From the end of the first century or at the beginning of the second century A.D., there are texts affirming that the second Gospel is the work of Mark: he accompanied Peter to Rome, where he also met Paul, and faithfully put in writing the teaching of Peter.

Like the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, that of Mark is based on the oral traditions concerning Jesus of Nazareth, which by degrees were written down. These partial texts that were passed on from community to community were completed by the oral witness of those who had accompanied Jesus during his earthly life. Mark wrote his Gospel for a definite type of community: he addresses Christians of pagan origin and wishes to proclaim the mystery of Jesus, Son of God, by relating the words and deeds by which he revealed himself to humankind.

Differing from Matthew and Luke who prefaced their Gospel with two chapters dealing with the childhood of Jesus, and differing also from John who placed at the beginning of his Gospel an admirable prologue, Mark holds to the pattern of primitive catechetics. The Acts of the Apostles in fact tell us what was the beginning and the end of this preaching by the Church of Jerusalem: at the time when Peter was looking for a replacement of Judas he said, “See among those who have been disciples with us from the moment Jesus was baptized by John to the day he was taken up” (Acts 1:21-22).
1 This is the beginning of the Good News of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. 2 It is written in the book of Isaiah, the prophet, “I am sending my messenger ahead of you to prepare your way. 3 Let the people hear the voice calling in the desert: Prepare the way of the Lord, level his paths.”

4 So John began to baptize in the desert; he preached a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5 All Judea and all the people from the city of Jerusalem went out to John to confess their sins and be baptized by him in the river Jordan.

6 John was clothed in camel’s hair and wore a leather garment around his waist. His food was locusts and honey. 7 He preached to the people saying, “After me comes one who is more powerful than I am; 8 I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you in the Holy Spirit. As for me, I am not worthy to bend down and untie his sandals.”

9 At that time Jesus came from Nazareth, a town of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 10 And the moment he came up out of the water, heaven opened before him and he saw the Spirit coming down on him like a dove. 11 And these words were heard from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved, the One I have chosen.”

12 Then the Spirit drove him into the desert. 13 Jesus stayed in the desert forty days and was tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, but angels ministered to him.

Jesus calls his first disciples (Mt 4:12; Lk 4:14)

14 After John was arrested, Jesus went into Galilee and began preaching the Good News of God. 15 He said, “The time has come; the kingdom of God is at hand. Change your ways and believe the Good News.”

16 As Jesus was walking along the shore of Lake Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net in the lake, for they were fishermen. 17 And Jesus said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.”

• 1.1 In verses 1 to 13, Mark gives us in three small tableaux three important insights about Jesus’ salvation. Vv. 1-7. John the Baptist announces the coming of the One sent by God: this Jesus about whom the Gospel will speak to us has been announced, prepared by all the great witnesses of the Old Testament. In him and by him God’s salvation will be accomplished. Vv. 9-10. Jesus goes down into the Jordan to open the gates of the true Promised Land (see the Book of Joshua): he is the beloved Son of the Father on whom the Spirit rests. Jesus comes to reveal the mystery of God, the mystery of the love of God – Father, Son and Spirit. Vv. 11-13. Jesus is at peace with the wild animals as he is with the angels. In him and by him will be accomplished the reconciliation of all creation with its God. Such had to be the Messiah announced by Isaiah (Is 11).

• 14. After this desert experience, Jesus returns to his home province, Galilee, and establishes himself in Capernaum. Jesus lives in the house of Simon, who already appears to be the leader of a group of fishermen, and among them Jesus finds his disciples. God becomes human, Jesus shares the life of the people of his time, and like the prophets he teaches by what he says and does. The time has come (v. 15). What does that mean? The time fixed by God has come to an end (Gal 4:4; Eph 1:10), the time of preparation has ended, and the manifestation of God announced by the prophets has already begun. Change your ways and believe the Good News. God does not expect works on the part of human beings but calls them to faith. Be rid of all that hampers you, of all that prevents you from seeing and believe! Believe that it is he, and he alone who is able to save you! At once they left their nets and followed him (v. 18), which means leaving their family and work they began to live with him. Like the masters of religion in his time, like the rabbis, Jesus instructed his first disciples, teaching them what they were to pass on to others in the Church.

Simon, Andrew, James and John. Jesus already knew them: he had met them where John the Baptist was preaching (Jn 1:35). The first nucleus of disciples is this natural group of lake fishermen of which Peter seemed to be the leader. They were most probably young men, ready to make a commitment at a time and in a culture where people were freer than we are from the constraints of work. They did not yet know what the Reign of God would mean but they trusted Jesus to guide them. This for them was the beginning of faith.
21. Mark has shown us how Jesus began his public life: he became part of a movement of conversion that had shaken everyone at the call of John the Baptist. It was then that Jesus began preaching and met his first disciples. Mark will now give us a “day” in the life of Jesus. Through his words and actions a power that impresses every witness becomes manifest. At the beginning of his ministry, Jesus preaches in the synagogues.

The synagogue is the Jewish house of prayer. People gather each Saturday for the chanting of the Psalms and the reading of the Bible. The one in charge preaches and invites others to join. This is where Jesus reveals himself. He is not like the teachers of the Law who repeat, interpret, and give others’ opinions. Jesus speaks on his own and he speaks with authority, “In truth, I tell you.”

23. With the same authority Jesus drives out demons. This act also contains a message: Jesus delivers us from the influence of the Devil, who strives to destroy those created in the likeness of God. This “Master of this world” (Jn 14:30) is present in all human business and culture to deceive human purposes and converts any progress into new slavery.

In Jesus’ time, but much more rarely in the Church’s time (our time), there were some persons possessed by the Devil. Jesus freed quite a number of people from this slavery and disease. Physical possession is not the usual way of the devil’s activity in humans. The Devil operates (far more dangerously because we do not feel it) in the moral life of people. He blinds and confuses them with regard to the truth, disguised as the angel of light (2 Cor 11:14).

Not that the Devil is the cause of every sin and evil that people do. There is also the selfishness of our “flesh” and the lure of the false promises of “the world” but the Devil, as enemy of God’s kingdom, is never at rest. He always nurtures our temptations. With holier persons who are not easy to tempt in a direct way, he goes about deceiving them persuading them to give more importance to their own good purposes than to the advice of others and the teaching of the Church.

The Devil notices at once those who are capable of weakening or destroying his empire. Then he awakens the bad, the mediocre, the foolish and the ill fated against them. That is why wherever Jesus goes the Devil also appears.

29. Peter’s simple faith is manifested. Jesus enters the house, bringing with him peace and health. Jesus shows us how to visit the sick. What a natural thing to do when Mass ends – to go see the sick. The care and love of our
Christian sisters and brothers attracts God’s favors upon them.
As soon as it was sundown. Let us not forget that it is the Sabbath, the weekly day of rest. For the Jews days are counted from the time of sunset and night precedes day as shown in Genesis 1:5. Everyone observes the Sabbath, just as Jesus does and there is such haste to bring the sick to him that they begin to do so in the evening as soon as the Sabbath is over.

The apostles knew God since childhood through the Bible’s teachings; perhaps they had not discovered God within their own lives but prayed to God as to a distant stranger. When they joined Jesus, they immediately understood that there was something extraordinary about him. They were especially taken with his apparent intimacy with God. The most extraordinary thing they noted in his manner and actions was his intimate and faithful union with his Father.

Living with Jesus, they begin to desire to know the Father more fully, something like Jesus knows him (Lk 11:1; Jn 14:8; 15:15).

Jesus leaves Capernaum to announce the Good News to the most isolated and ignored families in the whole country. There he finds the lepers. At that time leprosy was considered as a contagious disease. Because of this, lepers had to live on the outskirts of the towns, far from the rest of the population. There was also a belief that leprosy was an affliction from God, and the Jewish religion declared lepers unclean.

By Jesus’ act, the flesh of the leper becomes clean. As a result of this, from that time on, he would be like others and people would no longer avoid him. Both people and the Law of God would acknowledge his dignity.

The Good News does not remain mere words but it effects a change. From then on, they would no longer be marginalized people.

Don’t tell anyone (v. 44). Very often, particularly in the Gospel of Mark, Jesus gives this order to those who have just been cured of an evil (1:25; 1:34; 1:44; 3:12; 5:43; 7:36; 8:26; 8:30). We must note, however, that Jesus does not give this order when he is outside Israel territory; and that the order is not given after the transfiguration.

Jesus imposed this silence during the first part of his public life because most of the people expected a warlike and vengeful Messiah. Jesus did not want any ambiguity about his mission. Only when Jesus had sufficiently distanced himself from this popular image of the Messiah, would he begin to reveal, first to his disciples, the mystery of his person.

For this same reason Mark, who differs from Matthew, rarely uses the expression “son of God.” Mark reserves it for the privileged moments of Jesus’ revelation to people: his baptism and transfiguration, and at the conclusion of the passion on the lips of the centurion.

Jesus saw the faith of these people (v. 5). These are the friends of the paralytic, and Jesus rewards their faith.
preaching the Word to them, some people brought a paralyzed man to him.

4 The four men who carried him couldn’t get near Jesus because of the crowd, so they opened the roof above the room where Jesus was and, through the hole, lowered the man on his mat. 5 When Jesus saw the faith of these people, he said to the paralyzed, “My son, your sins are forgiven.”

6 Now, some teachers of the Law who were sitting there wondered within themselves, “How can he speak like this insulting God? Who can forgive sins except God?”

8 At once Jesus knew through his spirit what they were thinking and asked, “Why do you wonder? Is it easier to say to this paralyzed man: ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say: ‘Rise, take up your mat and walk?’ But now you shall know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.”

And he said to the paralyzed, “Stand up, take up your mat and go home.”

12 The man rose and, in the sight of all those people, he took up his mat and went out. All of them were astonished and praised God saying, “We have never seen anything like this!”

The call of Levi
(Mt 9:9, Lk 5:27)

13 When Jesus went out again beside the lake, a crowd came to him and he taught them. 14 As he walked along, he saw a tax collector sitting in his office. This was Levi, the son of Alpheus. Jesus said to him, “Follow me.” And Levi got up and followed him.

15 And it so happened that while

Apparently the paralytic did nothing more than consent to their advice. At once, Jesus tells him – your sins are forgiven. What a strange thing to say! How can Jesus forgive sins if the man is not conscious of any fault and, at the same time, repentant and awaiting forgiveness? Certainly during his long infirmity, this man had asked himself why God was punishing him (the people of his time believed sickness was a punishment from God). Many texts of the Old Testament emphasize the complex connection between sin and illness. It is often illness that makes us conscious of our state of sinfulness, and for his part Jesus does not want to heal unless there is reconciliation with God.

Jesus acts like God: he looked at the sinner, rectified the complexes of culpability and pardoned before healing.

Later the Pharisees arrive. When Jesus forgave the paralytic, the simple people did not realize how scandalous his words were. They did not have enough religious formation to realize immediately that only God could give absolution. It was the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law who were scandalized. Their indignation is justified because neither they, nor the others, nor the disciples, yet understand that Jesus is the true Son of God. Jesus silences them: If I restore health in the same way God does, should not I also forgive in the way God does?

Jesus disconcerts those who ask who he is. Better still, he shows that only he can save the whole person, body and soul.

FORGIVENESS OF SINS

Happy this man who was assured of his pardon through the glance and the words of Jesus! God is he who lives and loves and we need to meet him so that forgiveness can be authentic – his eyes meeting our eyes. Because of this, God had to become human – Jesus forgives sins because he is a son of man (Jn 5:27) and from him we receive the pardon both of God and of people within the Christian community.

PUBLICANS

• 13. To enter the family of God, we must change some of our values. This conversion is not as conspicuous as participation in devotional practices but is much more valuable. First, we must liberate ourselves from prejudices by which we classify people. Let us stop dividing people into good or bad; those we can greet and help and those we cannot. Let us learn that God does not hate the rich or the uneducated, those on the left or those on the right, for God’s merciful plan sees to the salvation of all.

The Gospel speaks about the publicans or the tax collectors (v. 15), who served the foreign powers. Jesus’ nation was under the domination of the Roman Empire, and the tax collectors were Jews who worked for foreigners.

Patriots considered them traitors. The people knew they filled their pockets; even beggars refused to receive from the publicans. Yet Jesus did not condemn them but chose one of them, Levi, as one of his apostles, of whom the majority were committed patriots.

The teachers of the Law were like catechists or religion teachers. They were well versed in religion and admired Jesus’ teachings, but they did not consider as brothers and sisters the publicans and other sinners (that is to say people who did not fulfill the religious precepts).

Levi is probably the apostle Matthew (Mt 9:9). In this case, like Simon, named Peter by Jesus,
Jesus was eating in Levi's house, tax collectors and sinners were sitting with him and his disciples for there were indeed many of them. But there were also teachers of the Law of the Pharisees' party, among those who followed Jesus, and when they saw him eating with sinners and tax collectors, they said to his disciples, "Why! He eats with tax collectors and sinners!"

Jesus heard them and answered, "Healthy people don't need a doctor, but sick people do. I did not come to call the righteous but sinners."

New wine, new skin
(Mt 9:14; Lk 5:33)

One day, when the disciples of John the Baptist and the Pharisees were fasting, some people asked Jesus, "Why is it that both the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast, but yours do not?" Jesus answered, "How can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. But the day will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them and on that day they will fast.

No one sews a piece of new cloth on an old coat, because the new patch will shrink and tear away from the old cloth, making a worse tear. And no one puts new wine into old wineskins, for the wine would burst the skins and then both the wine and the skins would be lost. But new wine, new skins!"

(Mt 12:1; Lk 6:1)

One Sabbath he was walking through grainfields. As his disciples walked along with him, they began to pick the heads of grain and crush them in their hands. Then the Pharisees said to Jesus, "Look! they are doing what is forbidden on the Sabbath!"

And he said to them, "Have you never read what David did in his time of need, when he and his men were very hungry? He went into the house of God when Abiathar was High Priest and ate the bread of offering, which only the priests are allowed to eat, and he also gave some to the men who were with him."

Then Jesus said to them, "The sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is master even of the Sabbath."

Cure of the man with a withered hand
(Lk 6:6; Mt 12:9; Lk 14:1)

Again Jesus entered the synagogue. A man who had a paralyzed leg.

Old skins: Gospel does not fit into the molds of religion and likewise does not enter into those persons who hold onto them at all costs. Mark wants us to catch Gospel's novelty. We have just seen Jesus welcoming sinners, now we wonder that he doesn't come like religious groups with prayers and fasting.

What is the new wine? (v. 22) It is of course the Gospel, and the enthusiasm because of the Holy Spirit that leads the disciples to every kind of madness to manifest the love of the Father and the freedom that they have acquired. In order to understand this, let us read the Acts of the Apostles and the lives of the saints, who have marked Church history.

