



The New Testament is a collection of 27 books of the Scriptures written in the seventy years following the resurrection of Jesus. The Church of the apostles saw in them an authentic expression of their faith. The Church has officially recognized these books as inspired by God, as the word of God. Just as in the Old Testament these books did not simply fall from heaven, rather we owe them to the apostles and the evangelists of the early Church. They make no pretense to answer all our questions concerning faith, but are a collection of testimonies where we discover the person of Jesus, the way in which the early Church saw itself animated and impelled by the power of his resurrection. It was God's will that Christians of every age would know Jesus and his work of redemption through these powerful testimonies.

But, why a *New Testament* after the *Old*?

Simply because each forms a part of salvation history and the revelation of God within history. The cross of Jesus separates these two phases.

In the Old Testament a people is being formed. They grow through their experience, and after having hoped for the thousand and one things that all people look for, they understand that what really matters is to hope for and to seek a kingdom of justice where people will be made new. When we read Sacred History, we see the direction it takes and discern different stages and key people. Israel discovers the great value of existence and of social life. We understand why it took them many centuries to discover something of the beyond. We grasp why the prosperity of the ancient kingdom of Israel could not last and why it was necessary for the people of God to gain insight and interiority into what they were losing in earthly power and glory. We see why, after many saviors, the unique Savior came for them while experiencing the final crisis under Roman oppression and the radicalization of political forces.

Thus, the message of Jesus was a call to overcome the narrow-mindedness of their nationalism and fanaticism in order to find here and now *the kingdom and the justice of God*. The history of Israel had to flow into a new era with a universal people of God, who would be rich in the knowledge of the Father and the Son. Such a people would practice non-violence that can overcome divisions and oppression.

We know that the Jewish nation collapsed after a few years: it was the end of one world and the rupture of destiny.

The New Testament does not replace the Old. Jesus' preaching does not make the warnings of the prophets irrelevant. Love does not replace justice. The salvation promised to the Jewish people is not replaced by a "salvation of souls," but rather the Gospel is presented as the liberating truth which redirects history and moves all civilizations toward the goal of reunion and reconciliation in Christ of all human powers and creative energy in the universe.

When attempts to evangelize the Jews in Palestine failed, the first Jewish Christians turned with added incentive to other people and announced the Gospel to them. Within a few years, the church began to spread throughout the known world then, that is to say, the nations of the Greco-Roman empire. At first, it was a common belief among Christians that the message would shortly reach the ends of the world, and Jesus would return in glory for judgment. In the seventies this illusion disappeared: history would last longer than they had expected.

The Christian communities began to gather what had been written down to preserve the preaching of the apostles. They also spent time recalling significant experiences of the first Christians. Of the books thus produced, the church approved those which expressed the faith as it was received from the apostles and rejected others which, although very commendable, did not seem to transmit the most fundamental and universal message of the faith.

How the Gospels Were Written

The Documents

All the publications of the New Testament and the Gospels in particular, whether they be in English, Spanish, or any other language are translations of original texts written in Greek. Ancient manuscripts containing these texts were copied a number of times, until each of these texts was fixed with the invention of printing; it was probably in 1456 that Gutenberg printed the first Bible.

Those copying the manuscripts could not avoid making some mistakes. By comparing the various manuscripts, grouped according to their differences and their origin, critics can determine what were the original texts which the Catholic Church recognized as the expression of the apostolic faith and as the word of God. The question remains: who wrote these first Gospels and what was their source?

Some beautiful manuscripts of the New Testament from the fourth century have been preserved. They are confirmed by many other much older documents which contain paragraphs or sometimes complete books of the New Testament. Moreover, Christian writers of the second and third centuries oftentimes quote the sacred text upon which they have commented. John's Gospel is considered as dating from the years 90–100 A.D., and fragments have been discovered in Egypt, very far from the place of origin. The fragments are dated from the years 120–130 A.D.

In what follows, we will pay special attention to the Gospels, though they are not the most ancient writings of the New Testament. When the first three gospels were written, in the years 50–70 A.D., Paul had already sent his original letters.

The Authors of the Gospels

It is interesting to note that the first historians of the Church already made special mention of those considered by tradition as the authors of the three synoptic evangelists.

In the year 110 A.D., Papias of Hierapolis (near Ephesus) wrote: "Mark, Peter's interpreter, wrote with precision, though not in an orderly manner, all that he recalled about the sayings and deeds of the Lord. He accompanied Peter who taught according to the needs of the moment, not in the form of a composition and he made no mistakes in including some things as he remembered them. Matthew put together the sayings of the Lord in Hebrew and from then on everyone translated them according to his ability."

In the year 185 A.D., bishop and martyr Saint Irenaeus wrote: "Matthew published a gospel among the Hebrews and in their language, while Peter and Paul went out to evangelize Rome and establish the Church. After they left, Mark, a disciple and Peter's translator, wrote down Peter's preaching. Luke, Paul's companion, also wrote a book about the Gospel preached by Paul."

These ancient sources about which we could add more, were thoroughly examined by many modern biblical scholars, and lately they have once again been accepted as information of historical value.

Moreover, it would be a mistake to think that the Gospels had been written in one piece by men like Matthew, Mark or Luke who at a given time decided to record by means of the written word the active ministry and the teaching of Jesus.

From the Oral Tradition to Our Gospels

We know that Jesus died when he was still young and that he died without having written anything. Jesus had dedicated most of his time to forming the twelve apostles whom he had chosen. They lived with him, as was the custom of disciples with Jewish teachers. Jesus had them learn his teaching by heart. Instead of multiplying discourses, Jesus repeated the essential truths in many ways. We cannot doubt that, after the days of Pentecost, their concern was to give form to these instructions of Jesus, which were to be the catechesis of the early Church.

At the beginning the apostles witnessed to what they had seen and heard. Gradually there emerged a need to have a written record of their testimony to safeguard the memory: we ourselves often do this when, during a meeting, the sharing of the participants is recorded for the benefit of those not present.

The Christian communities of Palestine spoke Aramaic or Hebrew according to regions and environment. It follows that the first accounts were drawn up in these two languages. Gradually the texts referring to what Jesus said and did were regrouped; in this way the first Christian communities passed from an oral testimony to a written text: that of the Gospels.

At that time the Greek speaking Christian communities had become a majority and primitive texts were translated into that language.

The Gospel of John

The first three evangelists not only differ in their focus but also in rather different presentations of the deeds and words of Jesus; each actually has his own theology, his own special way of knowing Jesus and it is this profound view, this personal testimony which finally justifies the differences.

In the Gospel of John we find parts of an ancient Gospel as simple as Mark's, with more deeds than words of Jesus, which may have been addressed to the Christian communities of Samaria, and which were written in Aramaic. This was the foundation on which John developed long discourses of Jesus showing that salvation transforms humankind and renews creation.

Can We Believe What the Gospels Say?

Most of us have probably asked this: why do we have four testimonies instead of one, and what are they worth? Following what we have just said it will be easy to understand what follows:

- Not all the deeds and words of Jesus are found in the Gospel.
- In relating the words of Jesus, each evangelist expresses them in his own way and adapts them for the better understanding of his readers.
- The events are not always told in the order in which they took place; and things that Jesus said on different occasions can be mixed together in the same passage.

