazarus lying at his door: *Remember that in your lifetime you were well off* (v. 25).

The Lazarus of today are legion and are already at our door; they are known as third or fourth world. On a world scale it is the more advanced countries and the privileged minorities that have taken possession of the table to which all were invited: the real power, and the culture imposed by the media. The national industries and sources of employment have been destroyed by a free exchange unimpeded by any social or moral restraint. Hundreds of millions of "Lazarus" people are marginalized and rejected until they die in misery, or through violence arising from a dehumanized life.

Modern-day Lazarus are kept at a distance from the residential areas by police, dogs and barbed wires. They would like to get their fill of the crumbs that are left over from the feast, but there are few scraps falling back to the homeland, after everything is wasted on imported products or deposited in foreign banks. Lazarus lives among dogs and rubbish: he becomes a prostitute, or a pickpocket, until a premature death enables him to find someone who loves him: at the side of *Abraham and the angels*.

Meanwhile, the rich person works hard, not so much to enjoy life as to convince himself that he is right: even the Church should justify him and the separation. It is this perversion of his mind that takes him to hell, after having inspired in him hatred or contempt for all those who proclaim the demands of justice taught by *Moses and the prophets*, that is to say, by the Scriptures.

The Gospel, in its desire to save the rich as well as the poor, asks us to work with a view

²⁷The rich man implored once more, ‘Then I beg you, Father Abraham, send Lazarus to my father’s house, ²⁸where my five brothers live. Let him warn them, so that they may not end up in this place of torment.’ ²⁹Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the prophets. Let them listen to them.’ ³⁰But the rich man said, ‘No, Father Abraham; but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.’

³¹Abraham said, ‘If they will not listen to Moses and the prophets, they will not be convinced, even if someone rises from the dead.’”

Mt 18:
6-7;
Mk 9:42

17 ¹Jesus said to his disciples, “Scandals will necessarily come and cause people to fall; but woe to the one who brings them about. ²It would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a millstone around his neck. Truly, this would be better for that person, than to cause one of these little ones to fall.

Mt 18:15;
18:21-22

³Listen carefully: if your brother offends you, tell him, and if he is sorry, forgive him. ⁴And if he offends you seven times in one day, but seven times he says to you, ‘I’m sorry,’ forgive him.”

Mt 17:20;
21:21

⁵The apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith.” And the Lord said, ⁶“If you have faith, even the size of a mustard seed, you may say to this tree, ‘Be uprooted, and plant yourself in the sea!’ and it will obey you.

Mk
11:23;
4:31

⁷Who among you would say to your servant, coming in from the fields

after plowing or tending sheep, ‘Go ahead and have your dinner’? ⁸No, you tell him, ‘Prepare my dinner. Put on your apron, and wait on me while I eat and drink. You can eat and drink afterward.’ ⁹Do you thank this servant for doing what you told him to do? ¹⁰I don’t think so. And therefore, when you have done all that you have been told to do, you should say, ‘We are no more than servants; we have only done our duty.’”

The ten lepers

• ¹¹On the way to Jerusalem, Jesus passed through Samaria and Galilee, and ¹²as he entered a village, ten lepers came to meet him. ¹³Keeping their distance, they called to him, “Jesus, Master, have pity on us!” ¹⁴Jesus said to them, “Go, and show yourselves to the priests.” Then, as they went on their way, they found they were cured. ¹⁵One of them, as soon as he saw that he was cleansed, turned back, praising God in a loud voice; and ¹⁶throwing himself on his face before Jesus, he gave him thanks. This man was a Samaritan.

Lev
13:45

Lev
14:2-32

¹⁷Then Jesus asked him, “Were not all ten healed? Where are the other nine? ¹⁸Did none of them decide to return and give praise to God, but this foreigner?” ¹⁹And Jesus said to him, “Stand up and go your way; your faith has saved you.”

7:50;
8:48

The coming of the kingdom of God

(Mt 24:17)

• ²⁰The Pharisees asked Jesus when the kingdom of God was to come. He

11:20;
12:54

to removing the abyss that separates them. The time for breaking down the barrier is in this life.

• **17.11** The ten lepers were cured but only one of them was told: *Your faith has saved you* (v. 19). He was the one who responded straight from the heart. While the others were concerned about fulfilling the legal requirements, he only thought about giving thanks to God right

where the grace of God found him: such is the faith which saves and transforms us.

Among the many people asking God for healing and favors, how many will really come to love God?

• **20.** *When will the kingdom of God come?* It does not come as a revolution or the change of the seasons each year: it is at work in people

answered, “The kingdom of God is not like something you can observe, ²¹and say of it, ‘Look, here it is!’ or ‘See, there it is!’ for the kingdom of God is within you.”

²²And Jesus said to his disciples, “The time is at hand, when you will long to see one of the glorious days of the Son of Man, but you will not see it. ²³Then people will tell you, ‘Look there! Look here!’ Do not go with them, do not follow them. ²⁴As lightning flashes from one end of the sky to the other, so will it be with the Son of Man; ²⁵but first he must suffer many things, and be rejected by this generation.

²⁶As it was in the days of Noah, so will it be on the day the Son of Man comes. ²⁷In those days people ate and drank and got married; but on the day Noah entered the ark, the flood came and destroyed them all. ²⁸So it was in the days of Lot: people ate and drank, and bought and sold, and planted and built; ²⁹but on the day Lot left Sodom, God made fire and sulfur rain down from heaven, which destroyed them all. ³⁰So will it be on the day the Son of Man is revealed.

³¹On that day, if you are on the rooftop, don’t go down into the house

to get your belongings; and if you happen to be in the fields, do not turn back. ³²Remember Lot’s wife! ³³Whoever tries to save his life will lose it, but whoever gives his life will be born again.

³⁴I tell you, though two men are sharing the same bed, it might happen that one will be taken, and the other left; ³⁵though two women are grinding meal together, one might be taken and the other left.”

³⁷Then they asked Jesus, “Where will this take place, Lord?” And he answered, “Where the body is, there too will the vultures gather.”

Pray and never lose heart

18 • ¹Jesus told them a parable, to show them that they should pray continually, and not lose heart. ²He said, “In a certain town there was a judge, who neither feared God nor people. ³In the same town there was a widow, who kept coming to him, saying, ‘Defend my rights against my adversary!’ ⁴For a time he refused, but finally he thought, ‘Even though I neither fear God nor care about people, ⁵this widow bothers me so much, I will see that she gets justice; then she will stop coming and wearing me out.’”

who have received the Good News. Those who believe already enjoy the kingdom.

Then come the words of Jesus concerning the end of Jerusalem and his second coming (Mk 13:14). We should not speak about the end of the world in every time of anxiety. Jesus gives us two comparisons: the *lightning* (v. 24) which is seen everywhere and the *vultures* (v. 37) which gather without fail wherever there is a corpse. In the same way, everyone, without fail, will be aware of Christ’s return.

Yet his return will catch off guard those who are not expecting it (just as in the days of Noah). Judgment will separate the elect from the condemned—nothing separated them in daily life—from *two people working side by side*, one will be taken, the other left behind.

In Matthew 24:17 the reference to someone outside his house is connected with the end of Jerusalem, and here it means it will be necessary

to escape quickly. In the present text this has another meaning: when the end of the world comes it will be too late to worry about saving one’s life or possessions.

Where will this take place? (v. 37): foolish question as in Luke 17:20, because the Lord will not come to take his people to a geographic location. On that day, the good will be taken into the presence of God as infallibly as vultures gather around a corpse.

• **18.1** *If there is a just God, why does he not do justice?* (Ps 44:24; Heb 1; Zec 1:12; Rev 6:10). Jesus answers: Do you desire and ask for the justice of God with enough faith? He will undoubtedly do justice, but you will have to wait.

A judge who neither feared God nor people (v. 2): many people upon seeing what is unjust and absurd in life, view God this way. If we pray

Mk 13:21;
Mt 24:23;
24:26-27;
Lk 21:8;
19:11-27

9:22

Mt 24:
37-39;
Lk 12:39
Gen 7:7

Gen
19:24

Mt 24:
17-19;
Mk 13:
15-16;
Lk 21:21

Gen
19:26;
Mt 10:39;
Jn 12:25;
Lk 9:24

Mt 24:
40-41;
1Thes
4:17

Mt 24:28

Rom
1:10;
Col 1:3;
2Cor 4:1

Ps 43:1; Rev 6: 9-11; 2P 3:9

Sir 35:12; 2Thes 2:3; Mt 24:12; Lk 5:32; 15:7

⁶And Jesus said, "Listen to what the evil judge says. ⁷Will God not do justice for his chosen ones, who cry to him day and night, even if he delays in answering them? ⁸I tell you, he will speedily do them justice. But, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

The Pharisee and the tax collector

16:15; Pro 21:2

• ⁹Jesus told another parable to some people, fully convinced of their own righteousness, who looked down on others: ¹⁰"Two men went up to the temple to pray; one was a Pharisee, and the other a tax collector. ¹¹The Pharisee stood by himself, and said, 'I thank you, God, that I am not like other people, grasping, crooked, adulterous, or even like this tax collector.