3.1 HUMAN ADVANCEMENT AND THE SABBATH

Here, what Mark wants to emphasize is not
hand was there 2 and some people watched Jesus: Would he heal the man on the sabbath? If he did they could accuse him.

3 Jesus said to the man with the paralyzed hand, “Stand here in the center.” 4 Then he asked them, “What does the Law allow us to do on the Sabbath? To do good or to do harm? To save life or to kill?” But they were silent.

5 Then Jesus looked around at them with anger and deep sadness because they had closed their minds. And he said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” He stretched it out and his hand was healed. 6 But as soon as the Pharisees left, they met with Herod’s supporters, looking for a way to destroy Jesus.

(Mt 12:15; Lk 6:17)

7 Jesus and his disciples withdrew to the lakeside and a large crowd from Galilee followed him. A great number of people also came from Judea, 8 Jerusalem, Idumea, Transjordan and from the region of Tyre and Sidon, for they had heard of all that he was doing.

9 Because of the crowd, Jesus told his disciples to have a boat ready for him, to prevent the people from crushing him. 10 He healed so many that all who had diseases kept pressing towards him to touch him. 11 Even the people who had evil spirits, whenever they saw him, would fall down before him and cry out, “You are the Son of God.” 12 But he warned them sternly not to tell anyone who he was.

The twelve apostles
(Mt 10:1; Lk 6:12)

• 13 Then Jesus went up into the hill country and called those he wanted and they came to him. 14 So he appointed twelve to be with him; and he called them apostles. He wanted to send them out to preach, 15 and he...
gave them authority to drive out demons.

16 These are the Twelve: Simon, to
whom he gave the name Peter;
17 James, son of Zebedee, and John his
brother, to whom he gave the name
Boanerges, which means "men of thun-
der"; 18 Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew,
Matthew, Thomas, James son of Al-
pheus, Thaddeus, Simon the Cananean
19 and Judas Iscariot, the one who be-
trayed him.

The sin against the Spirit
(Mt 12:24; Lk 11:15)

20 They went home. The crowd be-
gan to gather again and they couldn’t
even have a meal. 21 Knowing what was
happening his relatives came to take
charge of him: “He is out of his mind,”
they said. 22 Meanwhile, the teachers of
the Law who had come from Jerusalem
said, “He is in the power of Beelzebul:
the chief of the demons helps him to
drive out demons.”

23 Jesus called them to him and be-
gan teaching them by means of stories
or parables, “How can Satan drive out
Satan? 24 If a nation is divided by civil
war, that nation cannot stand. 25 If a
family divides itself into groups, that
family will not survive. 26 In the same
way, if Satan has risen against himself
and is divided, he will not stand; he is
finished. 27 No one can break into the
house of the Strong one in order to
plunder his goods, unless he first ties
up the Strong one. Then indeed, he can
plunder his house.

28 Truly, I say to you, every sin will be
forgiven humankind, even insults to
God, however numerous. 29 But who-
ever slanders the Holy Spirit will never
be forgiven: he carries the guilt of his
sin forever.”

20. He is in the power of Beelzebul (v.
22). More than the healings, the exorcisms
unsettled the Pharisees and the Teachers of the
Law. They, the religious authorities, traveled
from Jerusalem to see this Jesus for themselves.
The Jews of Jesus’ time were obsessed with the
belief that illness was a form of possession. Jesus
does not concern himself with distinguishing
between illness and possession. Actually, the
Devil is behind all human misery. Beelzebul, the
name of an ancient idol, was a Jewish term for
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No one can break into the house of the
Strong one. That Strong one is the Devil and his
house is the possessed person. “To plunder the
house” is to take away the Devil’s power over his
victim.

Every sin will be forgiven humankind, even
insults to God, however numerous and Mat-
thew adds: “And the one who speaks against the
Son of Man will be forgiven” (Mt 12:32).

Whereas the Old Testament punished blas-
phemous words with death in order to save
God’s honor and avoid his anger towards the
community, the God whom Jesus knows is
aware of how far human stupidity can go and
does not feel offended by so many ridiculous or
blasphemous words habitually used in our soci-
ety: he does not defend himself as do the
important people of this world.

Jesus allows himself to be criticized by those
who do not understand him. Many Pharisees of
good faith did not understand Jesus and were
scandalized by him. This was excusable, but it is
a different thing to call evil that which is clearly
good.

To slander (or: to blaspheme) the Holy Spirit
(v. 29) is to attribute to a bad spirit a work that is
manifestly good. Those who systematically at-
tribute bad intentions to good work done by
others, by the Church, by other parties, sin
against the Holy Spirit. The one who recognizes
the truth but not God is better off than the one
who says he believes in God but does not
recognize the truth.

About the exorcisms, Jesus concludes: “The
kingdom of God has come.” In reality the victory
over Satan is daily reinforced. Our prayer, the
insistent prayer of Christian communities, the
witness of life and courageous action of Chris-
tians are effective in repulsing the diabolical
presence of money, the exploitation of others,
drugs or the frenzy for sex.

31. See Mk 3:20.
Jesus lost his relatives but found his true
mother and your brothers are outside asking for you.” 33 He replied, “Who are my mother and my brothers?”

34 And looking around at those who sat there he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers. 35 Whoever does the will of God is brother and sister and mother to me.”

The sower
(Mt 13:1; Lk 8:4)

4 1 Again Jesus began to teach by the lake, but such a large crowd gathered about him that he got into a boat and sat in it on the lake while the crowd stood on the shore. 2 He taught brothers and sisters. When we commit ourselves to God’s work, we discover new brothers and sisters and a mother, Mary, of whom the Gospel says, “Happy are you for having believed that God’s promises would be fulfilled.” Jesus does not say, “He is my father,” for the Father is one and he is in Heaven.

THE BROTHERS OF JESUS

The Church never doubted that Mary was a virgin and that Jesus was her only son, as he is the only Son of the Father (see commentary on Mt 1:18). Why then does it speak of Jesus’ brothers and sisters?

First, in Hebrew, any relative is called “brother” or “sister.” In the Bible we find more than five hundred examples where the word “brother” signifies a fairly close relationship.

To avoid confusion the Jews used some clearer forms. If the Gospel really meant brothers – sons of Mary – on mentioning them together with her, it should have said, “Your mother and the sons of your mother are here.” This was the only acceptable way of expressing it at that time.

Some people say: “If the word ‘brother’ often denotes distant cousins, it may also mean brothers in the strict sense of the word.” Let us look more closely to see who are the “brothers” of Jesus. They are mentioned at the time Jesus visits Nazareth: James and Joset (Matthew says Joseph), Jude and Simon.

Among the women at the foot of the cross, Mark mentions a certain “mother of James the less and of Joset.” If it were Mary, mother of Jesus, it would be very strange that precisely at this hour she is spoken of as the mother of James and Joset rather than as mother of the condemned. It would also be strange that she is mentioned only after Mary of Magdala. John says that this Mary, wife of Cleophas, was the “sister,” which means probably a close relative, of Mary (Jn 19:25).

We must then admit that James and Joset are the sons of this “other Mary” (Mt 28:1) who was part of the group of women who came from Galilee with Jesus (Lk 23:55). They are at the most first cousins of Jesus, while Simon and Jude were more distant cousins. James and Joset would not be mentioned before Simon and Jude if they were more distant relatives of Jesus.

Also, in the first Christian community, when the Gospels were written, there was a very influential group composed of Jesus’ relatives and townmates of Nazareth. These were called “brothers of the Lord” and one of them, James, became bishop of the Jerusalem community. Little is said of this group other than that they were late in believing in Jesus even though he had lived with them for several years (Mk 3:21; Jn 7:3-5). In referring to them, the Gospel gives them the name the Christian community had given them, “brothers of the Lord” or “so and so, brother of Jesus.”


Mark will now give us a few parables relating to the Kingdom of God, for it was this proclamation of the beginning of a kingdom of God which was the great highlight of Jesus’ message. The Jews of the time occasionally spoke of a reign of God but what they envisaged was the liberty of his people in the land of Israel and the punishment of their oppressors. Jesus instead affirmed that God reigns in our midst: the Kingdom is already here, at our door.

The sower went out to sow. There was impatience to harvest the fruits of such terrible suffering and of so much blood shed under Roman occupation, and for Jesus it was still sowing time! We have here the great paradox of the Gospel, which often causes us to stumble: the Kingdom is here and with it we have all that God can give us in this world. However it remains that all we have is hope (Rom 9:24). After twenty centuries of Christianity, the Kingdom resembles a field that has just been sown. Some of the grain bears fruit and multiplies (8). Those who have eyes to see cannot fail to see how many things are born of the Gospel and

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Lk 11:28

Mt 13:34

Lk 1:26). Why then does it speak of the only Son of the Father (see commentary on virgin and that Jesus was her only son, as he is not say, “He is my father,” for the Father is one God’s promises would be fulfilled.” Jesus does say, “Happy are you for having believed that “brother” signifies a fairly close relationship. than five hundred examples where the word “brother” means probably a close relative, of Mary (Jn 19:25).

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When the crowd went away, some who were around him with the Twelve asked about the parables.

He answered them, “The mystery of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But for those outside, everything comes in parables, so that the more they see, they don’t perceive; the more they hear, they don’t understand; otherwise they would be converted and pardoned.”

Jesus said to them, “Don’t you understand this parable? How then will you understand any of the parables?

What the sower is sowing is the word. Those along the path where the seed fell are people who hear the word, but as soon as they do, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them.

Other people receive the word like rocky ground. As soon as they hear the word, they accept it with joy, but they have no roots so it lasts only a little while. No sooner does trouble or persecution come because of the word, than they fall.

Others receive the seed as among thorns. After they hear the word, they are caught up in the worries of this life, false hopes of riches and other desires. All these come in and choke the word so that finally it produces nothing.

And there are others who receive the word as good soil. They hear the word, take it to heart and produce: some thirty, some sixty and some one hundred times as much.”

This verse 12 quotes an important text of Isaiah (6:9) which will be recalled in Jn 12:40 and Acts 28:26. To understand, we must remember that the prophet used a grammatical form proper to Hebrew and difficult to translate into English. More or less this is what God says to the prophet: “ Harden their heart, speak so that listening they do not hear.” It should be understood in this way: “You will only succeed in hardening their heart, you will speak, but in fact they will listen without wanting to understand.” In no case does God wish anyone to be mistaken or remain in ignorance.

Everything comes in parables. Those who have not been called to meet Christ, or who once called have refused, live in a world “outside,” where they are not without the light of God, but such comes to them in “parables,” which means through many intermediaries and human limitations. The Gospel, then, brings light even to one who has not taken the step, but is adapted to its capacity, since such a person lives in a world of half-truths.

The parable of the sower leads the other parables. Here Jesus tells us the purpose of his mission: he has come to initiate a new age in the human story: the kingdom of God is now among us.

Sometimes it seems that the Gospel does not have much power to transform life. Maybe this is because we have trampled on many seeds that the wind brought us. It all depends on us.

Jesus speaks of thirty and one hundred fold. The word that is heeded transforms our life and strengthens our attempts to save the world. Who
can tell what is possible for a free and liberated person?

- 21. Listen then, if you have ears. Jesus warns us, “You waste your time if you only listen to me yet do not allow what you hear to bear fruit. The measure that you measure out will be the measure you receive. That is to say, if you begin to act according to what you have learned, you will receive from God new strength and new knowledge. If you do nothing, even your religious beliefs will be of no value to you, not even when you present yourself before God. You read my Gospel, but now challenge yourselves before you follow any further.”

Whatever is hidden. The word works secretly within the heart but when we discover the transformation that is at work in our life, we readily proclaim Christ and make known to others the secret that has made us happy (Eph 2:4; Col 3:3; Phil 2:10).

- 26. In every period of time, people become impatient. When will the kingdom of justice be realized? Will violence and corruption soon come to an end? Jesus answers: invisible forces are already at work; the world matures and the Kingdom grows on.

SEEDS

How many seeds are cast to the wind? A new style, a new song, a new device, a radio program. Some seeds have grown and taken root, producing fruits that mobilize people. Let us recognize the humble beginnings of the work of God: good willed people meeting together to solve a community problem; a gesture of kindness in a closed, unfriendly environment; a first attempt to smile at life after a great disappointment. The seed grows, and the person who has welcomed the word walks more confidently on the path where God leads.


- 35. In the last two parables Jesus has shown the irresistible growth of the Kingdom, and to give a visible sign of it, he will pass to the other shore of the lake, that is to say, on the pagan side of Lake Galilee. The two miracles he is about to perform will show that his victory over the demon goes beyond the frontiers of Israel.

In Jewish mentality the sea is a daily reminder of primitive chaos, it is there the marine monsters move around, monsters which only God, for he is the all-powerful, can challenge: Levia-
than and Rahab. In commanding the sea: Quiet now! Be still! Just as he does with the demons (Mk 1:25) Jesus affirms his divine power over the forces of evil.

Confronted with all the forms of evil that attack them, in the midst of tempests that arise, people, at times, wonder if God “does not sleep.” Jesus is there. He is not surprised by the disciples’ fear of the tempest, but of their lack of faith; only trust in the victory of Jesus, Son of God, over the forces of evil, will allow them to overcome this fear.

At the very instant when they discover this divine power in Jesus, the apostles are terrified, as was Moses at the burning bush (Ex 3:1), and Isaiah at the time of his vision in the Temple (Is 6:5), as all those to whom God shows himself in a special way: more than a friend, more than a master, Jesus revealed himself to them in the truth of his being. This fear in discovering God so close to them was greater than the fear they had felt during the tempest a few moments earlier.

5.1 Jesus overcame the raging sea and disembarking on the pagan shore of the lake he confronts the demon. The text says three times that the possessed lived among the tombs, and mentions also three times the chains with which people had in vain tried to bind him. For a Jew to repeat something three times is to use the superlative: it is to say that the possessed has partnership with death and with impurity to which it is attached (Num 19:11); but no one, absolutely no one is able to master him. Finally the possessed, like the servants of idols (1 K 18:28) slashed himself with stones till blood flowed. This adversary, however, bows low recognizing the superiority of Jesus, Son of God the Most High, who forces him to reveal his name. Here again the name is a symbol: legion which means that this man is possessed by a regiment of demons. Jesus will free this possessed man: the demon, author of every “impurity” is sent to his own kingdom. Pigs are in fact, in Jewish tradition, a type of impure animal, and the sea that it was soon filled with water. 38 And Jesus was in the stern, asleep on the cushion.

They woke him up and said, “Master, don’t you care if we sink?” 39 As Jesus awoke, he rebuked the wind and ordered the sea, “Quiet now! Be still!” The wind dropped and there was a great calm. 40 Then Jesus said to them, “Why are you so frightened? Do you still have no faith?”