This is not to say that we cannot believe the testimony of the evangelists. We are not given a “photo,” a recording of Jesus’ words, but rather four different views that complement each other. Why worry if there are certain contradictions in details: if at the gate of Jericho there was one blind man or two, what difference does it make in the basic message?

The Unique Place of the Gospels in Literature

The Gospels are exceptional and unique work among the literary writings of all time. Any comparison with other writings of its time, Christian or otherwise, shows a tremendous contrast—in the Gospels, simplicity and the desire to be temperate, in the other texts, what is marvelous, complex and “not down-to-earth.” A modern philosopher—not a believer—wondered why there were not more miracles in the Gospels. The Gospels carry within them the guarantee of their own authenticity. Taking into account what was said in the previous paragraph, modern criticism has not been able to find falsehood in the Gospels, even though it has scrutinized them with a magnifying glass for more than a century. What is more: the Gospels leave us with a deep sense of meaningfulness each time we are capable of opening ourselves to them.

Those Who Doubt

Still, those who question the testimony of the Gospels are many. At times it is because they think they see contradictions in the Gospels; more often, because it seems impossible for them to accept miracles. Even among believers who study the Gospels, some have reservations concerning the historical value of anything that could be termed a miracle in the literal sense.

This may be due to the fact that they have been trained in a “scientific” culture which relies only on human resources in order to solve every problem. In a world that covers itself with insurance, little is expected from God and God does not multiply miracles.

They reason the following way: if I cannot now see anything similar to what happened in the Gospel, how am I to believe that such things happened even then? Everything might be different if they were involved in poor or persecuted Christian communities. There they might witness the constant interventions of God for the benefit of those who can only hope in him alone. Actually, in these communities it is said: if today God works such miracles, why would he not have performed them in the time of Jesus and by his order?

In fact it is impossible to study the Gospel “impartially,” as we would do with any ordinary book, for it questions all of our life and not merely our ideas on any point. If we share the same faith of the apostles, we should have no difficulty accepting the sacred books while remaining aware of the critical questions. But if we do not fulfill the conditions that would allow us to “see God,” we feel uneasy until we find some reason to “reduce” the Gospel’s testimony to something which to us seems reasonable; that is to say that it will not question our stance in life itself. That is why many persons, though they admire the Gospels and refuse to consider it a lie, search for a thousand reasons to deny what seems shocking to them; its testimony of God-made-man; a God who moves around among people and who raises the dead.

Some Objections

Therefore they especially cling to two main arguments:

– They say that the Gospels were written many years after the death of Jesus when popular imagination had already placed a halo around him. And so, they do not reveal the reality of Jesus to us, but rather the faith of the Church in the first century. (Let us remember what we said about the date when the Gospels were written.)

– They also say that the Gospels were writings destined for the catechesis and teaching of Christians: the facts they relate are aimed at supporting what is taught. Hence it is not important whether Jesus walked on the water or not; the episode was written to show that Jesus possessed divine power.

But what about the apostles? They had been Jesus' witnesses, and their function was to remain his official witnesses within the Church. They knew what had actually happened; would they have remained silent while some were distorting the history of Jesus? The guarantee of the Gospel is found in the very structure of the Catholic Church, which was never a group of spontaneous believers carried away by enthusiasm or opportunism.

The Gospels came from the tradition of the apostles, and the Church retained them because it recognized this tradition in them. In those very years and during the following century, other "gospels" were written: "the gospel of Peter," "the gospel of Thomas," "the gospel of Nicodemus," "the proto-gospel of James." The Church, however, did not accept them because of the fantastic events recorded in them, or because of theological orientation which did not conform to the teaching received from the apostles.

MATTHEW



INTRODUCTION

Who was Matthew, known also as Levi? We read in the Gospel that he was a tax collector and that Jesus called him to be one of his apostles (Mt 9:9 and Mk 2:13). The earliest witnesses (Papias around the year 130 A.D.; Irenaeus around the year 180 A.D.; Origen around the year 200 A.D.) attribute to him a Gospel written in Hebrew that was still known at the time of Saint Jerome (fourth century). We only know the Greek version of this Gospel that must have been written during the same years by Matthew or by one of his collaborators.

In all probability, this Gospel was written in a Christian community both Jews and Greek origin, perhaps in Antioch (see Acts 12:1, 19:1, and 13:1). This was the time when the high priest, Ananias, had James, the Bishop of Jerusalem, stoned to death. At that time, Christians were excluded from the synagogues and they were no longer protected by Roman laws that had allowed the Jews not to offer sacrifices to Roman gods. Within a short time, they would be persecuted by Nero (the years 64-65 A.D.).

This Gospel attempts to show that Christians should not be concerned if their own people are rejecting them now. The official community that refused to believe was left outside of the kingdom to which those who acknowledged the Messiah had access. This minority received the “good things of the Covenant” that had been promised by the prophets. From then on, they will have to share them with all believers who will seek to join the Church whatever their origin may be.

From this perspective the whole history of Jesus is presented as a conflict, ending in a separation. The turning point corresponds with the end of Chapter 13 where Jesus no longer speaks to the crowd, but to his disciples.

Matthew had singled out the figure of Jesus as a preacher and as a teacher of Scripture. Matthew is especially interested in the words of Jesus and in his Gospel: Jesus’ words are more numerous than in the other Gospels. On the other hand, his gestures and miracles are presented in the most schematic way possible.

Therefore, we should not be surprised that Matthew built up his Gospel around five “discourses,” in which he gathered the words that Jesus had said on different occasions. These discourses are:

- The Sermon on the Mount: Matthew 5–7. This “Magna Carta” of the children of God is completed by ten signs of power that announce our liberation from sin (Chaps. 8 and 9).
- Instructions to Missionaries: Matthew 10. These instructions are completed by the controversies that oppose Jesus and his adversaries (Chaps. 11-12).
- Parables of the Kingdom: Matthew 13. Then comes the blinding of the Pharisees, while the faith of the Twelve and of Peter enables Jesus to establish his Church.
- Warnings to the Christian community: Matthew 18. The fundamental law of fraternal forgiveness is completed by various instructions. The guides of the Jewish people are closed, showing by contrast what the guides of the Christian people will have to be.
- How to live while waiting for the end of the world: Matthew 24 and 25.

Matthew put the first two chapters on the infancy of Jesus to serve as an introduction. First, he recalls how Joseph adopted the child born of the Virgin Mary as the son of David. Then we have accounts of a special type, in which Matthew shows little concern for the historicity of the facts, since his intention is to present a theological teaching by way of images. These two chapters form a whole (1:1 4:16) with the activity of John the Baptist who introduces the Son of God.

The family background of Jesus

1 • ¹This is the account of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, son of David, son of Abraham.

²Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers.

³Judah was the father of Perez and Zerah (their mother was Tamar), Perez was the father of Hezron, and Hezron of Aram. ⁴Aram was the father of Aminadab, Aminadab of Nahshon, Nahshon of Salmon.

⁵Salmon was the father of Boaz. His mother was Rahab. Boaz was the father of Obed. His mother was Ruth. Obed was the father of Jesse.

⁶Jesse was the father of David, the king. David was the father of Solomon. His mother had been Uriah's wife.