Mt 9:14

¹²I fast twice a week, and give a tenth of all my income to the temple.'

¹³In the meantime the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'O God, be merciful to me, a sinner.'

¹⁴I tell you, when this man went back to his house, he had been reconciled with God, but not the other. For whoever makes himself out to be great will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be raised up."

¹⁵People even brought little children to Jesus to have him touch them; but seeing it, the disciples rebuked these people. ¹⁶So Jesus called the children to him and said, "Let the children come to me and don't stop them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such

14:11; Mt 23:12; 6:1

Mt 19: 13-15; Mk 10: 13-16; Lk 9:47

with perseverance, we will gradually discover that things are not as absurd as they seem, and we will come to recognize the face of the God who loves us in what happens.

Who cry to him day and night (v. 7). Jesus, who so insists on our responsibility to the world, is the one who also urges us to call on God day and night. Why are people so readily divided (or why do we divide them) into prayers and doers?

Will he find faith on earth? (v. 8). Jesus confirms an opinion already found among the Jews of his days. In the last days before Judgment, the power of evil will be so great that *in many love will grow cold* (Mt 24:12).

In fact, with the first coming of Jesus, the Old Testament ended in seeming failure; few had believed in him and, later, most were influenced by the confusion, the false saviors and the violence which precipitated the fall of the nation forty years after the death of Jesus.

• 9. *The Pharisees were very determined to fulfill God's law; they fasted often and did many works of mercy. Unfortunately, many of them took the credit for such a model life: they thought they no longer needed God's mercy because their good deeds would force him to reward them.*

On the other hand the Publican recognizes he is a sinner towards God and people: all he can do is to ask pardon. He is in the truth and in the grace of God when he goes home.

Jesus speaks for those who are *fully convinced of their own righteousness* (v. 9). The text says precisely: "their justice" which contrasts with "he was justified" in verse 14. Scrip-

ture calls *just* those whose life is in order before God because they observe his law; so in Matthew 1:19 and Luke 1:6 Joseph and Zachary are called just. In many places, however, great importance is given to the exterior acts of the just man, and for the Pharisees as for any religious group that is at the same time a party or a social group, the members of the group considered themselves as good people.

Jesus invites us to humility if we want to acquire the only righteousness which counts in God's eyes, for it is not a matter of acquiring it by means of merit and religious practices, but receiving it rather as a gift from God destined for those who want his pardon and holiness. It is not by chance that this parable is in the Gospel of Luke, disciple of Paul; for Paul, the converted Pharisee, constantly dwells on what is the true justice of a Christian. What God wants for us is so great that we could never buy it with religious practices or good works: but to those who trust him God gives all (see Rom 4).

Neither is it by chance that Jesus offers us a Pharisee who only knows how to compare himself with another person in order to find himself better than the other. It is there that the devil waits for all, and for all Christian groups, who pride themselves on having discovered a way to conversion. Wherever we see a divided Church, whether because of political or religious causes, it is a good guess that people favor such a situation because it allows comparison with others. It is difficult to belong to a group of "the converted" without looking with charitable compassion on those Christian brethren who have not taken the same road.

10:21 as these. ¹⁷Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it.”

Jesus and the rich ruler

(Mk 10:17; Mt 19:16)

Mt 19: 16-29; Mk 10: 17-30; 10:25-28; Mt 19:20; 20:12-16; Dt 5: 16-20

¹⁸A ruler asked Jesus, “Good master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” ¹⁹Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. ²⁰You know the commandments: *Do not commit adultery; do not kill; do not steal; do not accuse falsely; honor your father and your mother.*” ²¹And the man said, “I have kept all these commandments from my youth.”

²²Then Jesus answered, “There is still one thing you lack. Sell all you have, and give the money to the poor, and you will have riches in Heaven. And then come, follow me!” ²³When he heard these words, the man became sad, for he was very rich. ²⁴Jesus noticing this said, “How hard it is for people who have riches to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle, than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.” ²⁶The bystanders said, “Who then can be saved?” ²⁷And Jesus replied, “What is impossible for human beings is possible for God.”

1:37 Acts 4:32

²⁸Then Peter said, “We left everything we had and followed you.”

Mt 19:10

²⁹Jesus replied, “Truly, I tell you, whoever has left home or wife, or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, ³⁰will receive much more in this present time, and eternal life in the world to come.”

Mt 20: 17-19; Mk 10: 32-34; Lk 9:22; 12:50; 13:32; 17:25

³¹Jesus then took the Twelve aside, and told them, “Now we are going

up to Jerusalem, and everything the Prophets have written about the Son of Man will be fulfilled. ³²He will be delivered up to the foreign power. People will mock him, insult him, and spit on him. ³³After they have scourged him, they will kill him, but he will be raised on the third day.” ³⁴The apostles could make nothing of this; the meaning of these words remained a mystery to them, and they did not understand what he said.

The blind man of Jericho

(Mk 10:46; Mt 20:29)

Mt 20: 29-34; Mk 10: 46-52

³⁵When Jesus drew near to Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the road, begging. ³⁶As he heard the crowd passing by, he inquired what was happening, ³⁷and they told him that Jesus of Nazareth was going by. ³⁸Then he cried out, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” ³⁹The people in front of him scolded him. “Be quiet!” they said, but he cried out all the more, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”

⁴⁰Jesus stopped, and ordered the blind man to be brought to him; and when he came near, Jesus asked him, ⁴¹“What do you want me to do for you?” And the man said, “Lord, that I may see!” ⁴²Jesus said, “Receive your sight, your faith has saved you.” ⁴³At once the blind man was able to see, and he followed Jesus, giving praise to God. And all the people who were there also praised God.

Jesus and Zaccheus

19 • ¹Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through it. ²A man named Zaccheus lived there. He was a tax collector and a wealthy

punishment would God send to him? Instead of punishing him, God comes to his home.

Jesus shows that he is guided by the Spirit when he spots Zaccheus among so many people,

THE POWER OF JESUS

• **19.1** Everyone in Jericho was pointing a finger at Zaccheus: how could a man involved in dirty deals, (like he was) be converted? What

man. ³He wanted to see what Jesus was like, but he was a short man and could not see him because of the crowd. ⁴So he ran ahead and climbed up a sycamore tree. From there he would be able to see Jesus, who was going to pass that way. ⁵When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zaccheus, come down quickly, for I must stay at your house today." ⁶So Zaccheus climbed down and received him joyfully.

⁷All the people who saw it began to grumble, and said, "He has gone as a guest to the house of a sinner."

⁸But Zaccheus spoke to Jesus, "Half of what I own, Lord, I will give to the poor, and if I have cheated anyone, I will pay him back four times as much."

⁹Looking at him Jesus said, "Salvation has come to this house today, for he is also a true son of Abraham.

¹⁰The Son of Man has come to seek and to save the lost."

The ten pounds

(Mt 25:14)

• ¹¹Jesus was now near Jerusalem, and the people with him thought that God's reign was about to appear. So

as they were listening to him, Jesus went on to tell them a parable. ¹²He said, "A man of noble birth went to a distant country in order to be crowned king, after which he planned to return home. ¹³Before he left, he summoned ten of his servants and gave them ten pounds of silver. He said, 'Put this money to work until I get back.' ¹⁴But his compatriots, who disliked him, sent a delegation after him with this message, 'We do not want this man to be our king.'

¹⁵He returned, however, appointed as king. At once he sent for the servants, to whom he had given the money, to find out what profit each had made. ¹⁶The first came in, and reported, 'Sir, your pound of silver has earned ten more pounds of silver.'

¹⁷The master replied, 'Well done, my good servant! Since you have proved yourself faithful in a small matter, I can trust you to take charge of ten cities.' ¹⁸The second reported, 'Sir, your pound of silver earned five more pounds of silver.' ¹⁹The master replied, 'And you, take charge of five cities!'

and when he understands at that very moment, that on that day he has come to Jericho, above all, to save a rich man.

Zaccheus knows that he is the object of envy and hatred. He is not all bad: although his hands are dirty, he has not lost the sense of what is good and he admires the prophet Jesus secretly. God is able to save him because of his good desires. The favor Jesus does to him compels him to manifest the human and good qualities hidden in him.

It is said that he received Jesus joyfully: a joy that shows the transformation that has taken place in him. After that, he will have no trouble in rectifying his evil deeds. Then he will share and reestablish justice.

The people are indignant, and in that they imitate the Pharisees; they believe that Jesus should share their prejudice and even their resentment. Jesus is not a demagogue; the crowd's lack of understanding does not matter to him any more than that of the Pharisees. Once again, Jesus shows his power; he destroys evil by saving the sinner.

• 11. Galileans go to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover and Jesus goes with them. He knows that death awaits him: they, nonetheless, are convinced that he will be proclaimed king and liberator of Israel.