41 But they were terrified and they said to one another, “Who can this be? Even the wind and the sea obey him!”

The Gerasene demoniac
(Mt 8:28; Lk 8:26)

1 They arrived on the other side of the lake in the region of the Gerasenes. 2 No sooner did Jesus leave the boat than he was met by a man with evil spirits who had come from the tombs. 3 He lived among the tombs and no one could restrain him, even with a chain. 4 He had often been bound with fetters and chains but he would pull the chains apart and smash the fetters, and no one had the strength to control him. 5 Night and day he stayed among the tombs on the hillsides, and was continually screaming and beating himself with stones.

6 When he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and fell at his feet 7 and cried with a loud voice, “What do you want with me, Jesus, son of the Most High God? For God’s sake I beg you, do not torment me.” 8 He said this because Jesus had commanded, “Come out of the man, evil spirit.” 9 And when Jesus asked him, “What is your name?” he replied, “Legion is my name, for we are many.” 10 And all of them kept begging Jesus not to send them out of that region.

11 Now, a great herd of pigs was feeding on the hillside, 12 and the evil spirits begged him, “Send us to the pigs and let us go into them.” 13 So Jesus let them go. The evil spirits came out of the man and went into the pigs, and immediately the herd rushed down the cliff and all were drowned in the lake. 14 The herdsmen fled and reported this in the town and in the countryside, so all the people came to see what had happened.

15 They came to Jesus and saw the man freed of the evil spirits sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, the same man who had been possessed by the legion. They were afraid. 16 And when those who had seen it told what had happened to the man and to the pigs, 17 the people begged Jesus to leave their neighborhood.

18 When Jesus was getting into the
boat, the man who had been possessed begged to stay with him. 19 Jesus would not let him and said, “Go home to your people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you and how he has had mercy on you.” 20 So he went throughout the country of Decapolis telling everyone how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were astonished.

Jesus raises the daughter of Jairus (Mt 9:18; Lk 8:40)

• 21 Jesus then crossed to the other side of the lake and while he was still on the shore, a large crowd gathered around him. 22 Jairus, an official of the synagogue, came up and seeing Jesus, threw himself at his feet 23 and asked him earnestly, “My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her so that she may get well and live.”

24 Jesus went with him and many people followed, pressing from every side. 25 Among the crowd was a woman who had suffered from bleeding for twelve years. 26 She had suffered a lot at the hands of many doctors and had spent everything she had, but instead of getting better, she was worse. 27 Since she had heard about Jesus, this woman came up behind him and touched his cloak 28 thinking, “If I just touch his clothing, I shall get well.” 29 Her flow of blood dried up at once, and she felt in her body that she was healed of her complaint.

30 But Jesus was conscious that healing power had gone out from him, so he turned around in the crowd and asked, “Who touched my clothes?” 31 His disciples answered, “You see how the people are crowding around you. Why do you ask who touched you?” 32 But he kept looking around to see who had done it. 33 Then the woman, aware of what had happened, came forward trembling and afraid. She knelt before him and told him the whole truth.

• 34 Then Jesus said to her, “Daughter, your faith has saved you; go in peace and be free of this illness.”

35 While Jesus was still speaking, into which they cast themselves is the symbol of the empire of evil (see the calmed tempest).

The herds rushed down (v. 13) (see Mt 8:32 and Lk 8:33). The actual text of Mark says, “two thousand pigs rushed.” This is an incredible number, for such large herds of pigs were never seen. In Hebrew, the word for herds is only distinguished from the word for 2,000 by an accent mark. Probably a mistake was made when Mark’s Gospel was written in Greek.

Jesus would not let him (v. 19). It is he who chooses those who will be with him (Mk 3:13). That does not mean that the others, all those who met Jesus and recognized him as Son of God, have nothing to do: they will witness in the midst of those they know how he had compassion on them. In this way Jesus reminds us of the diversity of vocations.

• 21. This woman was considered by the Jews as unclean because of her illness (Lev 15:19). She would also make ‘unclean’ anyone who touched her. Because of this, she was prohibited by the Law from mingling with others but dared enter into the crowd, and touch Jesus’ cloak.

Faith drove her to break the Law of “purification,” and to risk scandal. This woman did not know who Jesus was, but had faith that God would cure her through him.

The religiosity of this woman is akin to what we call today “popular Catholicism.” As seen in this woman, popular Catholicism is ill-instructed, yet shows a strong religious sense and trust in God. It is superficial and naive, expecting great results from touching images and religious things – Christ’s garment in this case. Like Jesus, we should respect the religious expressions of popular Catholicism while at the same time trying, like him, to help people discover deeper dimensions of their faith.

• 34. FAITH AND MIRACLES

Who is responsible for a miracle? Does it come from the faith of the one who asks or from Christ who works the miracle? If the miracle depends solely on the faith of a person, then what is the difference between the faithful one who asks God for a cure and the one who goes to any faith healer? In the latter, it would be enough to convince oneself; the one actually doing the healing would matter little.

These people coming to Jesus were, of course, very far from recognizing him as the Son of God, but they were convinced that God would give them some blessing through this prophet and holy man. This faith prepared them to receive healing in both body and spirit. How can God heal those who refuse to hope?
some people arrived from the official’s house to inform him, “Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the Master any further?” 36But Jesus ignored what they said and told the official, “Do not fear, just believe.” 37And he allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James and John, the brother of James.

* 38When they arrived at the house, Jesus saw a great commotion, with people weeping and wailing loudly. 39Jesus entered and said to them, “Why all this commotion and weeping? The child is not dead but asleep.”

They laughed at him. But Jesus sent them outside and went with the child’s father and mother and his companions into the room where the child lay. 41Taking her by the hand, he said to her, “Talitha kumi!” which means: “Little girl, get up!”

42The girl got up at once and began to walk around. (She was twelve years old.) The parents were astonished, greatly astonished. 43Jesus strictly ordered them not to let anyone know about it, and told them to give her something to eat.

**Is he not the carpenter?**
(Mt 13:55; Lk 4:16)

* 6** 1Leaving that place, Jesus returned to his own country, and his disciples followed him. 2When the Sabbath came, he began teaching in the synagogue, and most of those who heard him were astonished. They commented, “How did this come to him? What kind of wisdom has been given to him that he also performs such miracles? 3Who is he but the carpenter, the son of Mary and the brother of James and Joset and Judas and Simon? His sisters, too, are they not here among us?” So they took offense at him.

4And Jesus said to them, “Prophets..."
are despised only in their own country, among their relatives and in their own family.” And he could work no miracles there, but only healed a few sick people by laying his hands on them. Jesus himself was astounded at their unbelief.

**Jesus sends out the Twelve**

(Mt 10:1; Lk 9:1; 10:1)

- Jesus then went around the villages teaching. He called the Twelve to him and began to send them out two by two, giving them authority over evil spirits. And he ordered them to take nothing for the journey except a staff; no food, no bag, no money in their belts. They were to wear sandals and were not to take an extra tunic. And he added, “In whatever house you are welcomed, stay there until you leave the place. If any place doesn’t receive you and the people refuse to listen to you, leave after shaking the dust off your feet. It will be a testimony against them.”

So they set out to proclaim that this was the time to repent. They drove out many demons and healed many sick people by anointing them.

**John the Baptist beheaded**

(Mt 14:1; Lk 9:7)

- 14 King Herod also heard about Jesus because his name had become well-known. Some people said, “John the Baptist has been raised from the dead and that is why miraculous powers are at work in him.” Others thought, “He is Elijah,” and others, “He is a prophet like the prophets of times past.” When Herod was told of this, he thought: “I had John beheaded, yet he has risen from the dead!”

For this is what had happened. Herod had ordered John to be arrested and had him bound and put in prison because of Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip. Herod had married her and John had told him, “It is not right for you to live with your brother’s wife.” So Herodias held a grudge against John and wanted to kill him, but she could not because Herod respected John. He knew John to be an upright and holy man and kept him safe.

6. **THE MISSION**

See commentary on Matthew 10:5; Luke 10:1; Matthew 28:16. Jesus begins a third stage of his ministry by organizing a mission throughout the province. Before, the apostles accompanied Jesus but now he sends them ahead of him. Jesus is an educator. He not only teaches his followers, he has them share in his mission. His apostles must also proclaim their faith and perform healings as the Master does. By doing this, they put into practice what they have discovered of the kingdom of God. The disciples should be first to believe what they themselves proclaim: God makes himself present. Because of this, they must live day by day, trusting in the Father’s Providence, not frightened but always conscious of God’s mission and power.

Oil was used at the time as a remedy, but Jesus gives it a new meaning: the healings bring more than just well being, they are also the sign of spiritual healing, the reconciliation of people with God.

Jesus’ concern to form communities of believers is already present. He sends his disciples out two by two so that the message will not be from one person only, but the expression of a group united in one mission. Jesus tells them to stay under one roof with one family so that this may be a center radiating faith.

- 14. **King Herod**. This refers to Herod Antipas, son of the other Herod who reigned when Jesus was born.

**King Herod respected John**, but he was prisoner of his milieu and of his vices. As king of Galilee, his misconduct constituted a public counter-witness. All through the Bible we see prophets stressing
he liked listening to him, although he became very disturbed whenever he heard him.

21 Herodias had her chance on Herod’s birthday, when he gave a dinner for all the senior government officials, military chiefs and the leaders of Galilee. On that occasion the daughter of Herodias came in and danced; and she delighted Herod and his guests. The king said to the girl, “Ask me for anything you want and I will give it to you.” And he went so far as to say with many oaths, “I will give you anything you ask, even half my kingdom.” She went out to consult her mother, “What shall I ask for?” The mother replied, “The head of John the Baptist.”

25 The girl hurried to the king and made her request: “I want you to give me the head of John the Baptist, here and now, on a dish.”

26 The king was very displeased, but he would not refuse in front of his guests because of his oaths. So he sent one of the bodyguards with orders to bring John’s head. He went and beheaded John in prison; then he brought the head on a dish and gave it to the girl. And the girl gave it to her mother. When John’s disciples heard of this, they came and took his body and buried it.

Jesus, shepherd and prophet

• 30 The apostles returned and reported to Jesus all they had done and taught. Then he said to them, “Go off by yourselves to a remote place and have some rest.” For there were so many people coming and going that the apostles had no time even to eat.

32 And they went away in the boat to a secluded area by themselves.

33 But people saw them leaving and many could guess where they were going. So, from all the towns they hurried there on foot, arriving ahead of them.

34 As Jesus went ashore he saw a large crowd, and he had compassion on them (v. 34). This compassion of Jesus helps us understand that Christian commitment to the poor is not complete as long as the Church is not itself deeply rooted in the lower class of society. They were like sheep without a shepherd (Num 27:17; Is 40:11; Ezk 34; Zec 11:4-17; 12:8). This refers to people who had not yet found true community, and Jesus had pity on them. The prophet Ezekiel reproached the leaders of Israel for being bad pastors, but today he might reproach us for failing to be pastors and prophets in the midst of our world. Why should we so often wait for priests, religious or a few handpicked lay people to take the initiative of assembling new communities? Why are we so timid in proposing to “those who are outside” the light of faith that we have gratuitously received and allow them to discover in the group or community this richness?

And he began a long teaching session with them. What did he tell them? All that makes up the Gospel. Penetrating everyone’s conscience with a prophetic gaze, Jesus showed each one where the real problem lay. Speaking like the prophets, Jesus never enclosed and isolated the people within their personal problems: their personal progress had to be attained together with the renewal of their environment.

Jesus saw that they were burdened with difficulties but would lift them up by giving them “signs of hope.” In any situation there is something that we can do immediately to uplift ourselves; and even before any attempt of ours, God already gives us signs that he does not abandon us and that we must trust totally in him.
on them for they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he began a long teaching session with them.

**First miracle of the loaves**
(Mt 14:13; Lk 9:10; Jn 6:1)

- 35. It was now getting late, so his disciples came to him and said, “This is a lonely place and it is now late. 36 You should send the people away and let them go to the farms and villages around here to buy themselves something to eat.”

37. Jesus replied, “You yourselves give them something to eat.” They answered, “If we are to give them food, we must go and buy two hundred silver coins’ worth of bread.” 38. But Jesus said, “You have some loaves: how many? Go and see.” The disciples found out and said, “There are five loaves and two fish.”

39. Then he told them to have the people sit down together in groups on the green grass. 40. This they did in groups of hundreds and fifties. 41. And Jesus took the five loaves and the two fish and, raising his eyes to heaven, he pronounced a blessing, broke the loaves and handed them to his disciples to distribute to the people. He also divided the two fish among them.

42. They all ate and everyone had enough. 43. The disciples gathered up what was left and filled twelve baskets with broken pieces of bread and fish. 44. Five thousand men had eaten there.

**Jesus walks on the water**
(Mt 14:22; Jn 6:16)

- 45. Immediately, Jesus obliged his disciples to get into the boat and go ahead of him to the other side, towards Bethsaida, while he himself sent the crowd away. 46. And having sent the people off, he went by himself to the hillside to pray.

47. When evening came, the boat was far out on the lake while he was alone on the land. 48. Jesus saw his disciples straining at the oars, for the wind was against them, and before daybreak he came to them walking on the lake; and he was going to pass them by.

49. When they saw him walking on the lake, they thought it was a ghost and cried out; 50. for they all saw him and were terrified. But at once he called to them, “Courage! It’s me; don’t be afraid.” 51. Then Jesus got into the boat with them and the wind died down. They were completely astonished, 52. for they had not really grasped the fact of the loaves; their minds were dull.
Having crossed the lake, they came ashore at Gennesaret where they tied up the boat. As soon as they landed, people recognized Jesus and ran to spread the news throughout the countryside. Wherever he was they brought to him the sick lying on their mats. And wherever he went, to villages, towns or farms, they laid the sick in the marketplace and begged him to let them touch just the fringe of his cloak. And all who touched him were cured.

True cleanness
(Mt 15:10; Lk 6:39)

7 One day the Pharisees gathered around Jesus and with them were some teachers of the Law who had just come from Jerusalem.

2 They noticed that some of his disciples were eating their meal with unclean hands, that is, without washing them. 3 Now the Pharisees, and in fact, all the Jews, never eat without washing their hands for they follow the tradition received from their ancestors. Nor do they eat anything when they come from the market without first washing themselves. And there are many other traditions they observe, for example, the ritual washing of cups, pots and plates.

7.1 THE TRADITION AND TRADITIONS

No group, not even the Church, can sustain itself without traditions and customs. Yet even when they are good traditions, they are still made by humans. For example, the way the mass is celebrated, celebrations, novenas, etc. All that past popes, bishops, and Christian communities have done can be changed by another pope, bishop or Christian community, and because these can be changed, we understand that they are not essential.