⁷Solomon was the father of Rehobom. Then came the kings: Abijah, Asaph, ⁸Jehoshaphat, Joram, Uzziah, ⁹Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah, ¹⁰Manasseh, Amon, Josiah.

¹¹Josiah was the father of Jechoni-

ah and his brothers at the time of the deportation to Babylon.

¹²After the deportation to Babylon, Jechoniah was the father of Salathiel and Salathiel of Zerubbabel.

¹³Zerubbabel was the father of Abiud, Abiud of Eliakim, and Eliakim of Azor. ¹⁴Azor was the father of Zadok, Zadok the father of Akim, and Akim the father of Eliud. ¹⁵Eliud was the father of Eleazar, Eleazar of Matthan, and Matthan of Jacob.

¹⁶Jacob was the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, and from her came Jesus who is called the Christ—the Messiah.

¹⁷There were then fourteen generations from Abraham to David, and fourteen generations from David to the deportation to Babylon, and fourteen generations from the deportation to Babylon to the birth of Christ.

Jesus born of a virgin mother

(Lk 1:27)

• ¹⁸This is how Jesus Christ was born: Mary his mother had been given

tion was sufficient for Jesus to be considered, like Joseph, son of David.

Four names included in the list belong to women, all described in the Scriptures: *Tamar*, who gave everything so as not to lose the divine blessings; *Rahab*, a foreign prostitute whom Scripture praises (Jos 2); Ruth, another foreigner of exemplary conduct; and the widow of Uriah, the beautiful *Bathsheba*, who shared David's sin.

All of this background discreetly announces him who came down to save sinners and to open the kingdom of Israel to the multitudes coming from the pagan world.

The Savior is the flower and fruit of our earth and of the chosen race at the same time (Is 45:8). God led the Jewish people to a degree of human and religious maturity where the coming and teaching of Jesus would take on its full meaning.

We must understand that we are in solidarity with Christ first of all through human ties. The history of the present time, as well as the history of our families, prepares the second coming of Christ to humankind.

• 18. The wording of verse 16 should be noted. Jesus is not the son of Joseph. The beginning

Lk 3:
23-38

1:34;
2:4;
Gen
38:29;
Ru 4:13

Ru 4:13

2S12:24

2K
24:12;
36:9;
36:20

Lk 1:27;
Mt 2:5;
2:11

• **1.1** Many books in the Scriptures are careful to show that the events and persons they speak about are rooted in earlier history, for the whole Scripture draws its strength from a continuity of history and from the fidelity of God to his promises. That is the meaning of this list of ancestors. Matthew prefers to call it as do the other books of the Scriptures: the document of the origins.

Luke 3:23 has another genealogy of Jesus that aims to emphasize his solidarity with the whole human race.

There are 42 names on the list, arranged in three series of 14 names each, a symbolic number for the Jews. It is obvious that it is not a complete list.

Jesus is the *son of Abraham*. Abraham is the father of the believers. God promised to unite all nations around his race. Jesus is also *the son of David*: all Israel knew that the Savior would be a descendant of David.

The first series of names appears in Ruth 4:18. The second is made up of kings, descendants of David, mentioned in the Book of Kings. Scripture does not say anything about the descendants of Zerubbabel (Ezra 2:3).

The list extends to *Joseph*, the adoptive father of Jesus (cf. v. 16). Among the Jews, this adop-

to Joseph in marriage, but before they lived together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit.

¹⁹Then Joseph, her husband, made plans to divorce her in all secrecy. He was an upright man, and in no way did he want to disgrace her.

²⁰While he was pondering over this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, descendant of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. She has conceived by the Holy Spirit, ²¹and now she will bear a son. You shall call him 'Jesus' for he will save his people from their sins."

²²All this happened in order to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ²³*The virgin will conceive and bear a son, and he will be called Emmanuel*, which means: God-with-us. ²⁴When Joseph awoke, he did what the angel of the Lord had told him to do, and he took his wife to his home. ²⁵He did not have any mari-

tal relations with her. When she gave birth to a son, Joseph gave him the name Jesus.

Wise men from the east

2 • ¹When Jesus was born in Bethlehem, in Judea, during the days of king Herod, wise men from the East arrived in Jerusalem. ²They asked, "Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw the rising of his star in the East and have come to honor him."

Num
24:17

³When Herod heard this he was greatly disturbed, and with him all Jerusalem. ⁴He immediately called a meeting of all high-ranking priests and teachers of the law, and asked them where the Messiah was to be born.

⁵"In the town of Bethlehem in Judea," they told him, "for this is what the prophet wrote: ⁶*And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, you are by no means the least among the clans of*

Jn 7:42

Mic 5:1;
25 5:2

of the paragraph intends to remind us that Jesus is both a legitimate son of David through Joseph and the Son of God conceived through the Holy Spirit by a virgin-mother.

These short and almost bashful sentences do not dare to unveil the mystery of Mary, the virgin through whom life on earth touches God and offers itself as an oblation. A messenger breaks through the night and speaks with silent words: the world is open to the active presence of God.

Mary was engaged. Engagements gave to the Jewish people practically every right of marriage, especially conjugal rights. The only difference was that women continued to live under the parents' tutelage and in their parental home. The Jews were markedly a "macho" society. A woman necessarily belonged to a man, either to her father, her husband, or her son. Mary was already the wife of Joseph, but she could not be under his authority until he brought her to his home (vv. 20 and 24).

With reference to the virginity of Mary, see Luke 1:26.

The virginity of Mary was not in keeping with the Jewish mentality that gave first place to fecundity. It was not so unusual that Joseph would accept such a situation. At this time certain Jews belonging to the party of the Essenes lived celibacy, as did the monks.

Joseph, her husband, made plans to divorce her in all secrecy (v. 19). The Gospel is not precise as to his reasons for so doing. In any case it is unthinkable that people might have doubted Mary's fidelity.

The intervention of the angel in the Gospel is not to reassure Joseph but to inform him of his role in the plan of God: *You shall call him 'Jesus'*, and you will receive him as your son." Joseph was a "descendant of David" and Jesus adopted by Joseph would be a legitimate descendant of David. Most probably Mary did not even belong to the tribe of Judah, which was that of David, but like her cousin Elizabeth, she belonged to a family of priests of the tribe of Levi.

• **2.1** From the first Christian generations there have been popular narratives trying to relate all that was not known about Jesus and not part of the Gospel. These closely resembled the Jewish stories of the childhood of Abraham and Moses. The wise men, the star and the massacre of the children of Bethlehem have sprung directly from those stories and it is useless today to study astronomical maps to find a comet that was visible at that time.

In this chapter then, Matthew uses these stories without the slightest problem about their authenticity. He uses them to show how Jesus

1:25;
Lk 1:31;
Acts
3:16;
4:12

Is 7:14

Lk 1:31;
2:21

Judah, for from you will come a leader, one who is to shepherd my people Israel."

⁷Then Herod secretly called the wise men and asked them the precise time the star appeared. ⁸He sent them to Bethlehem with these instructions, "Go and get accurate information about the child. As soon as you have found him, report to me, so that I, too, may go and honor him."

⁹After the meeting with the king, they set out. The star that they had seen in the East went ahead of them and stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰The wise men were overjoyed on seeing the star again. ¹¹They went into the house, and when they saw the child with Mary his mother, they knelt and worshiped him. They opened their bags and offered him their gifts of gold, incense and myrrh.