In his parable Jesus invites them to hold onto another hope. He will rule on *his return from a faraway land* (his own death) at the end of history. Meanwhile, his people are in charge of riches, which he has given them and which they must multiply. They should not wait in idleness for his return, since his enemies will take advantage of his absence to struggle against his influence. Jesus' servants will participate in his triumph to the degree that they have worked.

This page is closely connected with the parable of the talents (Mk 25:14). Two differences are pointed out in what follows.

For one thing, in the introduction and in the conclusion Jesus refers to his country's political life. The country depended on the Roman Empire and its kings had to be acceptable to the Roman government that protected them.

On the other hand, the parable insists on

Mk13:34

Ps 2:2;
Jn 19:15

5:30;
7:34

2S 12:6

4:21;
13:16;
Mt 21:31;
Jn 8:39

Ezk
34:16

Mt 25:
14:30

Rom
8:18;
2Cor
4:17

²⁰The third came in, and said, ‘Sir, here is your money, which I hid for safekeeping. ²¹I was afraid of you, for you are an exacting person: you take up what you did not lay down, and you reap what you did not sow.’

²²The master replied, ‘You worthless servant, I will judge you by your own words! So you knew I was an exacting person, taking up what I did not lay down, and reaping what I did not sow? ²³Why, then, did you not put my money on loan, so that, when I got back, I could have collected it with interest?’

²⁴Then the master said to those standing by, ‘Take from him that pound, and give it to the one with ten pounds.’ ²⁵But they objected, ‘Sir, he already has ten pounds!’

^{8:18;}
^{Mt 13:12} ²⁶The master replied, ‘I tell you, everyone who has will be given more; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away.’

^{19:43;}
^{21:20} ²⁷As for my enemies who did not want me to be their king, bring them in, and execute them right here in front me!”

Jesus enters Jerusalem

(Mk 11:1; Mt 21:1; Jn 12:12; Mt 24:2)

^{Mt 21:}
^{1-11;}
^{Mk 11:}
^{1-11;}
^{Jn 12:}
¹²⁻¹⁶ ²⁸So Jesus spoke, and then he passed on ahead of them, on his way to Jerusalem. ²⁹When he drew near to Bethphage and Bethany, close to the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples with these instructions, ³⁰“Go to the village opposite; and, as you enter it, you will find a colt tied up, that no one has yet ridden. Untie it, and bring it here. ³¹And if anyone says to you, ‘Why are you untying this colt?’ You shall say, ‘The Master needs it.’”

³²So the two disciples went and found things just as Jesus had said.

³³As they were untying the colt, the owner said to them, “Why are you untying the colt?” ³⁴And they answered, “The Master needs it.” ³⁵So they brought it to Jesus and, throwing their cloaks on the colt, they mounted Jesus on it. ³⁶And as he went along, people spread their cloaks on the road.

³⁷When Jesus came near Jerusalem, to the place where the road slopes down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of his disciples began to rejoice, and to praise God with a loud voice for all the miracles they had seen; ³⁸and they cried out, “Blessed is he who comes as king in the name of the Lord. Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heavens.”

³⁹Some Pharisees in the crowd said to him, “Master, rebuke your disciples!” ⁴⁰But Jesus answered, “I tell you, if they were to remain silent, the stones would cry out.”

⁴¹When Jesus had come in sight of the city, he wept over it, ⁴²and said, “If only today you knew the ways of peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. ⁴³Yet days will come upon you, when your enemies will surround you with barricades, and shut you in, and press on you from every side. ⁴⁴And they will dash you to the ground and your children with you, and not leave stone upon stone within you, for you did not recognize the time and the visitation of your God.”

⁴⁵Then Jesus entered the temple area and began to drive out the merchants. ⁴⁶And he said to them, “God says in the Scriptures, *My house shall be a house of prayer*, but you have turned it into a *den of robbers!*”

⁴⁷Jesus was teaching every day

God’s justice: everyone receives according to his merit. Heavenly happiness is not something that can be distributed equally. Everyone will know God and will share his riches to the degree that

one has been able to love throughout life. Every step we take by way of obedience, sacrifice and humility, develops our capacity to receive God and to be transformed by him.

1K 1:
33-34

Ps
118:26;
Lk 2:14

Mt 21:
14-16

Acts
2:11

13:34-
35

Mt 21:
12-13;
Mk 11:
15-17;
Jn 2:
14-16

Is 56:7;
Jer 7:11

21:37;
22:53;
Jn 18:20;
Mk 11:18

in the temple. The chief priests and teachers of the law wanted to kill him, and the elders of the Jews as well, ⁴⁸but they were unable to do anything, for all the people were listening to him and hanging on his words.

Mt 21:38;
Mt 22:33

20 ¹One day, when Jesus was teaching the people in the temple and proclaiming the good news, the chief priests and the teachers of the law came with the elders of the Jews, ²and said to him, “Tell us, what right have you to act like this? Who gives you authority to do all this?”

Mt 21:
23-27;
Mk 11:
27-33

³Jesus said to them, “I also will ask you a question. Tell me: ⁴was John’s preaching and baptism a work of God, or was it merely something human?” ⁵And they argued among themselves, “If we answer that it was a work of God, he will say, ‘Why then did you not believe him?’ ⁶But if we answer that it was merely something human, the people will stone us, for they all regard John as a prophet.” ⁷So they answered Jesus, “We don’t know,” ⁸and Jesus said to them, “Neither will I tell you what right I have to act like this.”

7:39;
Mt 21:32

The murderous tenants

(Mk 12:1; Mt 21:33)

• ⁹Jesus went on to tell the people this parable, “A man planted a vineyard, and let it out to tenants, before going abroad for a long time.

Mt 21:
33-46;
Mk 12:
1-12;
Is 5:2

¹⁰In due time, he sent a servant to the tenants to get some fruit from the vineyard. But the tenants beat him, and sent him back empty-handed. ¹¹Again the man sent another servant; they beat him as well, and treated him

shamefully, and finally sent him back empty-handed. ¹²The owner then sent a third servant, but him they injured and threw out of the vineyard.

¹³The owner then thought, ‘What shall I do? I will send my beloved son; surely they will respect him.’ ¹⁴However the tenants, as soon as they saw him, said to one another, ‘This is the one who will inherit the vineyard. Let us kill him, and the property will be ours!’ ¹⁵So they threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. ¹⁶Now, what will the owner of the vineyard do to them? He will come and destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to others.”

Mt 3:17

On hearing this, some said, “God forbid!” ¹⁷Then Jesus looked directly at them and said, “What does this text of the Scriptures mean: The stone which the builders rejected has become the keystone? ¹⁸Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, and anyone that stone falls on will be crushed.”

Heb
13:12

Ps
118:22;
Is 28:16;
Acts
4:11

¹⁹The teachers of the law and the chief priests would have liked to arrest him right there, for they realized that Jesus meant this parable for them, but they were afraid of the crowd. ²⁰So they left, looking for another opportunity.

Is 8:14;
Dn 2:45;
Rom
9:33;
1P 2:8

19:48;
Acts
5:26

Paying taxes to Caesar

(Mk 12:13; Mt 22:15)

They sent spies who pretended to be honest men, in order to trap him in his words, and deliver him to the authority and power of the Roman governor. ²¹They said to him, “Master, we know that you are true in your words and in your teaching, and your

Mt 22:
15-22;
Mk 12:
13-17

Gal 2:6;
Col 3:25;
Eph 6:9

• **20.9** How many confrontations between Jesus and the leaders of Jerusalem! In 20:19, Luke says: *They were afraid of the crowd*. Is it a fact that the Jews of that time, their teachers of the law and their priests were any worse than we are today? Or are we mistaken when

we dream of a Church without persecutions and controversies?

Not all of us must experience the oppositions Jesus met. He chose for himself this crucifying way because it is the highway to God.

answers do not vary according to who is listening to you; for you truly teach the way of God. Tell us: ²²are we allowed to pay taxes to Caesar or not?"

²³But Jesus saw through their cunning and said, ²⁴"Show me a silver coin. Whose image is this, and whose title does it bear?" They answered, "Caesar's." ²⁵And Jesus said to them, "Return to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God what is God's."

²⁶So they were unable to trap him in what he said publicly; they were surprised at his answer, and kept silent.

Resurrection of the dead

(Mk 12:18)

• ²⁷Then some Sadducees arrived. These people claim that there is no resurrection, ²⁸and they asked Jesus this question, "Master, in the law Moses told us, 'If anyone dies leaving a wife but no children, his brother must take the wife, and any child born to them will be regarded as the child of the deceased.'²⁹ Now, there were seven brothers: the first married,

but died without children. ³⁰The second married the woman, but also died childless. ³¹And then the third married her, and in this same way all seven died, leaving no children. ³²Last of all the woman died. ³³On the day of the resurrection, to which of them will the woman be a wife? For all seven had her as a wife."

³⁴And Jesus replied, "Taking a husband or a wife is proper to people of this world, ³⁵but for those who are considered worthy of the world to come, and of resurrection from the dead, there is no more marriage. ³⁶Besides, they cannot die, for they are like the angels. They are sons and daughters of God, because they are born of the resurrection.