What does not change is God’s teaching. Where can it be found? In the Bible and in Jesus’ teachings. Yet there is a way of understanding Jesus as the apostles did. This is called the Tradition of the Apostles, and the Church, founded by the apostles, guards this Tradition, that is, their spirit. Let us not confuse the traditions of Catholics with the Tradition of the Church.

We often make little effort to enter into the spirit and Tradition of the Church, however, clinging instead to antiquated and mediocre traditions. Why are so many Christians today scandalized when the Church frees itself from these antiquated rites? Jesus gives us the reason: they cling to these rites because they are incapable of believing. External religion replaces the authentic faith they do not possess. They hang onto these things because these are all they have, and if they lose that, God no longer has any meaning for them.

14 Jesus then called the people to him again and said to them, “Listen to

CLEAN AND UNCLEAN

An important practice of Judaism was to keep oneself clean; one could not participate in worship without being in a state of ritual purity. This word “purity” did not have the same meaning we give it today. The clean person was one who was not contaminated even inadvertently by things prohibited by Law. For example, pork and rabbit were considered unclean; they could not be eaten. A menstruating woman or a person with hemorrhoids were considered unclean for a
me, all of you, and try to understand. 15 Nothing that enters one from outside can make that person unclean. It is what comes out from within that makes unclean. 16 Let everyone who has ears listen.”

17 When Jesus got home and was away from the crowd, his disciples asked him about this saying 18 and he replied, “So even you are dull? Do you not see that whatever comes from outside cannot make a person unclean?

19 Since it enters, not the heart but the stomach and is finally passed out.”

Thus Jesus declared that all foods are clean.

20 And he went on, “What comes out of a person is what defiles, 21 for evil designs come out of the heart: theft, murder, 22 adultery, jealousy, greed, maliciousness, deceit, indecency, slander, pride and folly. 23 All these evil things come from within and make a person unclean.”

The faith of the Syrophoenician (Mt 15:21)

• 24 When Jesus left that place he went to the border of the Tyrian country. There he entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there, but he could not remain hidden. 25 A woman, whose small daughter had an evil spirit, heard of him and came and fell at his feet. 26 Now this woman was a pagan, a Syrophoenician by birth, and she begged him to drive the demon out of her daughter.

27 Jesus told her, “Let the children be fed first, for it is not right to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.” 28 But she replied, “Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the crumbs from the children’s bread.” 29 Then Jesus said to her, “You may go your way;
because of such a reply the demon has gone out of your daughter.” 30 And when the woman went home, she found her child lying in bed and the demon gone.

**Healing of a deaf and dumb man**

31 Again Jesus set out; from the country of Tyre he passed through Sidon and skirting the sea of Galilee he came to the territory of Decapolis. 32 There a deaf man who also had difficulty in speaking was brought to him. They asked Jesus to lay his hand upon him.

33 Jesus took him apart from the crowd, put his fingers into the man’s ears and touched his tongue with spittle. 34 Then, looking up to heaven, he groaned and said to him, “Ephphatha,” that is, “Be opened.” 35 And his ears were opened, his tongue was loosened, and he began to speak clearly. 36 Jesus ordered them not to tell anyone, but the more he insisted on this, the more they proclaimed it. 37 The people were completely astonished and said, “He has done all things well; he makes the deaf hear and the dumb speak.”

**Second miracle of the loaves**

(Mt 15:32)

8 1 Soon afterwards Jesus was in the midst of another large crowd that obviously had nothing to eat. So he called his disciples and said to them, 2 “I feel sorry for these people because of how much they are suffering, for there is nothing here to give them to eat. 3 If you want to do something, give them something to eat.” They replied, “We have only five loaves and two fish.” 4 Jesus said, “Bring them here to me.” 5 Then he ordered the crowd to sit down in groups on the grass. 6 He took the five loaves and the two fish, and after he had given thanks, he broke them and passed them to his disciples, who gave them to the people. 7 They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples took up twelve baskets of the broken pieces, which remained. 8 And those who ate were about five thousand men, not including the women and children.

These two events lead to shape them according to the same pattern, but they have different meaning.

The first time, between Tiberias and Capernaum (that is, right at the center of Jesus’ work in Galilee) the people, more numerous and more urgent, approach Jesus to make him their liberator (Jn 6). Jesus refuses, but later that afternoon he multiplies the loaves – a clear sign that he is the Messiah foretold by the prophets. The next day Jesus, in his turn, demands that they take him for what he is, and this produces the rejection (Jn 6:60).

Later Jesus journeys to the boundaries of Galilee, where much of the population are pagan. They also want to hear Jesus. There, on the other side of the shore, the eastern part, Jesus offers them bread as a farewell meal after they followed him for two days through the desert land.

The two accounts of the multiplication of loaves differ in several points like the number of loaves and the number of participants. The baskets for example, mentioned in Mark 6:43 refer to the stiff osier basket of the Jews, and in 8:8 to the wicker basket or the Greek’s folding bag.

The number 12 records the Twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles, while the number 7 records the “seven pagan nations” which occupied Canaan and the seven deacons of the early Church.

These differences underline the will of Mark to take into account the real situation of the Church at the time he wrote: having been born in Jewish milieu, it was developing among Greek nations. This is why, for the first multiplication the evangelists say, “Jesus pronounced a blessing”, and in the second, “Jesus gave thanks”. Because the first was the word used for Eucharist among Jewish Christian communities, and the latter was used in Greek speaking churches.
they have been with me for three days and now have nothing to eat. If I send them to their homes hungry, they will faint on the way; some of them have come a long way.”

4 His disciples replied, “Where in a deserted place like this could we get enough bread to feed these people?”

5 He asked them, “How many loaves have you?” And they answered, “Seven.”

6 Then he ordered the crowd to sit down on the ground. Taking the seven loaves and giving thanks, he broke them and handed them to his disciples to distribute. And they distributed them among the people. 7 They also had some small fish, so Jesus said a blessing and asked that these be shared as well.

8 The people ate and were satisfied. The broken pieces were collected.

Some feel that one same event has been recorded with those differences in Jewish and Greek speaking communities before the gospels present them as two different events. But the sequence that contains both of them is very ancient (see the commentary of Mt 14:13) and does not come from later times in which the contract with the original events would have been lost. This duality is stressed in Matthew 16:5 and still more in Mark 8:9.

The miracle of the multiplication of the loaves (or the two multiplications of loaves) holds an important place in the synoptic gospels because it points out Jesus as the Messiah: see commentary on Matthew 15:29; Luke 9:12; John 6.

• 11. See commentary on Matthew 16:1.

THE PHARISEES

The Pharisees do not see the fruits of Jesus’ preaching nor do they see the people who are comforted and begin a better way of life. They do not see those who discover hope and faith or how God saves the poor.

Throughout the Gospel, Jesus confronts the Pharisees. They were a respected and powerful association, the most conspicuous within the Jewish society. Nevertheless they oppose Jesus steadfastly. If Jesus came in our present time, would he not likewise offend some of the most powerful religious associations?

The Pharisees were religious in a way that has always existed and still exists. Imagine a serious person who becomes aware that God’s service is the most important thing. This person enjoys a good social status or a fine education; so he decides to work for God, especially by leading others, sinners, less capable or less instructed.

All this is right and many Pharisees were excellent believers. The gospel when speaking about them, however, points out a way of thinking which was deeply rooted in their institution (and is always to be cared for in the Church) that is the reason why they could not recognize Jesus and rather opposed him. Such a Pharisee willingly serves God, but God, in turn, must acknowledge his services and reward him. The Pharisee wants to be without debt to God and carefully keeps himself from falling into sin, because he dislikes being in need of God’s pardon.

This is where things begin to go awry. For no one can meet God, not even the righteous and well instructed, unless they discover their own misery and weakness. We all need to experience God’s mercy and begin loving him wholeheartedly, meekly, feeling at one with the poorest and with sinners.

This Pharisee is aware of having the same weaknesses as the other people, in spite of being very observant, but he has no means of being freed because he is not humble enough to ask for God’s help. Thus there is no other way for him apart from hiding his faults behind a flawless exterior conduct and so he becomes a hypocrite.

• 14. Jesus tells his apostles to beware of the Pharisee’s spirit (of becoming like the Pharisees) but they do not listen, being more concerned about the food.

Jesus says: Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees, meaning their teaching (Mt 16:12). Jesus fears that his disciples, because of being com-
warned them, “Keep your eyes open and beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and the yeast of Herod.” 16 And they said to one another, “He saw that we have no bread.”

17 Aware of this, Jesus asked them, “Why are you talking about the loaves you are short of? Do you not see or understand? Are your minds closed? 18 Have you eyes that don’t see and ears that don’t hear? And do you not remember 19 when I broke the five loaves among five thousand? How many baskets full of leftovers did you collect?” They answered, “Twelve.” 20 “And having seven loaves for the four thousand, how many wicker baskets of leftovers did you collect?” They answered, “Seven.” 21 Then Jesus said to them, “Do you still not understand?”

Cure of the blind man at Bethsaida

22 When they came to Bethsaida, Jesus was asked to touch a blind man who was brought to him. 23 He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. When he had put spittle on his eyes and laid his hands upon him, he asked, “Can you see anything?” 24 The man, who was beginning to see, replied, “I see people! They look like trees, but they move around.” 25 Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again and the man could see perfectly. His sight was restored and he could see everything clearly.

26 Then Jesus sent him home saying, “Do not return to the village.”

Peter’s profession of faith

(Mt 16:13; Lk 9:18; Jn 6:69)

27 Jesus set out with his disciples for the villages around Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked them, “Who do people say I am?” 28 And they told him, “Some say you are John the Baptist; others say you are Elijah or one of the prophets.” Then Jesus asked them, 29 “But you, who do you say I am?” Peter answered, “You are the Messiah.” 30 And he ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

31 Jesus then began to teach them that the Son of Man had to suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the Law. He would be killed and after three days rise again. 32 Jesus said all this quite openly, so that Peter took him aside and began to protest strongly. 33 But Jesus turning around, and look-
ing at his disciples, rebuked Peter saying, “Get behind me Satan! You are thinking not as God does, but as people do.”

**Take up your cross**

(Mt 16:24; Lk 9:23)

* 34 Then Jesus called the people and his disciples and said, “If you want to follow me, deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me. 35 For if you choose to save your life, you will lose it; and if you lose your life for my sake and for the sake of the Gospel, you will save it.

36 What good is it to gain the whole world but destroy yourself? 37 There is nothing you can give to recover your life. 38 I tell you: If anyone is ashamed of me and of my words among this adulterous and sinful people, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when he comes in the Glory of his Father with the holy angels.”

**The transfiguration of Jesus**

(Mt 17:1; Lk 9:28)

9 1 And he went on to say, “Truly I tell you, there are some here who will not die before they see the kingdom of God coming with power.”

2 Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain. There his appearance was changed before their eyes. 3 Even his clothes shone, becoming as white as no bleach of this world could make them. 4 Elijah and Moses appeared to them; the two were talking with Jesus.

those who proclaim the truth. He had to freely go to his death because self-sacrifice is the only means for the salvation of the world.

- 34. It is necessary to lose oneself:
  - to lose oneself like Abraham, who in his old age went to strange lands;
  - to lose oneself like Moses, who agreed to be the leader of an irresponsible people;
  - to lose oneself like Mary, who entered a path wherein no one could understand or help her;
  - to rid oneself of this temporary existence so as to be reborn of God, like Ignatius the martyr. Condemned to be eaten by lions, he said, “I am the wheat of God; may I be ground by the teeth of wild animals to be converted into the pure bread of Christ. My passions are crucified in me; there is no carnal fire that can burn me; a fountain has sprouted in me that murmurs and speaking not as God does, but as people do. From me, for me, and not: from God, for God. For God has come in the person of Jesus to knock on our door and to propose to us very specific commitments.

If anyone is ashamed of me and of my words (v. 38). The believer who follows the words of Christ without fear of what may be asked of her is attacked without mercy by many who call themselves Christians. For we live in the midst of an adulterous people. In other words, people who without verbally denying God, in fact, serve other gods (Mt 6:24; Jn 8:42).

- 9.1 The transfiguration of Jesus is the midpoint of Mark’s Gospel.

This manifestation is in fact one of the most important in the New Testament. In the liturgy of oriental Churches, the feast of the Transfiguration holds a place of supreme importance.

Though not the summit, it is in fact the summary of all revelation. Moses and Elijah, the spokesmen of the Law and the Prophets (in a word, of all the Old Testament) present the Christ of the Gospel to the apostles Peter, James and John, those who will be responsible for the preaching of the Gospel.

As Moses and Elijah were led by God to the Holy Mountain, to witness his glory (Ex 33:18; 1 K 19:9), so the apostles are led apart by Jesus; they too climb the mountain and there Jesus manifests his glory to them.

Jesus had just announced his passion and his death: the day had come when the Father confirmed his end that was very near (Lk 9:31) and gave him a foretaste of his resurrection. Moses and Elijah were the witnesses, they who, in a certain way, escaped the corruption of death (Dt 9:4; 2 K 2:11).

A cloud formed covering them in a shadow. The cloud mentioned here is that which, in several episodes of the Bible, both indicates and hides the mysterious presence of God (Ex 19 and 1 K 8:10).

Listen to him! (v. 7). The apostles have been accompanying Jesus for more than a year, with misunderstanding increasing between him and
the religious authorities of the people of God. For them a question could arise: Is not Jesus mistaken? Are not the certitudes of God’s people on the side of the priests and scribes? The Father himself intervenes, just as he had done in the past for John the Baptist: 

*Listen to him!*  

"Listen to him for he is the Word made flesh" (Jn 1:14; Heb 1:1). He is the Prophet, and all the others speak only for him (Dt 18:17). When Jesus worked miracles for the sick, and over the forces of nature, he showed that the present order of the world is not permanent. Now the curtains are partially opened: would that the apostles understood that the Son of Man, as Jesus calls himself, is close to his resurrection. In a little while his fellow citizens will hang him on a cross. In a little while, too, the Father will give him the Glory that awaits him. The shining cloud, the dazzling white clothes are external signs that indicate something of the mystery of Jesus: the day he rises from among the dead, his human nature will be transformed and extended by divine Energies, so that he may fill everything in everyone.

The question about Elijah  

*11* Finally they asked him, "Why then do the teachers of the Law say that Elijah must come first?* 12 Jesus answered them, “Of course, Elijah will come first so that everything may be as it should be... But, why do the Scriptures say that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be despised?* 13 I tell you that Elijah has already come and they have treated him as they pleased, as the Scriptures say of him.”