¹²In a dream they were warned not to go back to Herod, so they returned to their home country by another way.

Escape to Egypt

• ¹³After the wise men had left, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother and flee to Egypt, and stay there until I tell you, for Herod will soon be looking for the child in order to kill him."

¹⁴Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and left that night for Egypt, ¹⁵where he stayed until the death of Herod. In this way, what the Lord had said through the prophet was fulfilled: *I called my son out of Egypt.*

¹⁶When Herod found out that he had been tricked by the wise men, he was furious. He gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its neighborhood who were two years old or under. This was done, according to what he had learned from the wise men about the time when the star appeared.

¹⁷In this way, what the prophet Jeremiah had said was fulfilled: ¹⁸*A cry*

lived in his own way what his people had undergone. That accounts for the quotations from the Old Testament with each one repeating the phrase: "in this way... was fulfilled..." It is a way of saying that the texts should be reread. They spoke of the people, and at the same time they announced the coming of Jesus. In a way, he would live what had already been lived—journeying, searching, rejoicing, grieving—but with him all would have a new meaning.

The *Wise Men* could have been respected priests and seers of Zoroastrian religion. Here they stand for all the non-biblical religions. While the Jewish priests, chiefs of the people of God, do not receive notice of the birth of Jesus, God communicates the news to some of his friends in the pagan world. This lesson is good for all times: Jesus is the Savior of all people, and not only of those who belong to the Church.

The star reminds us that God calls each one according to him or her own personality. Jesus calls the fishermen of Galilee after a miraculous catch of fish; the pagans who look at the stars, God calls by means of a star. God knows how to communicate with us by means of events and through our own ideals, which guide us as stars. Whatever be the way, it will lead us to the one who is the light of God.

• 13. In relating the story about the slaughter of innocent children and the flight into Egypt, Matthew quotes two verses from the prophets Hosea and Jeremiah about the trials and sufferings of God's people in past times. Jesus must live in exile and anguish, as did his ancestors. Persecution begins with his birth and will follow him till his death. Mary (and Joseph to a lesser degree) was associated with Jesus' sufferings and saving mission.

Christian tradition has always held that the "Innocents" associated with the Passion of Christ without having wished it also shared in his glory without having merited it. This invites us to be mindful of the fact that the mysterious love of God envelops millions of massacred children and other hundreds of millions killed before seeing the light of day. What should we think of so many stifled possibilities? Individuals and society responsible for this disaster suffer the consequences; but God has all destinies in hand, he knows them in advance, and no one by destroying life is able to limit God's generosity. No matter how much innocent blood the enemies of the Gospel spill, they will not be able to extinguish the Church or to block God's plans.

Lk 2:16;
Ps
72:10;
Is 60:1-6

2:22

1:20;
2:19

Hos
11:1

Jer 31:15 *is heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation: Rachel weeps for her children. She refuses to be comforted, for they are no more.*

Joseph and Mary return to Nazareth

4:19 • 19 After Herod’s death, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph and said, 20 “Get up, take the child and his mother, and go back to the land of Israel, because those who tried to kill the child are dead.” 21 So Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel.

22 But when Joseph heard that Archilais had succeeded his father Herod as king of Judea, he was afraid to go there. Joseph was given further instructions in a dream, and went to the region of Galilee.

• 23 There he settled, in a town called Nazareth. In this way, what was said by the prophets was fulfilled: *He shall be called a Nazarene.* Is 11:1; 53:2; Jdg 13:5; Lk 2:39; Acts 2:22

John the Baptist prepares the way

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

3 • 1 In the course of time, John the Baptist appeared in the desert of Judea and began to proclaim his message: 2 “Change your ways; the kingdom of heaven is at hand!” 3 It was about him that the prophet Isaiah had spoken when he said: *A voice is shouting in the desert, ‘Prepare a way for the Lord; make his paths straight!’* Mk 1:1-8; Lk 3:1-18; Jn 1:19; Mk 1:15; Is 40:3

4 John had a leather garment around his waist and wore a cloak of camel’s hair; his food was locusts and wild honey. 5 People came to him from

• 19. The return to Nazareth. Here we have the end of these stories that are intended to introduce us to the Gospel. They announce the mission of Christ: savior misjudged by his own, hounded by authority, he will turn towards the pagan nations. For Galilee was considered by the Jews of Judea as half-foreign and pagan (4:15). Jesus was to remain thirty years in this small village where he grew up and worked as a “carpenter” (Mk 6:3) while the world waited for salvation.

• 23. *He shall be called a Nazarene.* Matthew plays with this word that brings to mind *nezer*, or shoot (Is 11:1) and *nazirite* (Num 6). In those days there were religious groups who preached and baptized, as did John, and they were considered *nazirites*. Jesus was both *nezer* and *nazirite*.

Many people wonder what Jesus did between the ages of twelve, when he was seen in the temple (Lk 2:41), and thirty, the approximate age of Jesus when he began his ministry. False pretenders take advantage of this Gospel’s silence to speculate that Jesus went to India to learn magic and how to work miracles from the Hindu wonder workers, or even that he visited some outer-space goblins. It does not take much to imagine things!

Let us remember, first of all, that the Gospel is not a biography of Jesus, a narration of his life from birth to death. It seeks only to tell us the most important deeds and words of Jesus by which he gives us his message. It does not tell us what Jesus looked like, whether he was tall or stout, blond or dark, and many other things that

did not interest the first Christians. The Gospels of Mark and John open with Jesus’ baptism by John, after which Jesus began teaching. Later on, Matthew and Luke wrote a little about Jesus’ childhood to help us understand the secret of his person.

Secondly, let us read Matthew 13:54-56. The people of Nazareth, astounded by his deeds, do not say: surely Jesus has learned this in foreign countries because he was abroad so much. They wonder: what has happened to the carpenter’s son? We have known him for a long time... what has happened to him?

Thirdly, we can say that to speak the word of God is at the same time to speak a word of human experience. The prophets speak words of God, not as a tape recorder, but as people who feel something and have something to cry out. Jesus could not speak the word of God if he had not acquired, as a man, an exceptional wisdom of *what there was in each one* (Jn 2:25). The years Jesus spent in Nazareth were not really lost. He absorbed the culture of his people and observed events affecting his nation experiencing manual labor, human relations, feelings, suffering and oppression. Jesus had to experience all these things to be our savior, so that his words would be true, weighty and valuable for all times.

• 3.1 We have just said that the real beginning of the Gospel is the preaching of John the Baptist. Here Matthew compares Jesus with John, John’s baptism with that of Jesus. See commentaries on Mark 1:1 and Luke 3.

Jerusalem, from all Judea and from the whole Jordan valley, ⁶and they were baptized by him in the Jordan, as they confessed their sins.

12:34;
23:33;
Lk 21:23;
Rom
1:18;
2:5;
5:9;
Eph 5:6;
Col 3:6;
Rev 6:16

Jn 8:33;
Rom
4:12;
7:8

7:19;
Lk 13:7;
Jn 15:6

Mk 6:17;
Jn 1:26;
Acts 1:5;
11:16;
13:24;
19:4;
Mt 11:3;
Jn 11:15;
1:33

Is 41:16

⁷When he saw several Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he baptized, he said to them, "Brood of vipers! Who told you that you could escape the punishment that is to come? ⁸Let it be seen that you are serious in your conversion; ⁹and do not think: We have Abraham for our father. I tell you, that God can raise children for Abraham from these stones! ¹⁰The ax is already laid to the roots of the trees; any tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown in the fire.