³⁷Yes, the dead will be raised, as ³⁸Moses revealed at the burning bush, when he called the Lord *the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob*. ³⁸For God is God of the living, and not of the dead, for to him everyone is alive."

³⁹Some teachers of the law then agreed with Jesus, "Master, you have

- 27. See commentary on Mark 12:18.

Luke has his own expressions in speaking of the resurrection in verses 34-36. It is because in those countries of Greek culture (Luke wrote for them) many people believed in the immortality of the soul as something natural. Luke clarified for them that the other life is not something natural; it is a gift of God for those who are considered worthy (v. 35) to enter it.

They too are sons and daughters of God (v. 36). Using a Hebrew expression, the text says: they too are sons of God (at that time the sons of God were the angels) because they are born of the resurrection. This resurrection is not like coming back to the life we know, it is the work of the Holy Spirit, who transforms and sanctifies those he resurrects. Therefore the resurrected are sons and daughters of God in a much more authentic way than those of this world: delivered from sin, they are reborn of God.

To him everyone is alive (v. 38). They started to become alive when God knew them and called them, and they will not disappear, since God called them from this world to bring them into his own.

Faith in the resurrection contrasts with the doctrine of transmigration that says that souls come back to life in a body and social condition that befits their merits. The cycle will continue as long as purification has not been completed. It is a powerful theory capable of enticing many people in the West.

It could be said that it is convenient and leads to irresponsibility since all could be settled. Actually, however, this is not the case with the Hindus: their moral concern is often greater than ours, for they are keen to escape from these recurring beginnings. The difference is elsewhere. There are two conceptions of a human. In one, the soul is imprisoned in a body, in the second God saves the indivisible person. The body is not a clothing for the soul, which may pass from an old person to a newly born.

That is why Christian hope awaits a resurrection, that is to say, the possibility for each one to be reborn of God in God and express oneself fully in a "glorified body."

Scripture teaches us that this present life is our only opportunity. *Humans die only once and afterward are judged* (Heb 9:27).

Rom
13:7

Mt 22:
23-33;
Mk 12:
18-27
Dt 25:5

Rom
6:10;
Gal 2:19

Mt 22:46;
Mk 12:34

spoken well.” ⁴⁰They didn’t dare ask him anything else. ⁴¹So Jesus said to them, “How can people say that the Messiah is the Son of David? ⁴²For David, himself, says in the book of Psalms, *The Lord said to my Lord: Sit at my right hand,* ⁴³until I put your enemies under your feet! ⁴⁴David, there, calls him Lord; how then can he be his Son?”

Mt 22:
41-45;
Mk 12:
35-37

Ps 110:1

11:43;
Mt 23:
6-7;
Mk 12:
38-40

• ⁴⁵Jesus also said to his disciples before all the people, ⁴⁶“Beware of those teachers of the law, who like to be seen in long robes, and love to be greeted in the marketplaces, and to take the reserved seats in the synagogues, and the places of honor at feasts. ⁴⁷While making a show of long prayers, they devour the property of widows. They will receive a very severe sentence!”

The widow’s mite

(Mk 12:41)

Mk 12:
41-44

21 ¹Jesus looked up and saw rich people putting their gifts into the treasury of the temple. ²He also saw a poor widow, who dropped in two small coins. ³And he said, “Truly, I tell you, this poor widow put in more than all of them. ⁴For all of them gave an offering from their plenty; but she, out of her poverty, gave all she had to live on.”

Signs before the destruction of Jerusalem

(Mk 13:1; Mt 24:1)

Mt 24:
1-3;
Mk 13:
1-4

• ⁵While some people were talking about the temple, remarking that it was adorned with fine stonework and rich gifts, Jesus said to them, ⁶“The

days will come when there shall not be left one stone upon another of all that you now admire; all will be torn down.” ⁷And they asked him, “Master, when will this be, and what will be the sign that this is about to take place?”

Mic 3:12;
Jer 7:
1-15;
Acts
6:14

⁸Jesus said, “Take care not to be deceived, for many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am he; the time is near at hand!’ Do not follow them. ⁹When you hear of wars and troubled times, don’t be frightened; for all these things must happen first, even though the end is not so soon.”

Mt 24:
4-14;
Mk 13:
5-13

¹⁰And Jesus said, “Nations will fight each other and kingdom will oppose kingdom. ¹¹There will be great earthquakes, famines and plagues; in many places strange and terrifying signs from heaven will be seen. ¹²Before all these things happen, people will lay their hands on you and persecute you; you will be delivered to the synagogues and put in prison, and for my sake you will be brought before kings and governors. ¹³This will be your opportunity to bear witness.

Is 19:2;
24:19;
Zec 14:4

Ezk
6:12;
Acts
11:28;
2Mac
5:2

Mt 10:
17-22;
24:9;
Jn 15:20;
16:1-2;
Acts
25:13

Acts
5:32;
13:31

¹⁴So keep this in mind: do not worry in advance about what to say, ¹⁵for I will give you words and wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict.

Jn
14:18;
15:26

¹⁶You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, by relatives and friends, and some of you will be put to death. ¹⁷But even though, because of my name, you will be hated by everyone, ¹⁸not a hair of your head will perish. ¹⁹By your patient endurance you will save your souls.

Mic 7:6

11:49;
Jn 15:18;
Lk 8:15;
12:51

12:7

Jn
17:24

• 45. *They devour the property of widows* (v. 47). Pious widows have always sought to help those who seemed to be servants of God. It is well known that they have often been exploited by unscrupulous people and by sects.

• **21.5** See commentary on Mark 13:1 and Matthew 24:1.

For a great calamity will come upon the land (v. 23). Luke foretells the destruction of the Jewish nation more clearly than Matthew and Mark do.

Until the time of the pagans is fulfilled (v. 24). Luke divides history into two ages. One corresponds to the Old Testament: that was the time when Sacred History was almost the same

Mt 24: 15-21; Mk 13: 14-19; Lk 17:31

²⁰When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that the time has come when it will be reduced to a wasteland. ²¹If you are in Judea, flee to the mountains! If you are in Jerusalem, leave! If you are outside the city, don't enter it!

²²For these will be the days of its punishment, and all that was announced in the Scriptures will be fulfilled. ²³How hard will it be for pregnant women, and for mothers with babies at the breast! For a great calamity will come upon the land, and wrath upon this people. ²⁴They will be put to death by the sword, or taken as slaves to other nations; and Jerusalem will be trampled upon by the pagans, until the time of the pagans is fulfilled.

Rom 11:25; Zac 12:3; Dn 12:7; Rev 11:2

The coming of the Son of Man

Mt 24: 29-30; Mk 13: 24-26; Is 13:10; Ezk 32:7; Is 34:4

²⁵Then there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth anguish of nations, perplexed when they hear the roaring of the sea and its waves. ²⁶People will faint with fear at the mere thought of what is to come upon the world, for the forces of the universe will be shaken. ²⁷Then, at that time, they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.

Dn 7:13

The signs of the times

Rom 8:23

²⁸So, when you see things begin to happen, stand erect and lift up your heads, for your deliverance is drawing near." ²⁹And Jesus added this

Mt 24: 32-35; Mk 13: 28-31

comparison, "Look at the fig tree, and all the trees. ³⁰As soon as their buds sprout, you know that summer is near. ³¹In the same way, when you see these things happening, know that the kingdom of God is near. ³²Truly, I tell you, this generation will not pass away, until all this has happened. ³³Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

Mt 16:28; Mk 9:1; 13:30; Lk 9:27

• ³⁴Be on your guard: don't immerse yourselves in a life of pleasure, drunkenness and worldly cares, lest that day catch you unaware, like a trap! ³⁵For, like a snare, will that day come upon all the inhabitants of the earth. ³⁶But watch at all times and pray, that you may be able to escape all that is going to happen, and to stand before the Son of Man."

Rom 13:13; 1Thes 5:3; Is 24:17

³⁷In the daytime Jesus used to teach in the temple; then he would leave the city and pass the night on the Mount of Olives. ³⁸Early in the morning the people would come to the temple to hear him.

Mt 22:33

Mt 21:17; Jn 8:1

The conspiracy against Jesus

(Mk 14:1; Mt 26:1)

22 ¹The feast of Unleavened Bread, which is called the Passover, was now drawing near, ²and the chief priests and the teachers of the law wanted to kill Jesus. They were looking for a way to do this, because they were afraid of the people. ³Then Satan entered into Judas, called Iscariot, one of the Twelve, ⁴and he went off to

Mt 26: 1-5; Mk 14: 1-2; Jn 11: 47-53; 20:19

4:13; Jn 13:2

Mt 26: 14-16;

as the history of Israel. Then, after Jesus, came the *time of the nations*. The destruction of the Jewish nation and the dispersal of its people inaugurated a new era, which would be mostly the history of the evangelization and education of the nations by the Church. We could call that period the times of the New Testament, which will end with the great crisis concluding human history.

• 34. *Be on your guard*. After speaking about the imminent end of Jerusalem (vv. 28-32), Luke

speaks of *that day* which will conclude human history with the coming of Christ, the Judge (vv. 34-36).