The boy with an evil spirit  

*14* When they came to the place where they had left the disciples, they saw many people around and some teachers of the Law arguing with them. 15 When the people saw Jesus, they were astonished and ran to greet him. 16 He asked, “What are you arguing about with them?” A man answered him from the crowd, 17 “Master, I brought my son to you for he has a dumb spirit. 18 Whenever the spirit seizes him, it throws him down and he foams at the mouth, grinds his teeth and becomes stiff all over. I asked your disciples to drive the spirit out, but they could not.” 19 Jesus replied, “You faithless people. How long must I be with you? How long must I put up with you? Bring him to me.” 20 And they brought the boy to him.

As soon as the spirit saw Jesus, it

the Bible which said that Elijah had to return to earth to prepare the way before the Messiah would come, so that he should not encounter any opposition (Mal 3:1 and 4:23). Jesus asserts again what he had said many times: he has to be rejected. Not all that is written in the Bible is to be understood literally. Elijah was not to return personally from heaven, but rather John the Baptist had already come as the new Elijah (Lk 1:16).

*14. All things are possible for one who believes* (v. 23). Jesus has gone back to the crowd and again he meets with human unbelief. The prayer of the child’s father would be a model for all Christian prayer. If we turn to God in prayer, it is because we have faith; and yet in doing this we discover the poverty and the fragility of our faith.

Why could not we drive out the spirit? (v. 28). The apostles wonder: did Jesus not give them power over the demons? They are not aware of their lack of faith and easily forget how far they are from their Master. To them are directed the sharp words of Jesus: You, faithless people! How many people think they are great believers when, in fact their faith has still not moved anything!  

*Only prayer can drive out this kind.* Various
shook and convulsed the boy who fell on the ground and began rolling about, foaming at the mouth. 21 Then Jesus asked the father, "How long has this been happening to him?" He replied, "From childhood. 22 And it has often thrown him into the fire and into the water to destroy him. If you can do anything, have pity on us and help us."

Jesus said to him, "Why do you say: 'If you can?' All things are possible for one who believes." 24 Immediately the father of the boy cried out, "I do believe, but help the little faith I have."

Jesus saw that the crowd was increasing rapidly, so he ordered the evil spirit, "Dumb and deaf spirit, I command you: Leave the boy and never enter him again." The evil spirit shook and convulsed the boy and with a terrible shriek came out. The boy lay like a corpse and people said, "He is dead." 27 But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him and the boy stood up.

After Jesus had gone indoors, his disciples asked him privately, "Why couldn't we drive out the spirit?" 29 And he answered, "Only prayer can drive out this kind, nothing else."

Jesus again speaks of his passion (Mt 17:22; Lk 9:43)

30 After leaving that place, they made their way through Galilee; but Jesus did not want people to know where he was because he was teaching his disciples. And he told them, "The Son of Man will be delivered into human hands. They will kill him, but three days after he has been killed, he will rise." 32 The disciples, however, did not understand these words and they were afraid to ask him what he meant.

Who is the greatest? (Mt 18:1; Lk 9:46; 18:17; 22:24)

33 They came to Capernaum and, once inside the house, Jesus asked them, "What were you discussing on the way?" 34 But they did not answer because they had been arguing about who was the greatest.

Who is the greatest?

35 Then he sat down, called the people mentioned in the Gospels as being possessed may have been mentally sick and could be cured by magnetic force, by the laying on of hands (Mk 6:5). Not this lad. Sometimes we find ourselves like Jesus close to the power of Evil, and prayer is needed to overcome it.

In the Gospel of Mark we find only four references to prayer and these in only a few words. It is because prayer was not a novelty for the Jews.

What is prayer? It is to direct our spirit to God. There are thousands of ways of praying, of keeping our spirit oriented toward God, striving towards him and listening to him; praying the Psalms and other prayers of the Church, meditating on the rosary, singing, Bible reading, etc. The purpose of all these prayers is that the Lord may give us the spirit of prayer, that we may be able to communicate with God in the depth of our spirit, even while working and minding our tasks.

Jesus shows us in these pages the way to expel the demon, because the evil spirit multiplies obstacles to discourage us, as soon as he knows we have decided to follow Christ (Mt 12:43; 13:19).

• 30. Time is running out for Jesus. He now dedicates himself chiefly to preparing the group of apostles who will have the tremendous responsibility of continuing his work. They did not understand about his death and resurrection: these things cannot be understood until they have happened. They prefer not to question or know; leaving Jesus very isolated.

SERVANTS

• 33. The apostles return to Capernaum, the center of their missionary expeditions, and most probably stay in the house of Simon Peter. They have preached the kingdom of God, performing miraculous cures, and have expelled demons. They still lack the most important quality of all: to be humble.

We also follow Christ, make sacrifices for him, and look like good Christians, and God performs through us some miracles great or small... Can we compare ourselves with our neighbor? Do we have the right to impose ourselves on others when they prefer the services of another person? Should we consider ourselves superior to those who do not reach our level?

The last sentence of Jesus is as important as the first: Whoever welcomes a child such as this in my name... The dignity of the human person stems from this identification with Christ.

THE DIGNITY OF THE HUMAN PERSON

• 35. God does not wait for us to be baptized before he recognizes his Son in us. He created us "in Christ." This means that he created each of
Twelve and said to them, “If someone wants to be first, let him be last of all and servant of all.” 36 Then he took a little child, placed it in their midst, and putting his arms around it he said to them, 37 “Whoever welcomes a child such as this in my name, welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me, welcomes not me but the One who sent me.”

• 38 John said to him, “Master, we saw someone who drove out demons by calling upon your name, and we tried to forbid him because he does not belong to our group.” 39 Jesus answered, “Do not forbid him, for no one who works a miracle in my name can soon after speak evil of me. 40 For whoever is not against us is for us.

41 If anyone gives you a drink of water because you belong to Christ and bear his name, truly, I say to you, he will not go without reward.

The proliferation of separate churches is for the Catholic Church a call to reform.

For the Church finds itself paralyzed for want of a true spirit of poverty and because of its massive structures which no longer allow simple people to find there the fresh life-giving air of the Gospel.

In addition, a missionary sense is often completely absent: too many Catholics are not ready to leave their own practices and little groups, with the end result that the Church is seemingly absent in a great number of places, especially in the urban masses and among immigrants.

With that how can we condemn those who by their missionary action allow a great number of people to meet Jesus Christ in fervent and welcoming communities, even if everything there is not authentic?

In saying this we do not forget the many riches of Christian tradition which have often been lost by those who left the Church, especially the certitude that everything human must be redeemed and saved, and the joyful and humble way of believing and doing the will of the Father of which Mary is the finest symbol.

Several things seem to us out of place in these churches: the miracle used as an instrument of propaganda, the pressures on the sick, the threatening with punishments from God... Many enclose themselves in their cults, far from the “world,” making ecumenism impossible, that is the dialogue and common seeking with other Christians.
again? Have salt in yourselves and be at peace with one another.”

Divorce

(5: 31; Mt 19:1; Lk 16:18)

10 Jesus then left that place and went to the province of Judea, beyond the Jordan River. Once more crowds gathered around him and once more he taught them, as he always did. 2 Some (Pharisees came and) put him to the test with this question, “Is it right for a husband to divorce his wife?” 3 He replied, “What law did Moses give you?” 4 They answered, “Moses allowed us to write a certificate of dismissal in order to divorce.” 5 Then Jesus said to them, “Moses wrote this law for you, because you are stubborn. 6 But in the beginning of creation God made them male and female, 7 and because of this, man has to leave father and mother and be joined to his wife, 8 and the two shall become one body. So they are no longer two but one body. 9 Therefore let no one separate what God has joined.” 10 When they were indoors at home, the disciples again asked him about this 11 and he told them, “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against his wife, 12 and the woman who divorces her husband and marries another also commits adultery.”

There is, however, no room for envy or hatred: who can harm us if we do the work of God?

10• 42. See commentary on Matthew 18:6. To be thrown into Gehenna, says Jesus (v. 45). This word was used to designate hell. To enter life... to enter the kingdom; this is one and the same thing. The kingdom of God is not a place where God will put us; it is a life that invades us; it is a person’s meeting with self, the total realization of a person’s potential; the perfect union with God through which the sons and daughters are transformed into the likeness of the Father. Have salt in yourselves (v. 50). This concludes the speech after the discussion with the apostles (9:34). Of course we should make ourselves servants of others (9:35). That does not mean that we should be oppressed persons. The salt signifies the creativity and the talents of each one. Let us be persons fully alive, even if it includes disagreements, but always concerned about maintaining loving relations and mutual respect.

10• 1 MATRIMONY. See notes on Matthew 19:6. Is it right for a husband...? (v. 2) Matthew is surely more exact when he adds “for no matter what motive,” for everyone agreed that a wife could be sent away, but reasons justifying a divorce were discussed. Mark goes straight to the point: marriage is an irreversible commitment.

Jesus takes his stand; it is one of those clashes when he shocks everyone, including his disciples – going against general practice sanctioned by the Bible.

Jesus invokes another law of God, in the beginning. In the beginning: that is in the narrative of the Earthly Paradise. We must not forget that in ancient culture the beginning was a golden age where God established ideal institutions. It is clear then that if the authors of the Old Testament authorized divorce it was because the laws of society, even those of God’s people, reflect the level of the moral conscience of an era.

Jesus compares the ideal and the practice. This ideal, however, is not something that one admires without taking it seriously. Where Genesis says: the two shall become one body, Jesus adds: they are no longer two but one body. Over and above any discussion, the unity of the couple is “the” reality in the eyes of God.

Doubtless it would be the wrong way to look on marriage and human love as the human and social features of the first fundamental fact: sexuality. What is first in God’s plan for the universe is the couple of the Son of God made man and humanity that he saves. It is the supreme example of complementarity and the alliance of tenderness and fidelity. It is there we have the model couple. All the biological past that prepared the sexes, all the human evolution that brought about the couple only come later: they are reflections of God’s eternal project in creation and in history.

The words of Jesus cannot be jeopardized. They have been spoken in a practice of marriage universally accepted; they have the same value today in the widely spread practice of “non-marriage.” Throughout the Bible love and fidelity are linked, and when the Gospel speaks of losing oneself as a condition of finding oneself, it applies as well for the couple.

What if one of the two betrays the other? Here we are in the domain of human decisions where each one must solve his or her own case and solve it according to the consciousness they already have of their Christian vocation. Others must not condemn them, but Jesus takes all authority away from those who pretend to ease the conscience of divorcees as if they had not failed in some way in their Christian vocation.
Let the children come to me
(Mt 19:13; Lk 18:15)

13. People were bringing their little children to him to have him touch them, and the disciples rebuked them for this.

14. When Jesus noticed it, he was very angry and said, “Let the children come to me and don’t stop them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. 15. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it.” 16. Then he took the children in his arms and laying his hands on them, blessed them.

Jesus and the rich man
(Mt 19:16; Lk 18:18)

17. Just as Jesus was setting out on his journey again, a man ran up, knelt before him and asked, “Good Master, what must I do to have eternal life?”

18. Jesus answered, “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone.

19. You know the commandments: Do not kill, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not bear false witness, do not cheat, honor your father and mother.” 20. The man replied, “I have obeyed all these commandments since my childhood.”

21. Then Jesus looked steadily at him and loved him and he said, “For you, one thing is lacking. Go, sell what you have and give the money to the poor, and you will have riches in heaven. Then come and follow me.” 22. On hearing these words, his face fell and he went away sorrowful for he was a man of great wealth.

How hard for the rich to discover the kingdom!

23. Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom.
words of Jesus. They would like to make him say: “Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for one who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.”

They were more astonished than ever and wondered, “Who, then, can be saved?” Jesus looked steadily at them and said, “For humans it is impossible, but not for God; all things are possible with God.”

The reward for those who follow Jesus (Mt 19:27; Lk 18:28)

- 28 Peter spoke up and said, “We have given up everything to follow you.” Jesus answered, “Truly, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters, or father or mother, or children, or lands for my sake and for the Gospel, who will not receive his reward. I say to you: even in the midst of persecution he will receive a hundred times as many houses, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, and lands in the present time and in the world to come eternal life. Do pay attention: Many words of Jesus. They would like to make him say: it is difficult, very difficult for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God, but not impossible. Let us leave aside all these interpretations: the apostles clearly understood the comparison, Jesus said: “Yes, it is impossible.”

Immediately Jesus addresses both the rich and those who judge them; he reminds us of the infinite distance that separates the sinner from the holiness of God, but also of the infinite love of the Father that does the impossible for us. The question, “Who can be saved?” gives Jesus the opportunity to affirm once more that no one is saved by his own merits. God saves people, the rich included, by taking away the benefits and false security provided by their riches. We who await an answer from him, whether we are rich or not, are surely judging others or evaluating our life in terms of merits or demerits. Jesus reminds us that our salvation is the work of God and of him alone.

- 28. Whoever has left house... These words of Jesus that we find again in Mt 19:29 and Lk 18:29 have been given here a notable addition: with persecution. Once the Gospel had been preached the Church began to suffer persecution. From the Year 34, then again in 41 and 62 in Jerusalem, in 64 in Rome with the great persecution ordered by the emperor Nero. During these persecutions Christians experienced the bonds that united them, often stronger than family relationships. Hunted, obliged to hide, they found hundreds of brothers and sisters ready with houses to give them refuge. Jesus does not only speak of reward in the next life. Already in this world, in the midst of persecution, those who sacrifice themselves for the Kingdom will find friendship, joy and human fulfillment far greater than anything they could have hoped for.

- 35. Jesus feels full of courage and confidence, as he himself walks ahead of them to Jerusalem, where his punishment awaits him. Prompted by James’ and John’s request, he tries to convince his followers that success in his Kingdom does not consist in prestige and power, but in following the way of Jesus, their leader.

LEADERS – TO SERVE

What makes a leader? How should a leader be? How do leaders act, the head of a team, of a family? The heads of state smile at crowds and embrace a child who renders them homage, but who serves and who is to be served? Jesus has come to serve and his service to humanity will be
his voluntary death: “He made himself obedient, took the condition of a slave and died on the cross” (Phil 2:8).

To drink the cup and to be baptized (v. 38) are figurative ways of describing the suffering and death of Jesus.

In relation to this topic, we cite a short poem of Lao-Tzu, an ancient wise Chinese:

“What have the river and sea done to be kings of the hundred valleys?
They put themselves below them and that is why they reign in the hundred valleys.

If the saint wants to be at the top of his people, first he has to learn how to talk with humility. If he wants to lead his people, he should be last.
That is how the saint is at the top of his people and he doesn’t make them suffer. Willingly they place him at the top and do not get tired of him.
Since he doesn’t compete with anybody, nobody can compete with him.”