¹¹I baptize you in water for a change of heart, but the one who is coming after me is more powerful than I am; indeed, I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹²He has the winning fan in his hand; and he will clear out his threshing floor. He will gather his wheat into the barn; but the chaff, he will burn in inextinguishable fire."

• 13. In this baptism Jesus identifies himself with his people, more precisely with this world of "untitled" people who went to hear a call to conversion. For him it is an occasion of deep religious experience recalling that of the great prophets. What the voice says gives Jesus his mission. He will be Son and Servant of the Father (Ps 2 and Is 42:1).

• 4.1 The commentary of this event is partly found in Luke's Gospel (4:1-13).

Jesus is then Son of God in the sense this word had in his time: he is sent as king, prophet and savior and he knows it. How will he live this and how will God act towards his Son? He will be put to the test in the desert. In reality Jesus would undergo this test throughout his ministry: his opponents would ask for signs and miracles, and his own disciples would want him to center more on himself. It is this permanent test that is here presented in a figurative way. The Gospel intentionally places this temptation in the desert at the beginning, and affirms that Jesus defeated the evil spirit before he had begun his mission.

Jesus baptized by John

(Mk 1:9; Lk 3:2; Jn 1:29)

Mk 1:
9-19;
Lk 3:
21-22;
Jn 1:29

• ¹³At that time, Jesus arrived from Galilee and came to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. ¹⁴But John tried to prevent him, and said, "How is it, you come to me? I should be baptized by you!"

¹⁵But Jesus answered him, "Let it be like that for now; so that we may fulfill the right order." John agreed.

¹⁶As soon as he was baptized, Jesus came up out of the water. All at once, the heavens opened and he saw the Spirit of God come down, like a dove, and rest upon him. ¹⁷At the same time, a voice from heaven was heard, "This is my Son, the Beloved; he is my Chosen One."

Is 42:1;
Mt 12:18;
17:5

Jesus tempted in the wilderness

(Lk 4:1; Mk 1:12)

4 • ¹Then the Spirit led Jesus into the desert, that he might be put to the test by the devil. ²After Jesus fasted forty days and nights he was famished.

Mk 1:
12-13;
Lk 4:
1-13

Heb
2:18;
4:15

³Then the tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God,

27:40

After spending forty days and nights without food, Jesus was hungry (v. 2). This duration of forty days (which symbolically represents the forty weeks a child remains in its mother's womb in preparation for a new birth) was already present in the life of Moses and Elijah: Exodus 24:18; 1 Kings 19:8. This fast is for Jesus what the command to sacrifice his son had been for Abraham, and for Moses the rebellion of a thirsty people or the incident of the golden calf. In a moment of full lucidity, when Jesus felt physically exhausted and spiritually strengthened by his fast, the devil tried to convince him that it was impossible to carry out his mission with the means God had proposed.

Strange as it is, the Gospel presents this encounter of Jesus with the tempter (devil) as a discussion on biblical texts between masters of the law. The purpose, no doubt, is to show us that even biblical texts may lead us astray if we are without a spirit of obedience to God. The three temptations recall to mind those of the Hebrews in the desert (Ex 16:2; Ex 17:1; Ex 32). At the waters of Massah they grumbled against God

order these stones to turn into bread.”
 Dt 8:3 ⁴But Jesus answered, “Scripture says: *One does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.*”

Is 52:1 ⁵Then the devil took Jesus to the Holy City, set him on the highest wall of the temple, and said to him, ⁶“If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for scripture says: *God has given orders to his angels concerning you. Their hands will hold you up, lest you hurt your foot against a stone.*” ⁷Jesus answered, “But scripture also says: *You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.*”

⁸Then the devil took Jesus to a very high mountain, and showed him all the nations of the world in all their greatness and splendor. And he said, ⁹“All this I will give you, if you kneel down and worship me.” ¹⁰Then Jesus answered, “Be off, Satan! Scripture says: *Worship the Lord your God and serve him alone!*”

¹¹Then the devil left him; and angels came to serve him.

(Mk 1:14; Lk 4:14)

¹²When Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee.

¹³He left Nazareth and went to live in Capernaum, a town by the lake of Galilee, at the border of Zebulun and Naphtali.

¹⁴In this way, the word of the prophet Isaiah was fulfilled: ¹⁵*Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, crossed by the Road of the Sea; and you, who live beyond the Jordan, Galilee, land of pagans:*

¹⁶*The people who lived in darkness have seen a great light; on those who live in the land of the shadow of death, a light has shone.*

• ¹⁷From that time on, Jesus began to proclaim his message, “Change your ways: the kingdom of heaven is near.”

¹⁸As Jesus walked by the lake of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. ¹⁹He said to them, “Come, follow me; and I will make you fish for people.”

²⁰At once they left their nets and followed him.

²¹He went on from there and saw two other brothers, James, the son of Zebedee, and his brother John, in a boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets. Jesus called them.

for leading them where the going was difficult; later they put God to the test: “Could not he do something for them?” Finally they exchanged God and his glory for another god of their own making: a golden calf. Jesus replies by quoting three texts from Deuteronomy, a book that speaks at length of the rebellion of the people of God in the desert. The perfect obedience of the Son contrasts with the infidelity of the Father’s chosen people.

Jesus is victor in this trial, but after him the Church will have to confront these same temptations. She could be tempted to satisfy human desires instead of offering true salvation. Jesus teaches us to be strong against the tricks of the devil in using, as he did, the word of God.

The angels came to serve him (v. 11). After rejecting the temptations, Jesus finds total peace. His purity of heart opens up for him a spiritual world hidden from human eyes, a world as real as the material things and beings surrounding

him. In this spiritual world, as Son of God he is king among the spirits who are servants of his Father (see commentary on Dn 12:6).

• 17. *Change your ways.* The Greek word is oftentimes translated as “convert,” or “repent.” In 3:11 we put “change of heart,” which is the closest to the Greek word. This term can be understood in many ways. In the mouth of John the Baptist, “Be converted” means “turn away from your sins.” With Jesus, “conversion” means a renewal of life from inside out. The Gospel will tell us that this renewal follows the discovery of God’s mercy and is the work of his Spirit within us (see commentary on Mk 1:14).

The kingdom of heaven is near. The Jews at that time said “kingdom of Heaven” instead of “kingdom of God” (see commentary on Mt 5:1). Jesus proclaims that God comes to reign among us meaning that we receive definitive salvation.

Dt 8:3

Is 52:1

Ps 91:11;
Mt 27:40

Dt 6:16;
1Col
10:9

Dn 3:5;
Mt 2:11;
18:26;
1Col
14:25;
Rev 4:10;
22:8

Dt 6:13

Mk 1:
14-15;
Lk 4:14

Is 8:23
—9 1

Lk 1:79

Mk 1:
16-20;
Lk 5:
1-11;
Jn 1:40

13:47

²²At once, they left the boat, and their father, and followed him.

²³Jesus went around all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing all kinds of sickness and disease among the people.