Be on your guard. This invitation is not only addressed to those who will know that day, but it is for everyone, throughout the history of the Church. Once more he invites us to watch and pray while the world is asleep (see Eph 6:18).

That you may be able to stand (v. 36): to avoid errors and deceit (2 Thes 2:9; 1 Thes 3:13) during the trials preceding Christ's coming. The

Mk 14: 10-11; Acts 4:1 discuss with the chief priests and the officers of the guard how to deliver Jesus to them. ⁵They were delighted and agreed to give him money; ⁶so he accepted, and from that time he waited for an opportunity to betray him without the people knowing.

Mt 26: 17-19; Mk 14: 12-16 • ⁷Then came the feast of the Unleavened Bread, in which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. ⁸So Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, "Go and get everything ready for us to eat the Passover meal." ⁹They asked him, "Where do you want us to prepare it?" ¹⁰And he said, "When you enter the city, a man will come to you carrying a jar of water. Follow him to the house he enters, ¹¹and say to the owner, 'The master asks: Where is the room where I may take the Passover meal with my disciples?' ¹²He will show you a large, furnished room upstairs, and there you will prepare for us."

¹³Peter and John went off, and having found everything just as Jesus had told them, they prepared the Passover meal.

The supper of the Lord

(Mk 14:12; Mt 26:17)

Mt 26:20; Mk 14:17; 12:14 • ¹⁴When the hour came, Jesus took his place at the table and the apostles with him. ¹⁵And he said to them, "I was eager to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; ¹⁶for, I tell you, I shall not eat it again until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God."

Mt 26:29; Mk 14:25 • ¹⁷Then they passed him a cup, and when he had given thanks, he said, "Take this, and share it among yourselves; ¹⁸for I tell you that, from now on, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." ¹⁹Jesus also took bread, and after giving thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body which is given for you. Do this

Mt 26:20; Mk 14:17; 12:14

Mt 26:29; Mk 14:25

Mt 26: 26-28; Mk 14: 22-24; 1Cor 11: 23-25; Jn 6:31

Our Father expresses the same concern. Those who are expecting the coming of the kingdom pray: do not put us to the test.

In fact, vigils and prayers do more than just prevent possible falls. When the believer and the Church are more awake, they cooperate more in the development of the divine plan and hasten the coming of the Lord.

• **22.7** *Where do you want us to prepare it?* This was the first preoccupation of pilgrims to Jerusalem: finding a house where they could eat the sacrificed lamb.

A man will come to you (v. 10). Usually women carry the water jars, and so it would be easy to identify a man with a water jar. Jesus knew that Judas was betraying him, and did not want to indicate the place of the supper ahead of time: he could have been apprehended there. So he trusted a prophetic intuition: the Father had designated the place for the last supper. It was, in fact, the home of a rich man, a disciple of Jesus in Jerusalem. This may have been the house where the apostles gathered after Jesus' death and where the Church started.

• 14. See commentary on Mark 14:12.

Jesus took his place at the table, or rather as the Gospel says, "he reclined," as was the custom at banquets of the well to do: guests would recline on sofas around the table.

It is very difficult to know whether this last supper of Jesus started with the meal of the Passover lamb and concluded with the Eucharist, or whether Jesus only celebrated the Eucharist, without having shared the Passover meal. In any case, the Gospel intends to teach us that the Eucharist will be for the Church what the Passover meal was for the people of Israel.

They passed him a cup (v. 17). The person presiding at the passover meal would take four cups which he would bless and which the participants would pass around.

I will not drink of the fruit of the vine (v. 18). Jesus recalled that, for the Jews, the Passover meal was already an anticipated figure of the banquet of the kingdom of God. On that night, the celebration took place for Jesus in a very special way.

This is my body (v. 19). Is the consecrated bread the symbol of the body of Christ, or is it the body of Christ in fact? There have been great controversies between Catholics and Protestants about this. Catholics understand that the bread is really the body of Christ; Protestants maintain that the bread does not contain the physical presence of the body of Christ and look upon it as a mere symbol. Both have tried to come to a mutual understanding.

The faith of the Church states that the consecrated bread is symbol and reality at the same time. The presence of the body of Christ is not

Jer 31:31; 24:8 in remembrance of me.”²⁰ And after the supper, he did the same with the cup, saying, “This cup is the new Covenant, sealed in my blood, which is poured out for you.

Jn 13:21 ²¹ Yet the hand of the traitor is with me on the table. ²² Know that the Son of Man is going the way marked out for him. But alas for that one who betrays him!” ²³ They began to ask one another which of them could do such a thing.

Last conversation with Jesus

(Mk 10:42; Jn 13:1)

9:46 • ²⁴ They also began to argue among themselves which of them should be considered the most important. ²⁵ Jesus said, “The kings of the pagan nations rule over them as lords, and the most hard-hearted rulers claim the title, ‘Gracious Lord.’” ²⁶ But not so with you; let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as the servant. ²⁷ For who is the greatest, he who sits at the table or he

who serves? He who is seated, isn’t it? Yet I am among you as one who serves.

²⁸ You are the ones who have been with me, and stood by me, through my troubles; ²⁹ because of this, just as the kingship has been given to me by my Father, so I give it to you. ³⁰ You will eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and you will sit on thrones and govern the twelve tribes of Israel.

³¹ Simon, Simon, Satan has demanded to sift you like grain, ³² but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have recovered, you shall strengthen your brothers.” ³³ Then Peter said, “Lord, with you I am ready to go even to prison and death.” ³⁴ But Jesus replied, “I tell you, Peter, the cock will not crow this day before you have denied three times that you know me.”

³⁵ Jesus also said to them, “When I sent you without purse or bag or sandals, were you short of anything?”

symbolic but real, though not a material presence, as if we could say: “Jesus is here on the table.” The body of Christ is present, but through the sacramental sign of bread and wine, and it is present inasmuch as it is signified. In communion we receive the body of the “risen” Christ (it is another reason to think that it is not a material presence, but rather of another type, no less real, but different) in order to receive from him strength and life. Though his presence to the believer in communion is a mysterious and intimate reality, the objective of the Eucharist is not to make Jesus more present, but to renew and strengthen the communion (fellowship) between Jesus and those who share in the table of the Lord, making us at the same time more conscious of his divine overwhelming presence.

My blood which is poured out for you (v. 20). Jesus gives us the meaning of his death: he will be the Servant of Yahweh promised by Isaiah (53:12), who takes upon himself the sins of a multitude. That is why in Matthew and Mark Jesus says: My blood poured out for a multitude. Let us say that, for the Jews, a multitude, or the many, does not exclude anyone. However, this multitude refers first to the chosen people of Jesus: that is why we read here *poured out for you*, the same as in 1 Corinthians 11:24; Ephesians 5:25; John 17:19.

The new Covenant: see commentary on Mark 14:12.

Do this in remembrance of me (v. 19). With these words Jesus institutes the Eucharist as the church will celebrate it. *In remembrance of me*: not to remember a dead man. At the Passover the Jews remembered the intervention of God who had delivered them from Egypt; in the Eucharist, we remember the intervention of God who saved us through the sacrifice of his Son.

Some ancient manuscripts cut verse 19 after “This is my body,” and omit verse 20 perhaps thinking that these verses were a repetition of verses 17-18.

• 24. After the narrative of the Last Supper (Mk 14:12), Luke brings out some memories of the conversation with which Jesus took leave of his apostles. Here he shows Jesus as alone and misunderstood by his own apostles on the eve of his death. They have not learned anything in so many months and at the end of the Last Supper, they only express their all-too-human concerns.

The apostles were vying for the first place in the kingdom: what concept, then, did they still have of the kingdom? During the supper Jesus had acted as the servant of the house (Jn 13:1).

12:51 They answered, “No.” ³⁶And Jesus said to them, “But now, the one who has a purse or a bag must take it, or even his coat, and sell it, and but a sword. ³⁷For Scripture says: He was numbered among criminals. These words have to be fulfilled in me, and everything written about me is now taking place.

Is 53:12;
Ac15:
8:32;
Lk 23:32

³⁸Then they said, “See, Lord, here are two swords!” but Jesus answered, “That is enough.”

Gethsemane

(Mk 14:32)

Mt
26:30,
36-46;
Mk
14:26,
32-42;
Lk 21:37

• ³⁹After this, Jesus left to go as usual to the Mount of Olives, and the disciples followed him. ⁴⁰When he came to the place, he told them, “Pray that you may not be put to the test.”

11:4

⁴¹Then he went a little further, about a stone’s throw, and kneeling down he prayed, ⁴²“Father, if it is your will, remove this cup from me; however, not my will but yours be done.” ⁴³And from heaven there appeared to him an angel, who gave him strength.

1K 19:5;
Mt 4:11;
Jn 12:29

⁴⁴As he was in agony, he prayed even more earnestly, and great drops of blood formed like sweat and fell to the ground. ⁴⁵When he rose from prayer, he went to his disciples, but found them worn out with grief, and asleep. ⁴⁶And he said to them, “Why do you sleep? Get up and pray, so that you may not be put to the test.”