46. God is the one who moves us to ask something of him. The blind man understands that if he lets this opportunity go by, there will not be another chance, which is why he shouts all the more while the rest try to silence him.

Son of David! was a way of designating the Messiah.

11.1 See notes on Matthew 21:1.

THE SAVIOR

From Jericho to Jerusalem, Jesus “goes up” with the people who will celebrate the Feast. Many are from Galilee, the province of Jesus, and, on seeing him among the pilgrims, think he is about to proclaim himself as the Messiah.

Until then Jesus refused to be proclaimed, because many people expected from their Messiah a liberation very different from that which Jesus brought them. At this moment when he is finishing his mission, the time has come for Jesus to define himself publicly. He is the Anointed of God and there will be no other after him.

Jesus was sent by God to all people, but above all he came as Savior of the Jewish people. He
needs it, but he will send it back immediately.”

4 They went off and found the colt out in the street tied at the door. 5 As they were untying it, some of the bystanders asked, “Why are you untying that colt?” 6 They answered as Jesus had told them, and the people allowed them to continue.

7 They brought the colt to Jesus, threw their cloaks on its back, and Jesus sat upon it. 8 Many people also spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread leafy branches from the fields. 9 Then the people who walked ahead and those who followed behind Jesus began to shout, “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”

10 Blessed is the kingdom of our father David which comes! Hosanna in the highest!”

11 So Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the Temple. And after he had looked around, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve.

Jesus curses the barren fig tree
(Mt 21:18; Lk 13:6)

• 12. The next day, when they were leaving Bethany, he felt hungry. In the distance he noticed a fig tree covered with leaves, so he went to see if he could find anything on it. When he reached it, he found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. 14 Then Jesus said to the fig tree, “May no one ever eat your fruit!” And his disciples heard these words.

THE TEMPLE

• 15. The Temple of Jerusalem was, for the Jews, the only Temple of the only God. In each town they assembled in the synagogue to read the Bible and sing psalms, but only in the Temple did the priests sacrifice animals and celebrate true worship. A regular-sized building was at the center of the temple. Only the priests in charge of offering incense entered this building, while the multitude crowded together in the courtyards. In these courtyards stood vendors and exchange brokers who supplied animals and birds for the offerings.

While John stresses the prophetic character of the action of Jesus: “Destroy this Temple and in three days I will rebuild it” (Jn 2:19), Mark makes more of the purification of the Temple. In fact these sellers installed in the yards of the Temple, as well as many people who walked around, were scarcely interested in the prayer and cult of Israel. The priests were used to this and the High Priest Caiaphas made money by allowing vendors to stand in the very courtyards dedicated to prayer.

Jesus was not a priest or a Temple guard but this Temple was the house of his Father. That was why he made a whip from ropes and cast them all out.

My house will be called a House of Prayer
When evening came, Jesus left the city.

**The power of faith**

(Mt 21:20)

- 20 Early next morning, as they walked along the road, the disciples saw the fig tree withered to its roots.
- 21 Peter then said to him, "Master, look! The fig tree you cursed has withered."
- 22 And Jesus replied, "Have faith in God. 23 Truly, I say to you, if you say to this mountain: 'Get up and throw yourself into the sea,' and have no doubt in your heart but believe that what you say will happen, it will be done for you.

Therefore, I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it shall be done for you.

And when you stand to pray, forgive whatever you may hold against anyone, so that your heavenly Father may also forgive your sins."

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**By what authority do you act?**

(Mt 21:23; Lk 20:1)

- 27 They were once again in Jerusalem. As Jesus was walking in the Temple, the chief priests, the teachers of the Law and the elders came to him and asked, "What authority do you have to act like this? Who gave you authority to do the things you do?"

Jesus said to them, "I will ask you a question, only one, and if you give me an answer, then I will tell you what authority I have to act like this. 30 Was John's preaching and baptism a work of God, or was it merely something human? Answer me."

And they kept arguing among themselves, "If we answer that it was a work of God, he will say: 'Why then did you not believe him?'" 32 But neither could they answer before the people that the baptism of John was merely

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**THE OPPORTUNIST PRIESTS**

Jesus did not ask any authorization to teach in the Temple, or to drive out the vendors. He acted freely as prophets do. Since the priests were the ones in charge of maintaining the true faith, it was normal for them to check whether Jesus was a real prophet or not. But were they really concerned about truth? Were they ready to recognize that Jesus had come from God? Apparently they only thought to defend what was acceptable to them and, before even listening to Jesus, held him to be subversive. That is why Jesus asked them about John the Baptist. Because John the Baptist's preaching had been the most important happening in the previous two years, the priests should have taken a stand with regard to John. They had not done so nor were they ready for that. How could they make demands of Jesus if they spoke out only when it suited them?
something human, for everyone regarded John as a prophet. So they answered Jesus, “We don’t know,” and Jesus said to them, “Neither will I tell you what authority I have to act as I do.”

Parable of the tenants
(Mt 21:33; Lk 20:9)

1 Using parables, Jesus went on to say, “A man planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a hole for the wine press and built a watch tower. Then he leased the vineyard to tenants and went abroad.

2 In due time he sent a servant to receive from the tenants his share of the fruit. 3 But they seized the servant, struck him and sent him back empty-handed. 4 Again the man sent another servant. They also struck him on the head and treated him shamefully. 5 He sent another and they killed him. In the same way they treated many others; some they struck and others they killed. 6 One was still left, his beloved son. And so, last of all, he sent him to the tenants, for he said: ‘They will respect my son.’

7 But those tenants said to one another: ‘This is the one who is to inherit the vineyard. Let’s kill him and the property will be ours.’ 8 So they seized him and killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard. 9 Now, what will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to others.’

10 And Jesus added, “Have you not read this text of the Scriptures: The stone which the builders rejected has become the keystone. 11 This was the Lord’s doing; and we marvel at it.

Paying taxes to Caesar
(Mt 22:15; Lk 20:20)

13 They sent to Jesus some Pharisees with members of Herod’s party, with the purpose of trapping him in his own words. 14 They came and said to
Jesus, “Master, we know that you are true; you are not influenced by anyone, and your answers do not vary according to who is listening to you but you truly teach God’s way. Tell us, is it against the Law to pay taxes to Caesar? Should we pay them or not?”

15 But Jesus saw through their trick and answered, “Why are you testing me? Bring me a silver coin and let me see it.” 16 They brought him one and Jesus asked, “Whose head is this, and whose name?” They answered, “Caesar’s.” 17 Then Jesus said, “Return to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.”

And they were greatly astonished.

every person and for nations the possibility to develop culture and national life: that is enough to justify the political commitment of Christians.

But Jesus also knows that people’s true liberation goes beyond partisan quarrels and rivalries. In his time the Jewish people were torn apart and divided into irreconcilable factions; these were to be one of the causes of the national disaster during the great revolt of A.D. 66-71. Jesus will invite his adversaries to give political life its true place and not to confuse faith and religious fanaticism.

For the Pharisees, to pay taxes to Caesar, a foreign ruler and pagan, was like denying God, the true Lord of Israel. They identified the Jewish foreign ruler and pagan, was like denying God, “to serve the kingdom of God it was not necessary that was due only to God. Neither was he “the master” of who was listening to you but you truly teach God’s way. Tell us, is it against the Law to pay taxes to Caesar? Should we pay them or not?”

15 But Jesus saw through their trick and answered, “Why are you testing me? Bring me a silver coin and let me see it.” 16 They brought him one and Jesus asked, “Whose head is this, and whose name?” They answered, “Caesar’s.” 17 Then Jesus said, “Return to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.”

And they were greatly astonished.

by side the confrontations of Jesus with the two most important parties of the Jewish people: the Pharisees and the Sadducees. The Sadducees – the chief priests – are the managers of God’s people. They do not believe in the spiritual nor in the resurrection. According to them these are disastrous innovations that weaken the national spirit and the power of the central system. Their Bible is limited to the Pentateuch where much is said of priests and nothing at all about resurrection.

THE RESURRECTION

What is “resurrection”? When Jesus called the daughter of Jairus (Mk 5:21) and Lazarus (Jn 11:1) back to life, they only recovered the life they had before. The daughter went back to her dreams, Lazarus went to work in his garden and after this both had to die again. This was not really resurrection.

Many people think that there is “something” after death and that something in us, called “soul,” survives. This belief is partly true but it is not the most important aspect. The resurrection points, not to a survival of “something of us,” but to a transformation and raising up of our whole person. This will be through grace and the work of God: we will be reborn of God himself.

We would like to know what we shall be once risen, but that is impossible. If we think back on what Paul tried to make us understand on this subject in 1 Cor 15:35-57, this we must admit: as long as we are in the present world, a world where material things and time are our natural lot, it is impossible to imagine “the new heavens and the new earth” announced by the prophets and by Jesus (Is 65:17; Rev 21:1-4).

Let us come back to Paul’s comparisons: if someone has never seen more than the seeds of plants or trees, how could she imagine the plant covered with flowers or the tree fully grown? What common feature is there in appearance between the colorless, lifeless little seed and the

• 18. Mark’s intention has been to put side
dren. Last of all the woman died. 23 Now, in the resurrection, to which of them will she be wife? For the seven had her as wife.”

24 Jesus replied, “You could be wrong in this regard because you understand neither the Scriptures nor the power of God. 25 When they rise from the dead, men and women do not marry but are like the angels in heaven.

26 Now, about the resurrection of the dead, have you never reflected on the chapter of the burning bush in the book of Moses? God said to him: I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. 27 Now, he is the God, not of the dead but of the living. You are totally wrong.”

The greatest commandment
(Mt 22:34; Lk 10:25; 20:40)

• 28 A teacher of the Law had been listening to this discussion and admired how Jesus answered them. So he came up and asked him, “Which commandment is the first of all?”

29 Jesus answered, “The first is: Hear, Israel! The Lord, our God, is One Lord; 30 and you shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength. 31 And after this comes another one: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these two.”

32 The teacher of the Law said to him, “Well spoken, Master; you are right when you say that he is one and there is no other. 33 To love him with all our heart, with all our understanding and with all our strength, and to love our neighbor as ourselves is more important than any burnt offering or sacrifice.”

34 Jesus approved this answer and said, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” But after that, no one dared to ask him any more questions.
Whose son is the Christ?  
(Mt 22:41; Lk 20:41; Mt 23:6)

35 As Jesus was teaching in the Temple, he said, “The teachers of the Law say that the Messiah is the son of David. How can that be? 36 For David himself, inspired by the Holy Spirit declared: The Lord said to my Lord: sit at my right until I put your enemies under your feet. 37 If David himself calls him Lord, in what way can he be his son?”

Many people came to Jesus and listened to him gladly.

38 As he was teaching, he also said to them, “Beware of those teachers of the Law who enjoy walking around in long robes and being greeted in the marketplace, and who like to occupy reserved seats in the synagogues and the first places at feasts. They even devour the widow’s and the orphan’s goods while making a show of long prayers. How severe a sentence they will receive!”

The widow’s offering  
(Lk 21:1)

41 Jesus sat down opposite the Temple treasury and watched the people dropping money into the treasury box; and many rich people put in large offerings. 42 But a poor widow also came and dropped in two small coins.

43 Then Jesus called his disciples and said to them, “Truly I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all those who gave offerings. 44 For all of them gave from their plenty, but she gave from her poverty and put in everything she had, her very living.”

Jesus speaks of the end  
(Mt 24:1; Lk 21:5; 19:41; 17:23)

13 * 1 As Jesus left the Temple, one of his disciples said, “Look, Master, at the enormous stones and wonderful buildings here!” 2 And Jesus answered, “You see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left upon another, but all will be torn down.”

3 After a while, when Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, facing the Temple, Peter, James, John and Andrew approached him privately and asked, 4 “Tell us when this will be. What sign will be given us before all this happens?”

5 Then Jesus began to tell them, “Don’t let anyone mislead you. 6 Many will come, taking my place, and say: ‘I am the one you are waiting for,’ and they will deceive many people.

7 When you hear of war and threats of war, and of the tribulation that is among the nations, you will know that the end is near. 8 For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places, and there will be famines. But be vigilant; for you do not know on what day your Lord will come.

9 But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the anxieties of daily life, and that Day come upon you suddenly, like a trap. 

10 For it will come upon all who dwell upon the face of the earth. 11 Be vigilant therefore, for you do not know what day your Master will come.

12 But be assured of this, that he who comes will find an upright, vigilant servant, and I will place a crown of glory upon him. 13 But if that servant is lazy and careless, and if he does not keep watch over the house, the Master of that house will come upon him when he least expects it, and will punish him.

14 And the Lord said: Where is the servant who put the talent of his master to productive use? For he said: ‘Lord, since you gave me no task, I was afraid to put your money out on loan.’ 15 But the Lord said to him: ‘You wicked servant! I put you in charge of so much money that you might make more. 16 If then you were not capable of handling a large amount, you should at least have put it in a bank. 17 But the money which is placed in a bank will not lose its value. 18 Take what you have and give it to the neighbors of the Lord, so that when I come again I shall find you doing this.’ 19 But the servant said, ‘Lord, your money was placed in a bank. 20 And as a banksman usually does, I have given back the money which was placed in my care.’ 21 And the Lord said to him: ‘I will condemn you because you kept mine money in the bank. 22 Take what you have, and give it to the poor. Then you will have what is mine.’ 23 And he said, ‘Lord, your money was placed in the hands of some tradesmen. As a tradesman usually does, I have made some profit.’ 24 And the Lord said to him: ‘You wicked servant! I placed you in charge of my money with the hope that you would make a profit. 25 But the trademan who is placed in my service is prudent, and has gained profit. 26 Take what you have, and give it to the tradesman who kept mine money safe. 27 Then you will have what is mine.’ 28 But the servant said, ‘Lord, your money was placed in the hands of some tradesmen. 29 As a tradesman usually does, I have made some profit.’ 30 And the Lord said to him: ‘I will condemn you because you kept mine money in the hands of some tradesmen. 31 Take what you have, and give it to the tradesman who has kept mine money. 32 Then you will have what is mine.’

33 And the Lord said: “Whoever is not vigilant in all things, is not vigilant in the things of the kingdom of God. 34 If therefore, you can’t be vigilant with regard to what belongs to the earth, how can you be vigilant for what belongs to the heavens? 35 Therefore, I say to you, be vigilant in all things until you know the day and the hour.”

14 * 1 At that time Peter said to Jesus: “Tell us, when is the end? And what will be the sign of your coming, and of the end of the world?” 2 Jesus said to them: “Take heed, lest anyone mislead you. 3 For many will come in my name, saying: ‘I am he,’ and will mislead many. 4 And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. 5 See, I am making a disclosure of evil to you. 6 The nations will rise against the nations, and kingdoms against kingdoms; there will be famines and earthquakes in various places; 7 And the Kingdom of God is near at hand. 8 Fear not, therefore, that you will be shocked. 9 For all the nations of the world are shocked when they see the signs of the times. 10 But you will be shocked for the sake of my brethren who are in the far corners of the earth. 11 Then shall they see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and glory. 12 And then shall he send his angels and gather his chosen ones from the four winds, from the far corners of the earth.”