²⁴The news about him spread through the whole of Syria; and the people brought all their sick to him, and all those who suffered: the possessed, the deranged, the paralyzed; and he healed them all. ²⁵Large crowds followed him from Galilee and the Ten Cities, from Jerusalem, Judea, and from across the Jordan.

The Beatitudes

(Lk 6:17)

5 • ¹When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain. He sat down and his disciples gathered

around him. ²Then he spoke and began to teach them:

³Fortunate are those who are poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴Fortunate are those who mourn; they shall be comforted.

⁵Fortunate are the gentle; they shall possess the land. Ps 37:11

⁶Fortunate are those who hunger and thirst for justice, for they shall be satisfied. Is 51:1; Sir 24:21

⁷Fortunate are the merciful, for they shall find mercy. 18:33; Jas 2:13

⁸Fortunate are those with pure hearts, for they shall see God. Ps 24:4; 33:20

⁹Fortunate are those who work for peace; they shall be called children of God.

¹⁰Fortunate are those who are persecuted for the cause of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Heb 12:4; Jas 3:18; 1P 3:14

The Ten Cities (v. 25). This is the territory also called Decapolis, where Jews and non-Jews were mixed. Let us note that Jesus' ministry begins, not at the heart of Israel, but where is felt the presence of that majority of humankind who have not yet received the word of God.

• **5.1 Jesus went up the mountain.** Matthew places this discourse somewhere in the hill country bordering the lake of Tiberias. The reason for mentioning a *mountain* is to remind us of Mount Sinai where Moses received the law (Ex 19). In this first "discourse of Jesus" (see Introduction) Matthew presents him as a Master giving to Israel and to all humankind the new and definitive Law. The formula: *but I say to you* is repeated six times in order to highlight the contrast between the law of Moses and the New Law.

Fortunate! This first paragraph introduces the new people of God; to them the Law is given. Let us not forget that for the Scriptures, the Law is not only a matter of commandments; it includes also God's interventions and declarations which have made Israel a special people, called to a world mission. The Law had been given to the "children of Abraham and Israel" who were guided out of Egypt by Moses. Exclamations like these abound: How fortunate you are, Israel! Meaning: What luck to have been chosen! And how privileged you are to be God's people among all other nations! You are indeed fortunate for it is to you that God has spoken (Dt 33:29; Ps 144:15; Bar 4:4).

Right away the Gospel speaks of a converted people of God. No longer the people of the twelve tribes, with their land, their language, their frontiers, their national ambitions, but rather those God will seek among all nations. Who are these chosen ones who surely must consider themselves overjoyed to be so called? They are *the poor, those who weep*, those who have often been tempted to curse their misfortune, their sins, their personal conflicts.

Here Matthew gives us eight beatitudes, while Luke 6:20-26 has only four. It is not important, however, for they form but one theme. The main difference between Matthew and Luke arises from the fact that their beatitudes are addressed to two different groups.

Luke presents the Beatitudes in the way they were proclaimed by Jesus. In Luke, Jesus addresses the whole assembly of common people, speaking as one of them. Like the prophets he speaks boldly and clearly: you, the poor, are the first beneficiaries of the promises of God.

Matthew instead adapts Jesus' words to his audience of Christian believers. The Church had already spread and Christian communities brought together all kinds of people: slaves, ordinary people and wealthy ones. Matthew tells them that the Gospel is significant for each of them. It is not only by being poor that they will please God, but by their inner attitude and way of life. He says: *Fortunate are those who are spiritually poor, adding the pure hearts, those who work for peace...*

Luke points out those to whom the Gospel

Jas 1:2 ¹¹Fortunate are you, when people insult you and persecute you and speak all kinds of evil against you because you are my followers. ¹²Be glad and joyful, for a great reward is kept for you in God. For that is how this people persecuted the prophets who lived before you.

10:22;
1P 4:14;
Heb
11:32;
Jas 5:10

Salt and light

(Mk 4:21; Lk 14:34; 8:16; 11:33)

Mk 9:50;
Lk 14:
34-35;
Lev
2:13;
Num
18:19

• ¹³You are the salt of the earth. But if salt has lost its saltiness, how can it

be made salty again? It has become useless. It can only be thrown away and people will trample on it.

• ¹⁴You are the light of the world. A city built on a mountain cannot be hidden. ¹⁵No one lights a lamp and covers it; instead, it is put on a lamp stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶In the same way, your light must shine before others, so that they may see the good you do, and praise your Father in heaven.

Is 49:6;
Jn 8:12;
9:5;
Phil 2:15
Lk 8:16;
11:33;
Mk 4:21

Jn 3:21;
15:8;
1Co1
10:31

gives priority: the masses who are poor, the workers, the peasants and the marginalized. Matthew for his part teaches those already within the Church how they should behave to be worthy of the God who chose them.

Those said to be “fortunate” are not so because of what they suffer: the expression would not ring true. They are fortunate because they are admitted to the kingdom.

The kingdom of heaven is theirs (v. 3) and following immediately: *they possess the land*. There is no real contradiction, it is only apparent.

First of all we must understand the term *Heaven* as used in Jesus’ time. Being exceedingly respectful of God, the Jews would not pronounce his name, referring to him with other words like *Heaven, The Glory, The Power...* The kingdom of *Heaven* means literally the kingdom of *God*, like the Father of *Heaven* means simply: God the Father. On reading the word *Heaven*, remember that Jesus usually meant by this word, not the reward we will obtain after death “in heaven,” but the kingdom of God that comes to us on this earth together with Jesus.

Likewise we translated as a *great reward* is kept for you in God (v. 12) the sentence that says “is kept for you in heaven.”

The real meaning of *the land* must also be understood. This land, for the Scriptures, was Palestine, because it was there that God would come to save his people. The Gospel, in turn, does not oppose what is material with what is spiritual: actually, the term “spiritual” is not used at all throughout the Gospel. When God spoke through the prophets, he promised his people a world where all their needs would be satisfied: banquets with wine aplenty (Is 25:6), long life, a land well-watered, freedom from oppression, a kingdom of justice. Over and above all that, God would live among his people and to them he would communicate his Spirit: *I shall be their God and they shall be my people* (Ezk 37:27).

In the Beatitudes, the kingdom of God is at the same time the *land* of Palestine promised to the children of Abraham and the land where peace reigns for God is present there. Those

who *hunger for justice* will be given both bread and the holiness of God, because in the Scriptures, *justice* also signifies: being as God wishes us to be. Because of this Jesus tells us that we shall be *satisfied or consoled*. Our consolation on earth is to know and see that God loves us and cares for us and in spite of all, can overturn the situation of the oppressed. It is also to know that even when it seems he does not hear our prayer, our cross has meaning and purpose. Finally we must not forget that in our future life God will give us more than we could ever hope for or merit. It is certain, however, that Matthew more than Luke, has reoriented the language of Jesus, inviting us to look higher than what is immediate.

Waiting lasted until the coming of Jesus. Jesus tells us that a new age has begun: God is with us and his kingdom is already here for those with a *clean heart*, meaning that their desires have been purified: *they shall see God* (v. 8).

Fortunate—the persecuted. Matthew, like Luke, develops this last beatitude, for, no matter wherever we are, we cannot live the Gospel without suffering persecution.