⁴⁷Jesus was still speaking when suddenly a crowd appeared, and the man named Judas, one of the Twelve, was leading them. He drew near to

Mt 26:
47-56;
Mk 14:
43-50;
Jn 18:
3-11

Jesus does not get discouraged when he sees that the apostles are out of touch with his thoughts and desires, even when time is coming to an end for him. He has surrendered his life and his work to the Father: if he has seemingly failed, he knows that after his death his work will rise to new life along with him, and so he confirms his promises to his apostles.

You will sit... (v. 30). How hard it is for us to understand Jesus’ faithfulness to his own people. All that is his, he shares with those who have committed themselves to his work. *The twelve tribes of Israel* means the entire people of God. With this, Jesus designates all of us who come from many nations to accept the faith of the apostles. Peter believes that since he is the head, he will be stronger than the others. Jesus, on the other hand, sees Peter’s future mission, and in spite of his fall, wills to give him a special grace, so that he will be able to strengthen the rest. Such is Jesus’ way of doing things: he saves what was lost and, having seen the incurable weakness of human nature in Peter, he uses him to give the Church a stability to which no other human society can aspire. Indeed, the continuity of the Church through the centuries is, in part, due to the popes, Peter’s successors.

At the end, Jesus uses some images to indicate that the crisis foretold so many times is at hand: the apostles do not really understand and they look for swords.

• 39. It appears that Jesus celebrated the Passover in a house at the southwest of the old town of Jerusalem. He went down the stepped street to what had been the stream of Tyropeon, went

up the Ophel area, the old city of David, to go down to the Kidron torrent, almost always devoid of water. From there he must have taken a path to go up to the Mount of Olives. It was called that because its western slopes were covered with olive trees. Jesus went to a garden called Gethsemane, or “olive press.” This land may have belonged to one of the disciples of Jesus, since he went there many times (Jn 18:2).

Some of the ancient manuscripts of the Gospel do not have verses 43 and 44: probably they were taken out because many people were scandalized by this “weakness” of Christ.

And from heaven there appeared to him an angel (v. 43). At times the Scripture speaks of an angel to indicate that God intervened in a mysterious way, by encouraging, teaching or punishing... This angel reminds us of the one who came to encourage Elijah (1 K 19:4). We must understand that God wished to give Jesus a special help to be able to endure this exceptional trial. There again we need the witness of the saints to understand better.

He was in agony (v. 44). Jesus certainly has felt, just as we have—and perhaps even more acutely—the horror of death. But he must also have been assailed by a despairing vision of the world of sin due to the presence of the all-holy Father. Should we want to understand something of what took place in those moments, we must learn about the testimonies of the great saints who, in their own way, also experienced this extremely difficult test.

Drops of blood formed like sweat (v. 44). This is a symptom understood by doctors, due both to anxiety and suffering.

Jesus to kiss him,⁴⁸ and Jesus said to him, “Judas, with a kiss do you betray the Son of Man?”

⁴⁹Those with Jesus, seeing what would happen, said to him, “Master, shall we use the sword?”⁵⁰ And one of them struck the High Priest’s servant and cut off his right ear.⁵¹ But Jesus ordered him, “No more of this!” He touched the man’s ear and healed him.

⁵²Then Jesus spoke to those coming against him, the chief priests, officers of the temple and elders; and he said to them, “Are you looking for a thief, a robber? Do you really need swords and clubs to arrest me?⁵³ Day after day I was among you, teaching in the temple, and you did not arrest me. But this is the hour of the power of darkness; this is your hour.”

The trial of Jesus, Peter’s denial

(Mk 14:53; Mt 26:57)

• ⁵⁴Then they seized him and took him away, bringing him to the High Priest’s house. Peter followed at a distance.

⁵⁵A fire was kindled in the middle of the courtyard where people were gathered, and Peter sat among them.⁵⁶ A maidservant noticed him. Looking at him intently in the light of the fire,

she exclaimed, “This man also was with him!”⁵⁷ But he denied it, saying, “Woman, I do not know him!”

⁵⁸A little later someone who saw him said, “You are also one of them!” Peter replied, “My friend, I am not!”⁵⁹ After about an hour another asserted, “Surely this man was with him, for he is a Galilean.”

⁶⁰Again Peter denied it: “My friend, I don’t know what you are talking about!” He had not finished saying this, when a cock crowed.⁶¹ The Lord turned around and looked at Peter, and Peter remembered the word which the Lord had spoken: “Before the cock crows, you will deny me three times.”⁶² Peter went outside, weeping bitterly.

⁶³Now the guards, who had arrested Jesus, mocked and beat him.⁶⁴ They blindfolded him, struck him, and then asked him, “Who hit you? Tell us, prophet!”⁶⁵ And they hurled many other insulting words at him.

⁶⁶At daybreak, the council of the elders of the people, among whom were the chief priests and the teachers of the law, assembled again. Then they had Jesus brought before them, and they began questioning him,⁶⁷ “Tell us, are you the Christ?” Jesus

The hour and the form of Jesus’ arrest were suited to evildoers driven by the *Power of Darkness*. There are times when all hope and justice have apparently disappeared from the earth.

• 54. WHY DID THEY KILL HIM?

Regarding the two trials of Jesus, one religious, the other political, see commentary on Mark 14:53.

Jesus’ trial and condemnation to death were not very different from what happens to many Christian militants and martyrs. Merely preferring relationships with the poor and educating simple people so they can be free and responsible does not constitute a crime in any country, and yet, throughout the centuries, it has been enough to bring persecution onto many persons. We have already mentioned that Jesus preached in extremely difficult circumstances,

since his nation was under the law of the Roman occupants, and any liberating message smacked of subversion.

Undoubtedly, those who condemned Jesus had plenty of reasons to hate him. However, the Gospel records that the accusations focused on the key points of his teaching. They condemned Jesus because he claimed to be divine: *the Christ, the Son of God, the one who will sit at the right hand of God* (v. 69).

The chief priests of the time belonged to wealthy families who fought for their positions because it gave access to temple money. Annas and his sons (and his son-in-law Caiaphas) are known to have acted with utter shamelessness, silencing protests with the sticks of their guards, who formed an illegal militia. Here, they appear with the leaders of the Jews, or the Elders, who belong to the richest families.

19:47;
21:37

Mt 26:
69-75;
Mk 14:
66-72;
Jn 18:
15...27

Mt 26:
67-68;
Mk 14:65

Mt 26:
57-66;
Mk 14:
53-64

Jn 10: 24-25
Ps 110:1; Acts 2:36
replied, "You will not believe, if I tell you,⁶⁸ and neither will you answer, if I ask you.⁶⁹ But from now on *the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the power of God.*"

⁷⁰In chorus they asked, "So you are the Son of God?" And Jesus said to them, "You are right, I am."

⁷¹Then they said, "What need have we of witnesses? We have heard it from his own lips."

Jesus before Pilate

Mt 27:2, 11-14; Mk 15: 1-5; Jn 18: 29-38
Acts 17:7
(Mt 27:11; Mk 15:1; Jn 18:28)

23 • ¹The whole council rose and brought Jesus to Pilate. ²They gave their accusation: "We found this man subverting our nation, opposing payment of taxes to Caesar, and claiming to be Christ the King."

³Pilate asked Jesus, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus replied, "You said so." ⁴Turning to the chief priests and the crowd, Pilate said, "I find no basis for a case against this man."

Acts 3:13; 13:28
⁵But they insisted, "All the country of the Jews is being stirred up by his teaching. He began in Galilee and now he has come all the way here."

⁶When Pilate heard this, he asked if the man was a Galilean. ⁷Finding the accused to come under Herod's jurisdiction, Pilate sent Jesus over to Herod who happened to be in Jerusalem at that time.

9:9
⁸Herod was delighted to have Jesus before him; for a long time he had wanted to see him because of the reports about him, and he was hoping to see Jesus work some miracle. ⁹He

piled up question upon question, but got no reply from Jesus.

¹⁰All the while the chief priests and the scribes remained standing there, vehemently pressing their accusations. ¹¹Finally, Herod ridiculed him and with his guards mocked him. And when he had put a rich cloak on him, he sent him back to Pilate. ¹²Pilate and Herod, who were enemies before, became friends from that day.

Acts 4:27

¹³Pilate then called together the chief priests and the elders and the people, ¹⁴and said to them, "You have brought this man before me and accused him of subversion. In your presence I have examined him and found no basis for your charges; ¹⁵and neither has Herod, for he sent him back to me. It is quite clear that this man has done nothing that deserves a death sentence. ¹⁶I will therefore have him scourged and then release him." (¹⁷At Passover, Pilate had to release a prisoner.)

Mt 27: 15-26; Mk 15: 6-15; Jn 18:38 --19:16

• ¹⁸Shouting as one man, the crowd protested, "No! Away with this man! Release Barabbas instead!" ¹⁹This man had been thrown into prison for an uprising in the city and for murder.