13 Then he asked them, “What is the sign of your coming?” 14 They answered him: “Tell us, when is the end?” 15 And he said to them: “Take heed, lest anyone mislead you. 16 For many will come in my name, saying: ‘I am he,’ and will mislead many. 17 And when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. 18 For these things must happen, but the end is not yet. 19 Then shall they see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and glory. 20 And then shall he send his angels and gather his chosen ones from the four winds, from the far corners of the earth.”

13.1 THE END OF THE WORLD

The prophets of the Bible spoke in a rather obscure way about the end of the history that would initiate God’s universal kingdom. According to them, all nations of the world would join
forces to destroy the Holy City of Jerusalem, but right at the moment of greatest despair God would intervene in a triumphant way to establish his own Kingdom (Is 66:18; Ezk 38; Jl 4; Zec 14).

That is why, when Jesus speaks of the destruction of the Temple, the apostles think of the end of time. The answer of Jesus is clear: the tragedy that will end with the destruction of Jerusalem is near but that would not be the end of the world.

This discourse contains Jesus’ warnings about the destruction of the Jewish nation that would occur 30 years later, but what he said regarding these agents clarifies the meaning of the conflicts that occur at present in the whole world.

When you hear of war (v. 7). This does not mean that God leaves the world in the hands of evil. It is more a delivery than a failure, because humanity is maturing and the nations encounter more complex problems in their life and development. The crisis suffered by the Jewish nation in the time of Jesus was similar to that experienced by other civilizations: something dies and something is born.

People, confused, are easily fooled by propaganda and ideologies. Fear makes them blind and they persecute those who do not share their fanaticism. That is why they hate the true believers. At the same time, Jesus asks his followers to be bear witness to him (v. 9) as the only Savior and to proclaim what the Gospel demands of the individual and of society.

Thirty years after Jesus’ death, the Jews rebelled against their Roman oppressors. The Roman army reorganized after its first defeats and, its flags adorned with the image of their idols, approached the Holy City. Then many messiahs (v. 22) appeared, that is, those who claimed to be the saviors of the Jewish nation, and they had many followers.

The more fanatic Jews locked themselves in the city of Jerusalem waiting for God’s intervention, but they were so divided that they fought among themselves. Those who fled from the city because of hunger were arrested by the Romans and crucified in front of the walls. In the end, when the Romans entered, burning the Temple and the palaces, all those that were not killed – men, women and children – were brought to Rome as slaves.

• 24. Later on… (v. 24). After announcing
disastrous time, the sun will grow dark, the moon will not give its light, the stars will fall out of the sky and the whole universe will be shaken.

Then people will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory. And he will send the angels to gather his chosen people from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the sky.

Learn a lesson from the fig tree. As soon as its branches become tender and it begins to sprout leaves, you know that summer is near. In the same way, when you see these things happening, know that the time is near, even at the door.

Truly, I say to you, the end of the Jewish world, Jesus speaks of an even more important event: the end of the world or, better still, its transformation.

The sun will grow dark, the moon will not give its light (v. 24). These are images taken from Isaiah 13:10 and 34:4 that express the confusion, the surprise and the disintegration of the people and the universe before the majesty of the Supreme Judge.

He will send the angels. This is also a common image in Jewish books that spoke of God’s judgment. Likewise, the trumpet referred to in Matthew 24:31 and 1 Thessalonians 4:16 should not be understood literally.

Learn a lesson. Jesus comes back to the destruction of Jerusalem.

32. In this paragraph, we return to the end of the world. The Day mentioned is the day of the Judgment, called the “Day of Yahweh” in the Prophets (Amos 5:18; Zep 1:15).

No one knows when... Jesus states it clearly. Nevertheless, there have always been people who believe they know what the angels do not. People in every century have foretold the impending end of the world (2 Thes 2).

Not even the angels or the Son, only the Father. Some are confused by this. Does this not mean that Jesus is not God as the Father is? They must remember that when Jesus speaks of the Father and the Son, he speaks of himself with his human consciousness in relation to the Father.


God the Father can communicate to Jesus certain prophecies but he cannot tell him, for example: “the end of the world will take place on the 12th of July of the year 1977” because the date is not fixed; it depends on how we make the kingdom of God mature through our efforts and prayers (2 P 3:14).

Modern science shows that time does not pass at the same speed for two persons if one is moving and the other is still; much less equal is the pace of time between God and us. God knows the time as it can be known in eternity, but this does not mean that it corresponds with a certain date in our calendar.

33. This is a summary of the parable of the talents (Mt 25:14-30) and that of the ten young women (Mt 25:1-13). It warns us that we should wait for the Lord who is at work. The doorman symbolizes those who have positions of responsibility in the Church, who are not the owners of the Church but only hold the keys of the Church.

HOW CHRIST COMES; CHRISTIAN COMMITMENT

In several parts of the Gospel, Jesus invites us to be vigilant while waiting for his arrival. How will he come? How can he come to us if we are meant to die before his coming in glory?

It is true that we will meet the Lord when we die. Nevertheless, Jesus comes to us in several ways while we await him, doing our work and living our lives.

Our work (v. 34). One aspect of our commitment to Christ is our commitment to the Christian community, to our Church. This means our participation in common prayer, in the eucharist, in catechesis and other similar events. As we participate in these commitments there is not only one but several “comings” of Christ. We see his coming in those of our brothers and sisters who are converted; he comes to us giving us strength and wisdom; he comes to us through prayer, giving us the inner certainty of his presence.

He also comes in our day-to-day living. The prophets have said time and again that the events that bring renewal and growth in values also bring the Lord. At times, he comes in his resurrection, through happy events that bring
come, in the evening or at midnight, when the cock crows or before dawn.

36 If he comes suddenly, do not let him catch you asleep.

37 And what I say to you, I say to all: watch.”

Conspiracy against Jesus

(Mt 26:2; Lk 22:1; Jn 11:47)

1 It was now two days before the feast of the Passover and Unleavened Bread. The chief priests and the teachers of the Law were looking craftily for a way to arrest Jesus and put him to death;

2 for they said, “Not during the Festival, or there might be trouble among the people.”

Jesus anointed at Bethany

(Mt 26:6; Jn 12:1)

3 Jesus was in Bethany in the house of Simon the leper. As he was reclining at dinner, a woman entered carrying a precious jar of expensive perfume made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfumed oil on Jesus’ head. 4 Then some of them became angry and said, “What a useless waste of perfume. 5 It could have been sold for more than three hundred silver coins and the money given to the poor.” And they criticized her.

6 But Jesus said, “Let her alone; why are you troubling her? What she has just done for me is a very charitable work.

7 At any time you can help the poor, for you always have them with you, but you will not have me forever.

8 This woman has done what was hers to do, she has anointed my body beforehand for my burial.

9 Truly, I say to you, wherever the Good News is proclaimed, and this will be throughout the world, what she has done will be told in praise of her.”

life and joy, and more justice and hope for the poor. At other times, he comes through his passion and death.

Precisely because Jesus comes in our daily history, we have a commitment to him to serve our contemporary world.

Be alert, for many begin with generosity, but afterwards they lose sight of the goal and turn out to be mere administrators and activists.

They are committed to works and movements but not to the Lord himself. That is why their life is full of contradictions. For a time they perform marvels and suddenly they fail. They do useful things, but are not aware of the moment they should stop them and follow another path. They do their own work, but do not let the Lord take over their mind, their heart, their whole life.

This does not happen to those who are alert: through them Christ comes to people.

• 14.1 EASTER, THE PASSOVER

The Jews were going to celebrate the 1480th anniversary of their departure from Egypt. Easter, that is the Passover of the Lord, was the feast of national independence and was the most important holiday of the religious calendar.

For the preceding 40 years, however, they had lost their independence. That is why the Passover would revive in them their desire for freedom and often cause disturbances. From all parts of Palestine the Jews went up to Jerusalem in pilgrimage, because the Passover lamb would be sacrificed in the Temple and eaten in Jerusalem.

Each family was to eat the roasted lamb with lettuce and unleavened bread, alternating the singing of psalms with the blessing of several cups according to an old and very precise ritual. The head of the family would recall the departure from Egypt and, on recalling the past, everyone would ask the Lord to free his humiliated people.

The vast majority, both common people and authorities, were incapable of taking a new look at the future. The salvation of Israel, the people of God, did not consist in first breaking their political chains, but in discovering the secret of universal fellowship which transcends all races and parties.

The Gospel was the ferment capable of liberating humanity, making good triumph over evil. Salvation was in the person of Jesus but they could not see it. Moreover, they distrusted him because his doctrine seemed too idealistic to them, and Judas was one of those who regretted having followed such a useless leader.

Jesus had done very little in the span of two years that followed his baptism by John, but it was enough to raise fears among the authorities. No society can bear the presence of a person, free and without sin.


A few days before the Passover, while Jesus was at dinner in Bethany (Jn 12:1), Mary publicly demonstrated her tender and passionate love for him. Others present also loved Jesus, although they were unable to express it. Still others, prompted by Judas’ remark, were scandalized that Mary should show more concern for Jesus than for the poor.

What she has just done for me is a very
charitable work (v. 6). The Jews numbered burying the dead among the “charitable works.” Jesus sees in the gesture of Mary a sign, an announcement of his imminent death. Nothing should be lost of Jesus’ numbered hours among us. It was far more important to pay attention to and accompany him in these last moments than to be performing charitable deeds for the poor (something similar in Mark 2:19-20 regarding those who are prisoners to their structured fasts and prayers).

You always have them with you (v. 7). It would be inexact to translate this with: “There will always be poor,” even if that is a reality, and still more inexact to conclude that for Jesus we are wasting our time striving for a more just society.

Then Judas Iscariot (v. 10). The Gospel stresses only the contrast between the attitude of Mary and that of Judas. Mary’s true love leads her to behave in a way that appears stupid to the apostles, while Judas criticizes Mary’s good deed for the sake of thrift.

12. THE NEW COVENANT

During the Passover supper Jesus wanted to clarify the meaning of his imminent Passion. He was headed toward a death which he freely accepted, a death that would save the world. What would “his” salvation be? It would bring human history to its fulfillment: peoples and races needed to mature, to confront one another and finally to be united in one body. The world would pass through a thousand crises and deaths in order to come to the resurrection. Within such a history God could spread and distribute the riches of his Spirit and bring to holiness his elect. Jesus had presented a message that should guide humanity, but a people of God was also needed, a yeast, a minority who would feel committed to God’s work, and to whom God would commit himself.

Twelve centuries before Jesus’ birth, God made a covenant with the people of Israel on Mount Sinai: they and their children would be, among all races, the chosen people of God. As time passed and the infidelities of God’s people became more evident, the prophets understood that something more was needed: a covenant whose prime effect would be the forgiveness of sins (Jer 31:31). The family of God could no longer be identified with a certain race, but would be a family of believers pardoned of their sins.

On the eve of his death, Jesus remembered the first covenant on Sinai, when the blood of sacrificial animals was spilled (Ex 24:8). He
day I drink the new wine in the kingdom of God.”

Peter’s denial foretold
(Mt 26:30; Lk 22:34; Jn 13:37)

26 After singing psalms of praise, they went out to the Hill of Olives.
27 And Jesus said to them, “All of you will be confused and fall away; for the Scripture says: I will strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered.
28 But after I am raised up, I will go to Galilee ahead of you.”
29 Then Peter said to him, “Even though all the others fall away, I will not.” 30 And Jesus replied, “Truly, I say to you, today, this very night before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times.” 31 But Peter insisted, “Though I have to die with you, I will never deny you.” And all of them said the same.

Gethsemane
(Lk 22:40; Jn 18.1)

32 They came to a place which was called Gethsemane and Jesus said to his disciples, “Sit here while I pray.”
33 But he took Peter, James and John along with him, and becoming filled with fear and distress, 34 he said to them, “My soul is full of sorrow, even to death. Remain here and stay awake.”
35 Then he went a little further on and fell to the ground, praying that if possible this hour might pass him by. Jesus said, 36 “Abba (Daddy), all things are possible for you; take this cup away from me. Yet not what I want, but what you want.”
37 Then he came and found them asleep and said to Peter, “Simon, are you sleeping? Couldn’t you stay awake for one hour? 38 Keep watch and pray, all of you, so that you may not slip into temptation. The spirit indeed is eager but human nature is weak. 39 And going away he prayed saying the same words. 40 When he came back to the disciples, he found them asleep again; they could not keep their eyes open,


See notes on Matthew 26:26.

32. The Silence of God

Jesus is alone as he confronts death to overcome it, carrying on his shoulders the destiny of all humanity. He sees the wickedness of people who will maltreat him or let him be maltreated. He also sees behind it all the power of Darkness.

At this moment Jesus is the man of sorrows, aware of all afflictions, made one with sin. He is burdened by all the wickedness on earth. For this his death will be the price, the atonement. Face to face in prayer with his beloved and just Father, Jesus experiences anguish as great as death itself.

Jesus continually repeats one phrase which expresses the perfect prayer: “Father, your will be done.” There are moments and places in which the persecuted church is in agony and cannot do anything other than pray that the will of God be done. During these times her prayer is more effective than ever.

How mysterious is the Agony of the Son of God (agony means struggle): he who will give countless martyrs the inner strength to face their tortures fearlessly, allows himself to experience the very extreme of human weakness. This is for us. Even filled with fear or a sense of weakness, we shall not doubt: he will make us firm.

Let us look at Jesus our Savior, who had no
and they did not know what to say to him.  

41 When he came back the third time, he said, “You can sleep on now and take your rest! It is all over, the time has come; the Son of Man is now given into the hands of sinners. 42 Get up, let us go. Look: the one betraying me is right here.”

The arrest  
(Mt 26:47; Lk 22:47; Jn 18:2)

43 While Jesus was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, came up. With him was a crowd armed with swords and clubs, who had been sent by the chief priests, the teachers of the Law and the elders. 44 The traitor had arranged a signal for them, “The one I kiss, he is the man. Arrest him and take him away under guard.”

45 So, when he came, he went directly to Jesus calling, “Master! Master!” and kissed him. 46 Then they seized Jesus and arrested him. 47 One of the bystanders drew his sword and struck out at the High Priest’s servant, cutting off his ear.

48 Jesus turned to them saying, “So you have set out against a robber! Did you need swords and clubs to arrest me? 49 Day after day I was among you teaching in the Temple and you did not arrest me. But let the Scriptures be fulfilled.”