• ¹³. Jesus has just designated those who are called to the kingdom. First of all he will clarify their mission: *to be the light of the world* and not merely a light in the world. This does not mean that all people are to enter the Church, but that the Church has to be *salt and light* to the world. Scripture mentions *salt* as the element that preserves food. The *covenant of salt* was the Covenant of God with those who were to serve him forever (Num 18:19). So the disciples of Jesus are called *salt of the earth* because through them the world benefits from the lasting Covenant with God. They must continually enkindle in the world the desire and struggle for true justice and perfection, and not allow human societies to become satisfied with mediocrity.

• ¹⁴. *You are the light*: Jesus does not mean “You are the best in the world,” but “God has

More perfect law

• ¹⁷Do not think that I have come to annul the law and the prophets. I have not come to annul them, but to fulfill them. ¹⁸I tell you this: as long as heaven and earth last, not the smallest letter or dot in the law will change, until all is fulfilled.

¹⁹So then, whoever breaks the least important of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be the least in the kingdom of heaven. On the other hand, whoever obeys them, and teaches others to do the same, will be great in the kingdom of heaven.

chosen you to be a minority and through you he will make himself known.” You will experience, (both you and the Church) much that you would perhaps prefer to avoid, but which will be for the world, a sign from God.

Children of light: Ephesians 5:8; 1 Peter 2:12; 1 Thessalonians 5:4.

• 17. Here begins the presentation of the new Law. It is far from what is often sought in a religion: practices to observe, fasts, prayers, good works with which one wins salvation. Jesus says little about this because Scripture has dealt at length with this subject, and the study of Scripture itself shows that these laws and practices are always linked to a certain culture, and have to be adapted to the times.

Law (v. 18): At times this word indicates the whole religion of Israel. *The law and the prophets:* was a way of indicating the whole Scriptures.

Not the smallest letter or dot in the law will change until all is fulfilled (v. 18). Jesus does not refer to the commandments. Rather he affirms that the religion founded on the Old Testament's Scripture was a temporary, yet necessary step in the history of salvation. The prophecies had to be fulfilled; the rites and sacrifices of that religion expressed in a veiled manner the mystery of sin and mercy that would be fulfilled in the person and the work of Jesus. With him comes the *perfect and definitive* fellowship of God with humankind.

For us as well, observing the laws of the Scriptures is not an end in itself. They are an expression of real love and are its guidelines. In obeying them we become receptive to the Spirit who will lead us. In this way we discover a “righteousness” or perfection far superior to the canonists of the time: the *Lawyers and the Pharisees*.

In verse 19 Jesus is referring to the commandments.

²⁰I tell you, if your sense of right and wrong is not keener than that of the Lawyers and the Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

• ²¹You have heard, that it was said to our people in the past: *Do not commit murder; anyone who murders will have to face trial.* ²²But now, I tell you: whoever gets angry with a brother or sister will have to face trial. Whoever insults a brother or sister is liable, to be brought before the council. Whoever calls a brother or sister “Fool!” is liable, of being thrown into the fire of hell. ²³So, if you are about to offer your gift at the altar,

In verse 20, *If your sense of right and wrong is not keener*, Jesus refers to the spirit of the law.

Just when he is about to teach a new way of understanding the Law of God, Jesus warns us against the temptation of the easy way. Many could misinterpret the words of Jesus and say: It would be better if religion were less demanding and easier to practice! Because of this, Jesus points out that anyone who does not intend to fulfill the entire law will not enter the kingdom; nor will those who have ready excuses for their laziness: these commandments are not so important! To those who obey the law, Jesus shows the spirit of the law. For such as these the Gospel is not a comfortable road, but the call to a more perfect life.

• 21. Here we have the beginning of the opposites: *You have heard... but now I tell you.* This formula will be repeated six times.

Jesus alludes to the reading of the Scriptures which takes place each Sabbath in the synagogues; just as in the Church today each week has its assigned readings. It was the Hebrew text or its Aramaic translation (the spoken language) that was used. The leaders of the synagogue or visitors passing through gave a commentary. Jesus was known for speaking often in the assemblies and it is highly probable that he would have often said: *You have heard (vv. 21, 27, 38) and I tell you*, for he spoke with authority (Mt 7:29).

Jesus does not question the demands of the Scriptures, nor is he satisfied with a mere commentary; the law of Christ is a call for purification of heart, that is, of our intentions and our desires. It is a fresh enlightenment born of a new experience of God. When we turn towards the Father (and that is the great innovation: the imitation of God the Father: 5:48), we discover

Rom
3:31;
10:4

Lk
16:17;
21:32;
Mt24:35;
Jas 2:10

Rom
10:3;
Phil 3:9

20:13;
Dt 5:17;
Lk 12:57

Eph
4:26;
Jas
1:19-20

Mk
11:25;
Rom
13:9

and you remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴leave your gift there, in front of the altar; go at once, and make peace with your brother, and then come back and offer your gift to God.

²⁵Don't forget this: be reconciled with your opponent quickly when you are together on the way to court. Otherwise he will turn you over to the judge, who will hand you over to the police, who will put you in jail.

²⁶There, you will stay, until you have paid the last penny.

²⁷You have heard that it was said: *Do not commit adultery.* ²⁸But I tell you this: anyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent, has already

committed adultery with her in his heart.

²⁹So, if your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and throw it away! It is much better for you to lose a part of your body, than to have your whole body thrown into hell. ³⁰If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away! It is better for you to lose a part of your body, than to have your whole body thrown into hell.

• ³¹It was also said: *Anyone who divorces his wife, must give her a written notice of divorce.* ³²But what I tell you is this: if a man divorces his wife, except in the case of unlawful union, he causes her to commit adultery.

18:8-9;
Lk 17:1

Mk 9:43

Dt 24:1;
Mal 2:
14-16;
Mk 10:4

19:9;
Mk 10:
11-12;
Lk 16:18;
1Co
7:10-11

Lk 12:
58-59

20:14

how imperfect are the human criteria of morality. Therefore, let us not call sin only that which is seen or condemned as such by people. Indeed my sins are all the bad thoughts that I keep inside and that produce evil fruits when the opportunity comes. See also Matthew 12:34.

Until you have paid the last penny (v. 26). Repairing the damage means more than just returning the money I have illegally taken. I must also question why I am so weak that I am carried away by any desire.

Often we recognize how lukewarm our love for God is and how short-lived our perseverance in doing good. This is the result of many years of wrongdoing. We are able to forget about the wrong we have done, but we fail to repair the damage caused to our whole person. Although we may feel happy and unconcerned, we carry a load within ourselves from the unsettled debts and accounts.

If we are not purified during this life, we will be during or after our death. The Church calls this painful purification "purgatory." The transformation that should take place in us (1 Cor 15:51) is impossible unless the Spirit has completely burned out (Mt 3:11) our roots of evil.

• ²⁷. *Do not commit adultery.* For many, conjugal fidelity is a burdensome and old-fashioned law, which they merely admire in others. Jesus replaces fidelity among the laws of the interior world, where God, the Faithful One is to reign.

If your right eye... (v. 29). Here we must underline the opposition between: *your hand, your eye, and: you.* In another place Jesus will say that we must be able to give up everything, but here he dares to add: even your physical integrity.

All of us are looking for happiness, promotion

and security, but what are those criteria worth? All strive to live fully their life and enjoy without limits their own health and body, but here Jesus tells us that true life is elsewhere and that true self creates itself while accepting mutilations of the present life.