²⁰Since Pilate wanted to release Jesus, he appealed to the crowd once more, ²¹but they shouted back, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" ²²A third time Pilate said to them, "Why, what evil has he done? Since no crime deserving death has been proved, I shall have him scourged and let him go."

• **23.1** Pilate does not want to condemn Jesus, partly because he hates Jewish priests, and so he sends Jesus to Herod. By putting a white robe on Jesus, Herod treats him as a madman pretending to be a king.

They became friends from that day on (v. 12), because, in spite of the fact that they were so different, they realized that they belonged to the same class of people with power to play with the lives of common people.

• 18. Barabbas may have been one of those terrorists harassing the Roman oppressors. The chief priests who wanted to have peace with the Romans hated these people. Yet the chief priests persuaded the people to ask for the release of Barabbas. Even though they hated those priests, the people listened to them. With that, Pilate's plan (he wanted to release Jesus) failed.

²³But they went on shouting and demanding that Jesus be crucified, and their shouts grew louder. ²⁴So Pilate decided to pass the sentence they demanded. ²⁵He released the man they asked for, the one who was in prison for rebellion and murder, and he handed Jesus over in accordance with their wishes.

The way of Calvary

(Mt 27:32; Mk 15:16)

²⁶When they led Jesus away, they seized Simon of Cyrene, arriving from the countryside, and laid the cross on him, to carry it behind Jesus.

- ²⁷A large crowd of people followed him; among them were women, beating their breasts and grieving for him, ²⁸but Jesus turned to them and said, “Women of Jerusalem, do not weep for me! Weep rather for yourselves and for your children, ²⁹for the days are coming when people will say, ‘Happy are the women without child! Happy are those who have not given birth or nursed a child!’ ³⁰And they will say to the mountains, ‘Fall on us!’ and to the hills, ‘Cover us!’ ³¹For if this is the lot of the green wood, what will happen to the dry?”

³²Along with Jesus, two criminals also were led out to be executed. ³³There, at the place called the Skull,

he was crucified together with two criminals—one on his right and another on his left. (³⁴Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”) And the guards *cast lots to divide his clothes among themselves*.

³⁵The people stood by, watching. As for the rulers, they jeered at him, saying to one another, “Let the man who saved others now save himself, for he is the Messiah, the chosen one of God!”

³⁶The soldiers also mocked him and, when they drew near to offer him bitter wine, ³⁷they said, “So you are the King of the Jews? Save yourself!” ³⁸Above Jesus there was an inscription in Greek, Latin and Hebrew, which read, “This is the King of the Jews.”

- ³⁹One of the criminals hanging with Jesus insulted him, “So you are the Messiah? Save yourself, and us as well!” ⁴⁰But the other rebuked him, saying, “Have you no fear of God, you who received the same sentence as he did? ⁴¹For us it is just: this is payment for what we have done. But this man has done nothing wrong.” ⁴²And he said, “Jesus, remember me, when you come into your kingdom.” ⁴³Jesus replied, “In truth I tell you, today, you will be with me today in paradise.”

• 27. *What will happen to the dry wood?* (v. 31). Jesus taught that the sacrifice which is accepted is fruitful: but at the same time he mourns the unnecessary sufferings of a people who have let the opportunity pass them by, and who will be destroyed through their own fault.

These words are also meant for all those who make the blood of Christ useless for themselves.

A large crowd of people followed him, especially women... Luke is the only evangelist reflecting this compassionate attitude. Contrary to Matthew who insists on the guilt of the Jewish people, Luke wants to point out that Jesus' condemnation moved many people. Jesus' words recall what he already said about the destruction of the Jewish nation (Mk 13).

• 39. The leaders of the Jews have put Jesus where he belongs, since he decided to take our sins upon himself. The two men look at the one who has come to share their destiny.

You will be with me today in paradise (v. 43). What is paradise? We lack adequate words to express what lies beyond. In Jesus' time, the Jews used to compare the Place of the Dead to a huge country divided up into regions separated by insurmountable barriers. *Hell* was one of the regions; it was reserved for the wicked, from there no one could escape. Another region was Paradise where the good people would be with the first ancestors of holy people, awaiting the moment of resurrection.

You will be with me (v. 43), says Jesus, that is with the Savior, who for a day and a half was

Mt 27:
31-43;
Mk 15:
20-32;
Jn 19:
17-24;
Lk 9:23;
14:27

Zec
12:10

Hos
10:8

Ezk
21:3;
Lk 6:43;
Heb 6:8

Acts
3:17;
7:60

Ps 22:8;
Is 49:7;
Lk 9:35

Ps 69:22

Mt 27:
45-56;
Mk 15:
33-41;
Jn 19:
25-37;
10:22

Ps 31:6

⁴⁴It was almost midday. ⁴⁵The sun was hidden, and darkness came over the whole land until mid-afternoon; and, at that time, the curtain of the Sanctuary was torn in two. ⁴⁶Then Jesus gave a loud cry, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." And saying that, he gave up his spirit.

Acts
3:14

⁴⁷The captain, on seeing what had happened, acknowledged the hand of God. "Surely this was an upright man!" he said. ⁴⁸And all the people who had gathered to watch the spectacle, as soon as they saw what had happened, went home beating their breasts. ⁴⁹But those who knew Jesus, and the women who had followed him from Galilee, remained there at a distance. They witnessed all these things.

Mt 27:
57-61;
Mk 15:
42-47;
Jn 19:
38-42

⁵⁰Then a member of the Jewish supreme council intervened, a good and righteous man named Joseph, ⁵¹from the Judean town of Arimathea. He had not agreed with the decision and action of his fellow members, and he lived uprightly in the hope of seeing the kingdom of God. ⁵²Joseph went to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body. ⁵³He then took it down, wrapped it in a linen cloth, and laid it in a yet unused tomb, cut out of a rock.

⁵⁴It was the day of preparation and the Sabbath was beginning. ⁵⁵So the women, who had come with Jesus

from Galilee, followed Joseph to see the tomb, and how his body was laid. ⁵⁶Returning home, they prepared perfumes and ointments. And on the Sabbath day they rested, as the law required.

The Lord has risen

(Mk 16:1; Mt 28:1; Jn 20:1)

24 ¹On the Sabbath the women rested according to the commandment, but the first day of the week, at dawn, the women went to the tomb with the perfumes and ointments they had prepared. ²Seeing the stone rolled away from the opening of the tomb, ³they entered, and were amazed to find that the body of the Lord Jesus was not there.

Mt 28:
1-8;
Mk 16:
1-8;
Jn 20:
1-2

⁴As they stood there wondering about this, two men in dazzling garments suddenly stood before them. ⁵In fright the women bowed to the ground. But the men said, "Why look for the living among the dead? ⁶You won't find him here. He is risen. Remember what he told you in Galilee, ⁷that the Son of Man had to be given into the hands of sinners, to be crucified, and to rise on the third day." ⁸And they remembered Jesus' words.

Mt 28:
10, 17;
Mk 16:
10...14;
Jn 20:
18...29;
Lk 8:2

⁹Returning from the tomb, they told the Eleven and all the others about these things. ¹⁰Among the

in the peace and joy of God, before the resurrection. This statement puts us at ease as to our own destiny at death, although we cannot know what will become of us before the Resurrection. We will not be anesthetized, nor will we cease to exist, as some claim, but we will rather possess everything, being with Jesus who came to share death and his brothers' and sisters' rest (see Phil 1:23 and Rev 14:13).

• **24.1** *The Lord Jesus*: with this expression, not found in the rest of the Gospel but very much in use in the early church, Luke shows us that the Risen Jesus has entered a kind of existence which is different from that of his mortal life. Let us remember the following:

1) None of the Gospels describe the Resurrection of Jesus: it was an event that could not be seen.

2) The apostles' preaching about the risen Jesus is based on two facts: the empty tomb and the appearances (see commentary on Mt 28:1).

3) Before the Gospels were written, Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, in the year 57, gave a list of Jesus' appearances (1 Cor 15:3).

4) Although the four Gospels agree on the essentials, there are, nevertheless, differences as to the order of the appearances and the place where they occurred. Luke does not mention appearances in Galilee. Matthew gives the impression that all that was important took place in Galilee, and that the Ascension took place

women, who brought the news, were Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary the mother of James. ¹¹But however much they insisted, those who heard did not believe the seemingly nonsensical story. ¹²Then Peter got up and ran to the tomb. All he saw, when he bent down and looked into the tomb, were the linen cloths, laid by themselves. He went home wondering.

The road to Emmaus

(Mk 16:12)

• ¹³That same day, two followers of Jesus were going to Emmaus, a village seven miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁴and they were talking to each other about all the things that had happened. ¹⁵While they were talking and debating these things, Jesus himself approached and began to accompany them, ¹⁶but their eyes were not able to recognize him.

¹⁷He asked, “What is it you are

talking about?” The two stood still, looking sad. ¹⁸Then the one named Cleophas answered, “Why, it seems you are the only traveler to Jerusalem who doesn’t know what has happened there these past few days.” ¹⁹And he asked, “What is it?”