50 Then they all deserted him and fled.

51 A young man covered by nothing but a linen cloth followed Jesus. As they took hold of him, 52 he left the cloth in their hands and fled away naked.

53 They led Jesus to the High Priest and all the chief priests assembled with the elders and the teachers of the Law.

54 Peter had followed him at a distance and went right into the courtyard of the High Priest, where he sat with the guards, warming himself at the fire.

55 Now the chief priests and the whole Council tried to find some evidence against Jesus so that they might put him to death, but they were unable to find any. 56 Even though many came up to speak falsely against him, their evidence did not agree. 57 At last some stood up and gave this false witness:

58 We heard him say: ‘I will destroy this Temple made by hands and in three days I will build another not made by human hands.”

59 But even so their evidence did not agree.

60 The High Priest then stood up in
the midst of them and asked Jesus, “Have you no answer at all? What of this evidence against you?” But Jesus was silent and made no reply. 

The High Priest put a second question to him, “Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?” Then Jesus answered, “I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Most Powerful and coming with the clouds of heaven around him.” The High Priest tore his clothes to show his horror and said, “What more evidence do we need? You have just heard his blasphemous words. What is your decision?” And they all condemned Jesus saying, “He must die.” Some of them began to spit on Jesus and, blindfolding him, they struck him saying, “Play the prophet!” And the guards set upon him with blows.

Peter disowns Jesus
(Mt 26:69; Jn 18:15)

While Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the High Priest’s servant-girls came by. Noticing Peter beside the fire, she looked straight at him and said, “You also were with Jesus, the Nazarene.” But he denied it, “I don’t know or understand what you are talking about.” And he went out through the gateway.

The servant-girl saw him there and told the bystanders, “This man is one of them.” But Peter denied it again. After a little while those standing by said to Peter, “Of course you are one of them; you are a Galilean, aren’t you?” And Peter began to justify himself with curses and oaths, “I don’t know the man you are talking about.” Just then a cock crowed a second time and Peter remembered what Jesus had said to him, “Before the cock crows twice you will deny me three times.” And he broke down and wept.

Jesus before Pilate
(Mt 27:11; Lk 23:2; Jn 18:28)

Early in the morning, the chief priests, the elders and the teach

occupies the central place in the Gospel: Are you the Son of God?

Jesus answered by combining two Biblical texts that reflect the divine personality of the Savior. Son of Man (the Human One) who comes from God himself (Dn 7:13), who is seated at the right hand of God as an equal (Ps 110). With this assertion, Jesus clearly affirmed that he is not only a son of God like a saint or an envoy of God, but the Only One who shares the divinity of the Father.

The priests were not mistaken in their understanding of what Jesus claimed to be as Son of God. They condemned him, not just because he used a dangerous word, but because in all his way of acting Jesus put himself in a place fitting only to God. They could soothe their conscience, for they were upholding the honor due to the Only One.

So they forgot that actually they hated him, because he had denounced their hypocrisy, their lack of faith and their love of money. Jesus felt free about religious rules they defended and had caused them to fall from their pedestals. God had come in the person of Jesus to demand from them the fruits of the vineyard (Mk 12:2) calling them to account, and they opposed him.

Jesus was condemned in the name of God. He did not rebel against the unjust sentence imposed by the religious leaders of his people who were the legal, though unworthy, representatives of God. This was his perfect obedience to the Father.

66. The apostles did not lack character or courage; if so, Jesus would not have chosen them. Peter was sincere when he said: “Although all abandon you, I will not.” They were ready to die for Jesus, as people are in the enthusiasm of a battle, but what happened was quite different. When Jesus was arrested, the apostles became confused because he did not use his divine power and showed no resistance to his enemies. It would be wrong to say that the apostles were cowards until they received the Holy Spirit.

It was an understandable reaction for them to flee from the scene of Jesus’ arrest. Their fleeing, however, shook to the foundations all the faith they had after living day by day with Jesus for the past two years. It was more than fear that caused Peter to deny Jesus; in fact, he did not yet know who Jesus really was.

The denial of Peter is a real and serious fall, although God forgives the sin the instant Peter’s gaze meets Jesus and Peter repents (Lk 22:61). This failure however, will compel him, to the end of his life, not to rely on himself alone. Peter, Rock and responsible for the Universal Church, would remain ever conscious of his personal weakness and never find peace until he followed Jesus by giving up his life for him (Jn 21:19).
ers of the Law (that is, the whole Council or Sanhedrin) had their plan ready. They put Jesus in chains, led him away and handed him over to Pilate.

2 Pilate asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” Jesus answered, “You say so.” 3 As the chief priests accused Jesus of many things, 4 Pilate asked him again, “Have you no answer at all? See how many charges they bring against you.” 5 But Jesus gave no further answers, so that Pilate wondered.

6 At every Passover festival, Pilate used to free any prisoner the people asked for. 7 Now there was a man called Barabbas, jailed with the rioters who had committed murder in the uprising.

8 When the crowd went up to ask Pilate the usual favor, 9 he said to them, “Do you want me to set free the King of the Jews?” 10 For he realized that the chief priests had handed Jesus over to him out of envy. 11 But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to ask instead for the release of Barabbas. 12 Pilate replied, “And what shall I do with the man you call King of the Jews?” 13 The crowd shouted back, “Crucify him!”

14 Pilate asked, “What evil has he done?” But they shouted the louder, “Crucify him!”

Jesus crowned with thorns
(Mt 27:27; Jn 19:1)

15 As Pilate wanted to please the people, he freed Barabbas and after the flogging of Jesus had him handed over to be crucified.

16 The soldiers took him inside the courtyard known as the praetorium and called the rest of their companions.

17 They clothed him in a purple cloak and twisting a crown of thorns, they forced it onto his head. 18 Then they began saluting him, “Long life to the King of the Jews!” 19 With a stick they gave him blows on the head and spat on him; then they knelt down pretending to worship him.

20 When they had finished mocking him, they pulled off the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him.

The crucifixion

The soldiers led him out of the city to crucify him. 21 On the way they met Simon of Cyrene, father of Alexander and Philip, who carried the cross.

The Spirit will teach the apostles that that rejection so scandalous for the Christian of Jewish origin is part of God’s plan (Acts 4:18; Rom 11:25-32). Was it possible for God to come to us without us rejecting him (Jn 1:5)? This sentencing to death of the manifested-God was part of his paradoxical wisdom that we hardly accept (1 Cor 1:17-24). God’s people, be they Jewish or Christian, are as blind as the others when facing tragedy (Is 42:19; Mk 8:17).

15. Jesus was subjected to torture and mockery and everything that befalls the condemned anywhere in the world, when police and military no longer consider them as persons and brothers and sisters. To comply with Roman law Jesus was scourged, but this was not done out of cruelty; the loss of blood and exhaustion caused by such a scourging would hasten the death of the crucified man, thus shortening his agony.

A convicted man with his arms nailed to the cross would suffocate. To make breathing possible, he would shift his weight from his feet to his arms, thus increasing the unbearable pain caused by the nails in the feet and the wrists. As soon as he no longer had enough strength to do this, he would suffocate and die. The bitter wine offered was a drink commonly used by Roman
and Rufus, who was coming in from the country, and forced him to carry the cross of Jesus.

22 When they had led him to the place called Golgotha, which means the Skull, 23 they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he would not take it. 24 Then they nailed him to the cross and divided his clothes among themselves, casting lots to decide what each should take.

25 It was about nine o’clock in the morning when they crucified him. 26 The statement of his offense was displayed above his head and it read, “The King of the Jews.” 27 They also crucified two robbers with him, one on his right and one on his left.

29 People passing by laughed at him, shook their head and jeered, “Aha! So you are able to tear down the Temple and build it up again in three days. 30 Now save yourself and come down from the cross!”

31 In the same way the chief priests and the teachers of the Law mocked him saying to one another, “The man who saved others cannot save himself. 32 Let’s see the Messiah, the king of Israel, come down from his cross and then we will believe in him.” Even the men who were crucified with Jesus insulted him.

The death of Jesus
(Mt 27:45; Lk 23:44; Jn 19:28)

33 When noon came, darkness fell over the whole land and lasted until three o’clock; 34 and at three o’clock Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lamma sabachthani?” which means “My God, my God, why have you deserted me?” 35 As soon as they heard these words, some of the bystanders said, “Listen! He is calling for Elijah.” 36 And one of them went quickly to fill a sponge with bitter wine and, putting it on a reed, gave him to drink saying, “Now let’s see whether Elijah comes to take him down.”

The curtain which enclosed the Temple sanctuary was torn in two. God no longer remains in that place where no mortal could enter. God left the awe-inspiring temple shrine and is now present to all of us through his wounded Son – wounded, not only by sin, but also by the compassion he feels for us.

Reconciliation among persons and nations. Before Jesus entered our world, God had not begun to lift the barriers that divided people but limited himself to relating with just one people, the Jewish people. From the time of Jesus’ birth, all were called to enter the Kingdom (Eph 2:11-16). Now, the knowledge of Jesus crucified would be the basis of faith and unity. Knowing and believing in him, persons and nations would become reconciled, despite the differences dividing them.

Truly, this man was the Son of God (v. 39).

Assuredly, the Roman captain proclaimed that Jesus was a just man (Lk 23:47), that is, an outstanding man. Mark intentionally places on the lips of the captain the words “Son of God,” because this pagan officer represents the pagan nations who would recognize the Son of God in this crucified man.

On several occasions Jesus insisted that he not be proclaimed Son of God (Mk 1:44). He did this because no one can know who God is or what being Son of God means (Mt 11:27), until he has known how Jesus died and come to believe in his resurrection. See Romans 3:24.
But Jesus uttered a loud cry and gave up his spirit. And immediately the curtain that enclosed the Temple sanctuary was torn in two from top to bottom.

The captain who was standing in front of him saw how Jesus died and heard the cry he gave; and he said, “Truly, this man was the Son of God.”

There were also some women watching from a distance; among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and Joset and Salome, who had followed Jesus when he was in Galilee and saw to his needs. There were also others who had come up with him to Jerusalem.

The burial

It was now evening and as it was Preparation Day, that is the day before the Sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea boldly went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Joseph was a respected member of the Council who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God.

Joseph was surprised that Jesus should have died so soon; so he summoned the captain and inquired if Jesus was already dead. After hearing the captain, he let Joseph have the body.

Joseph took it down and wrapped it in the linen sheet he had bought. He laid the body in a tomb that had been cut out of the rock and rolled a stone across the entrance to the tomb. Now Mary of Magdala and Mary the mother of Joset took note of where the body had been laid.

He has been raised, he is not here

When the Sabbath was over, Mary of Magdala, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go and anoint the body. And very early in the morning on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they came to the tomb.

They were saying to one another, “Who will roll back the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?” But as they looked up, they noticed that the stone had already been rolled away. It was a very big stone.

As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man in a white robe seated on the right, and they were

names of those who saw the resurrected Jesus. Can we believe them? We would like more details to support our faith, but if even thousands of interviews with eyewitnesses were published, with pictures in full color to support the statements, there would always be room for doubt. We do not see him, we cannot find him. Where is he?

Actually it is not important whether there are few or many witnesses. This is a matter of faith and faith is something personal.

We doubt, not because there is not enough evidence, but because the event overwhelms us. How can we believe in a resurrection? The evidence, nevertheless, is there and has withstood recurring criticisms and even modern studies.

Finally, who will believe? Those whose own experience has prepared them to accept the most fundamental truth: the living God loves people and restores them to life. Some persons are predisposed to believe because they have experienced that God himself walks with them in their trials and gives them hope when everything seems lost. Because of this, they recognize in Christ the ideal human being and understand
amazed. 6 But he said to them, “Don’t be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified; he has been raised and is not here. This is, however, the place where they laid him. 7 Now go and tell his disciples and Peter: Jesus is going ahead of you to Galilee; you will see him there just as he told you.” 8 The women went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them. And they were so afraid that they said nothing to anyone.

Short conclusion of Mark’s Gospel

• 9 After Jesus rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary of Magdala from whom he had driven out seven demons. 10 She went and reported the news to his followers, who were now mourning and weeping. 11 But when they heard that he lived and had been seen by her, they would not believe it.

12 After this he showed himself in another form to two of them, as they were walking into the country. 13 These men too went back and told the others, but they did not believe them.

14 Later Jesus showed himself to the Eleven while they were at table. He reproached them for their unbelief and stubbornness in refusing to believe those who had seen him after he had risen.

• 15 Then he told them, “Go out to the whole world and proclaim the

that he had to suffer before reaching his glory. They have learned the ways of God and that is why they believe the witnesses of the resurrected Christ.

It is not more difficult to believe in Christ’s resurrection than to believe in his words, for both go together. “Those who believe have overcome the world,” John the apostle says (1 Jn 5:5). This means overcoming the false meaning that most people give to their existence due to their ignorance of God. Whoever believes has overcome the fears each of us has when we have to pass through uncharted paths, when we have to set reason aside and entrust ourselves to God’s hands.

• 9 In verse 8 there is an abrupt ending to Mark’s Gospel. We were looking forward to the meeting between Jesus and the apostles in Galilee, but it does not take place. Why? We do not know. We find only a series of brief references to Jesus’ appearances after his resurrection.

• 15 Proclaim the Good News to all creation. The Good News is the seed that will be planted in the world and will flourish, in its proper time, in every field of human endeavor. Salvation is not a matter of saving isolated souls or individual beings. The Gospel is to be proclaimed to all creation in all activities and acts of those who have been renewed by baptism. They are to be the yeast that transforms human history.

THE NAME OF JESUS

On the day of his resurrection, Jesus’ human nature begins to participate fully in divine Glory (Rom 1:4). Jesus now asks us to believe in his Name, that is, in the divine power he has just received and that works through him.
Good News to all creation. 16 The one who believes and is baptized will be saved; the one who refuses to believe will be condemned. 17 Signs like these will accompany those who have believed: in my Name they will cast out demons and speak new languages; 18 they will pick up snakes and, if they drink anything poisonous, they will be unharmed. They will lay their hands on the sick and they will be healed.”

19 So then, after speaking to them, the Lord Jesus was taken up into heaven and took his place at the right hand of God. 20 The Eleven went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that accompanied them.

the world to heal and sanctify it. The miracles and healings are not ends in themselves; they are only signs and means. The goal of evangelization is that all creation may be gathered around the person of the Son-of-God-become-human, through the power of his Spirit. “Do not fear,” the Lord says, “my Church is not a shelter against the world, its temptations and problems; rather each of you is baptized to be an apostle.”

Signs like these will accompany those who have believed. The Acts of the Apostles reports these signs and miracles. Even today they can be seen wherever Christians fulfill their mission of evangelizing the world.