They replied, “It is about Jesus of Nazareth. He was a prophet, you know, mighty in word and deed before God and the people. ²⁰But the chief priests and our rulers sentenced him to death. They handed him over to be crucified. ²¹We had hoped that he would redeem Israel.

It is now the third day since all this took place. ²²It is also true that some women of our group have disturbed us. When they went to the tomb at dawn, ²³they did not find his body; and they came and told us that they had had a vision of angels, who said that Jesus was alive. ²⁴Some of our people went

there as well. Paul speaks first of an appearance to Peter and does not mention the appearance to Mary Magdalene. An in-depth study of the texts sheds some light on these discrepancies: they did not want to reveal everything, and at times preferred to modify details of the place or the chronology to fit the demands of their book and for the purpose of teaching.

5) As for Jesus’ ascension, it was not a “trip” to heaven; he was already “in heaven,” in the sense that he shared the glory of God from the moment of his resurrection. The Ascension is simply the last of his appearances (see commentary on Acts 1:9).

• 13. We notice on this page of the Gospel how carefully Luke uses in turn the verbs: *see* and *recognize*. The evangelist, in fact, wishes to show us that after his resurrection Jesus can no longer be “seen” with the eyes of the body; he had gone from this world to the Father, and this new world evades our senses. It is only with new vision, this light of faith that we “recognize” him present and active in us and around us. If the history of the Church records a number of exceptional apparitions of the risen Jesus, the faithful are invited to “recognize” him through faith.

These two disciples were merely going home to return to their work, after their hopes had been crushed. We are accustomed to call them the *pilgrims* of Emmaus.

The Jewish people, the people of Israel, were pilgrim people because they never had the possibility of lingering on the way. The departure from Egypt, the conquest of the Land, the fights against invaders, the development of religious culture were many stages along the way. Each time they thought that in reaching their goal, their problems would be solved, and each time they had to realize that the road was taking them still further.

Cleophas and his companion were pilgrims since they followed Jesus, thinking that *he would redeem Israel*. In the end, there was only the death of Jesus. This is the moment when Jesus becomes present and teaches them that one does not enter the kingdom without passing through death.

They recognized him (v. 31). Perhaps Jesus looked different as we see in John 20:14. This is what Mark says in 16:12. Luke also wants us to understand that the same people, whose eyes could not recognize Jesus, will see him when they come to believe.

Starting with Moses and going through the prophets (v. 27). Remember that “Moses and the prophets” is a way of designating Scripture. Jesus invites them to pass from Israel’s faith or hope in a happy future for the whole nation, to faith in his very person, accepting the mystery of his rejection and of his Passion.

Everything in the Scriptures concerning himself (v. 27). In his first biblical lesson, Jesus

Jn 20:
3-12

Mt 16:
12-13

Jn 20:14

to the tomb and found everything just as the women had said, but they did not find a body in the tomb.”

²⁵ He said to them, “How dull you are, how slow of understanding! Is the message of the prophets too difficult for you to understand? ²⁶ Is it not written that the Christ should suffer all this, and then enter his glory?”

²⁷ Then starting with Moses, and going through the prophets, he explained to them everything in the Scriptures concerning himself.

²⁸ As they drew near the village they were heading for, Jesus made as if to go farther. ²⁹ But they prevailed upon him, “Stay with us, for night comes quickly. The day is now almost over.” So he went in to stay with them. ³⁰ When they were at table, he took the bread, said a blessing, broke it, and gave each a piece.

³¹ Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; but he vanished out of their sight. ³² And they said to one another, “Were not our hearts burning within us when he was talking to us on the road and explaining the Scriptures?”

³³ They immediately set out and re-

turned to Jerusalem. There, they found the Eleven and their companions gathered together. ³⁴ They were greeted by these words: “Yes, it is true, the Lord is risen! He has appeared to Simon!” ³⁵ Then the two told what had happened on the road to Emmaus, and how Jesus had made himself known, when he broke bread with them.

Jesus appears to the apostles

(Jn 20:19)

• ³⁶ While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood in their midst. (He said to them, “Peace to you.”) ³⁷ In their panic and fright they thought they were seeing a ghost, ³⁸ but he said to them, “Why are you upset, and how does such an idea cross your minds? ³⁹ Look at my hands and feet, and see that it is I myself! Touch me, and see for yourselves, for a ghost has no flesh and bones as I have!” ⁴⁰ (As he said this, he showed his hands and feet.)

⁴¹ Their joy was so great that they still could not believe it, as they were astonished; so he said to them, “Have you anything to eat?” ⁴² And they gave him a piece of broiled fish. ⁴³ He took it, and ate it before them.

taught them that the Messiah had to suffer. Jesus not only found all the texts which foretold his Passion and Resurrection such as Isaiah 50; Isaiah 52:13; Zechariah 12:11; Psalm 22; Psalm 69; but also those texts showing that God’s plan filters human history.

Something similar happens to believers now when we often complain and show our impatience. Yet Jesus did not leave us alone. He has not risen in order to sit in heaven; he is ahead of humanity on pilgrimage and draws us toward that final day when he will come to meet us.

At the same time *he walks with us*, and when our hopes are dashed, it is the moment when we discover the meaning of the Resurrection.

Thus the Church does for us what Jesus did for the two disciples. First, it gives us the ‘interpretation of Scripture’: what matters in our efforts to understand Scripture is not to know many passages by heart, but to discover the thread connecting various events and to understand God’s plan concerning people.

Then, the Church also celebrates the Eucharist. Notice how Luke says: *he took the bread, said a blessing, broke it and gave each a piece* (v. 30); these same four words were used among believers to speak of the Eucharist. We can come close to Jesus in conversation and meditating on his word; we find him present in our fraternal meetings, but *he makes himself known* in a different way when we share the bread that is his body.

Cleophas (v. 18): the husband of Mary, mother of James and Joset (see Jn 19:25 and Mk 15:40).

• 36. Jesus was reborn to a glorious life from the day of his resurrection. He was already ‘in the Father’s glory,’ but wanted to be with his disciples on various occasions in order to convince them that his new condition was not a lesser life, or something ghostly, but rather a super life.

In this chapter we put in parentheses some words or sentences that do not appear in many

18:31;
Acts
3:24

1P 1:11

1Cor
15:5

Jn 20:
19-23

Jn 21:5

Jn 21:
10, 13

Last instructions

• ⁴⁴ Then Jesus said to them, “Remember the words I spoke to you when I was still with you: Everything written about me in the law of Moses, in the prophets and in the psalms must be fulfilled.” ⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.

And he said, ⁴⁶ “So it was written: the Messiah had to suffer, and on the third day rise from the dead. ⁴⁷ Then repentance and forgiveness in his name would be proclaimed to all nations,

beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ And you are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹ And that is why I will send you what my Father promised. So remain in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.” Acts 1:8
Acts 1:4

⁵⁰ Jesus led them almost as far as Bethany; then he lifted up his hands and blessed them. ⁵¹ And as he blessed them, he withdrew, and was taken to heaven. ⁵² They worshiped him, and then returned to Jerusalem full of joy; ⁵³ and they were continually in the temple, praising God. Mk 16:19;
Acts 1:9, 12

ancient manuscripts and which perhaps have been added later.

• 44. Jesus uses these encounters to clarify the meaning of his brief and intense mission for his apostles. He saves us from sin, which means nothing less than reordering history to resurrect humankind.

Everything written about me in the law of Moses, in the prophets and in the psalms must be fulfilled. What the prophets announced, about a savior who would be rejected by his people and take the sin of his people upon himself, had to be fulfilled. What sin? Everyone’s sins, of course, but also the violence of the whole Jewish society at the time of Jesus. This was the sin that brought him to the cross.

As a matter of fact, this way of death and resurrection was not reserved only for Jesus, but for his people also. In that precise period, Israel, subject to the Roman Empire, had to accept the death of its earthly ambitions: autonomy, national pride, the religious superiority of the Jews over other people... in order to rise as the people of God scattered among nations and to become the agent of salvation. A minority took the way Jesus pointed out and this was the beginning of the Church.

Repentance and forgiveness (v. 47). Chris-

tian conversion is not passing from one party to another, from one religious group to another: it is a recasting of the person. Persons are part of a society, a world, a history. Therefore the preaching *to the nations* means also the education of the nations and even international society. This is something that takes longer than ten or a hundred years.

You are witnesses of these things (v. 48). Jesus calls his apostles to be the official witnesses of his Gospel and those who judge authentic faith.

Remain in the city (v. 49). The apostles are not able to begin immediately missionary work. They will first dedicate themselves to strengthening fellowship and the fervor of the community of the disciples, as they wait for the time chosen by the Father to give them *the power coming from above*.

I will send you what my Father promised. Jesus could not affirm his divine authority and the unity of the three divine persons more powerfully.

He withdrew (v. 51): this was the last of Jesus’ appearances to the group of disciples.

And so concludes Luke’s first book. His second book, *The Acts of the Apostles*, follows the Gospels and it begins exactly where this Gospel ends.

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