Is it only a matter of sacrificing what could drag us to "major fault and sin"? The word of Jesus goes far beyond. As much as we complain about the misery and meaninglessness of our life, we conserve it at any cost with the hope of still enjoying this world. What if real sin were to avoid any risk and self-sacrifice when God is calling?

Jesus speaks of a *hell of fire*, because there is nothing worse than this final result: a lost life that has not been fruitful, and the abortion of our eternal self.

• ³¹. *Anyone who divorces his wife...* See commentaries on Mark 10:1; Matthew 19:3.

Here this saying of Jesus is given as an example of the courageous decisions that a Christian may be called upon to make. God sometimes asks for heroic sacrifices. The one who does not choose the difficult way necessarily loses something of the Gospel.

Except in the case of unlawful union (v. 32). These words are not found in the other quotations of this saying of Jesus. Why did Matthew put them? In fact there are two possible interpretations.

First, it can be understood that one spouse has an extra licentious relationship, and then the other is allowed to separate.

Second, it can be understood that the one entering the Church through baptism is living with an unlawful union, and then this marriage or concubinage does not tie him.

And the man who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

Oaths

20:7; Lev 19:12; Dt 23:22; Mt 23:16
 Is 66:1; Mt 23:22; Jas 5:12
 Ps 48:3
 2Col 1:17-19

• ³³You have also heard that people were told in the past: *Do not break your oath; an oath sworn to the Lord must be kept.* ³⁴But I tell you this: do not take oaths. Do not swear by the heavens, for they are God's throne; ³⁵nor by the earth, because it is his footstool; nor by Jerusalem, because it is the city of the great king. ³⁶Do not even swear by your head, because you cannot make a single hair white or black. ³⁷Let your 'Yes' mean 'Yes' and your 'No' mean 'No.' Anything else you say comes from the evil one.

• 33. *Do not take oaths* (v. 34). This sentence must not be understood: "You shall never take an oath", but: "In a general way, don't take oaths."

Many invoke the name of God on any occasion. Is it because they truly know him and have him in mind? If we use his name casually, it is because we do not experience the weight of his presence. What a lack of respect to call on God to testify to our sincerity when we do not even recognize all that is false and unclean within us!

Anything else you say comes from the devil (v. 37), and even the preoccupation of defending and justifying oneself in the eyes of others. See also Matthew 23:16; James 5:12.

• 38. *An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.* We read this in the Scriptures because in the world of that time it was a wholesome maxim (Dt 19:18-21). It claimed to put a limit to the thirst for vengeance and reminded judges and the community itself of the duty to defend its members against those who abuse the weak.

Do not oppose evil with evil. Jesus asks us to approach an adversary in the same way as this adversary may be approaching us: who is the wicked one?

Offer the other cheek (v. 39): be the first to be free of the web of violence. As in judo, surprise the other by making the very move he was not expecting: he may then see that he was mistaken. Jesus has no doubt that this renunciation of violence and of our own interests obliges the Father to intervene and come to our aid. Do not forget that Jesus wants us to "see God" at work in our lives.

If someone forces you to go one mile (v. 41). Jesus speaks to farmers who are humiliated and oppressed by foreign armies. Many times they

Love of enemies

(Lk 6:29)

21:24; Lev 24:20; Dt 19:21
 Lk 6:29; Jn 18:22; 1Col 6:7
 Lk 6:31

• ³⁸You have heard, that it was said: *An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.* ³⁹But I tell you this: do not oppose evil with evil; if someone slaps you on your right cheek, turn and offer the other. ⁴⁰If someone sues you in court for your shirt, give him your coat as well. ⁴¹If someone forces you to go one mile, go two miles with him. ⁴²Give when asked, and do not turn your back on anyone who wants to borrow from you.

Lev 19:18
 Lk 6: 27-36; Job 31:29; Acts 7:60; Rom 12:20; Pro 25:21; 23:4

• ⁴³You have heard, that it was said: *Love your neighbor and do not do good to your enemy.* ⁴⁴But this I

are obliged to carry the burden of the soldiers. Their usual reaction is resigned submission concealing hatred and desire for revenge. Would they be capable of responding to such a counsel? It is certain that had they practiced it, they might have saved their nation from destruction.

• 43. *Love your neighbor.* Here we come to the last of the opposites between the Old Law and the New. The Old Testament spoke of loving a neighbor and this was a matter of solidarity among the members of the people of God. With the Gospel the word "love" is not only given a wider dimension: it introduces us into a world totally different. Solidarity within the group is supported by an instinct inscribed in nature. This love however does not cross the frontiers that separate social groups; these only exist and find their identity in opposing others.

Do not do good to your enemy: The text is not found in the Scriptures as it stands but its equivalent is in several places (Dt 7:2). Referring to enemies of the nation rather than to personal enemies, we are asked to be wary of them, not to help them and even to exterminate them, rather than share their errors. If in many countries today it is understood that there is no frontier for love, it must be recognized that this ideal is a fruit of the Gospel: Jesus has enlightened our minds by asking us to model the love of our neighbor on the universal love of God the Father. We have only to open a newspaper to see that this love of neighbor, whatever it be, and even if it comes from a social, national or religious group, in enmity with ours, remains incomprehensible to the majority, even in Christian countries. When we realize that there is a place for everyone in the present world and that God directs everything for the benefit of all, we

tell you: love your enemies; and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵so that you may be children of your Father in Heaven. For he makes his sun rise on both the wicked and the good; and he gives rain to both the just and the unjust.

⁴⁶If you love those who love you, what is special about that? Do not even tax collectors do as much?

⁴⁷And if you are friendly only to your friends, what is so exceptional about that? Do not even the pagans do as much? ⁴⁸As for you, be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Doing good for God alone

6 • ¹Be careful not to make a show of your good deeds before people. If you do so, you do not gain anything from your Father in heaven.

²When you give something to the poor, do not have it trumpeted before you, as do those who want to be noticed in

the synagogues and in the streets, in order to be praised by people. I assure you, they have their reward.

³If you give something to the poor, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴so that your gift remains really secret. Your Father, who sees what is kept secret, will reward you.

⁵When you pray, do not be like those who want to be noticed. They love to stand and pray in the synagogues or on street corners, in order to be seen by everyone. I assure you, they have their reward. ⁶When you pray, go into your room, close the door, and pray to your Father who is with you in secret; and your Father who sees what is kept secret will reward you.

• **Our Father...**

(Lk 11:1; Mk 11:25)

⁷When you pray, do not use a lot of words, as the pagans do; for they

see things as God does and are *perfect as the Father is perfect*.

Love your enemies (v. 44): Mark 12:31; Luke 10:27; Romans 13:9; Galatians 5:14; Romans 12:20; Luke 23:34; Acts 7:60; Romans 12:14; Ephesians 5:1.

• **6.1** After the six opposites (“but I say to you”), Matthew gives us three examples of another secret without which we shall not see God: work for him alone without wanting anyone to know, and in such a way that we ourselves will have immediately forgotten what we have done.

Those who make a show. The expression appears three times with reference to good deeds, prayer and fasting. Jesus uses a word often translated as “being hypocrites,” which refers in a general way to those who make a show, or who are shallow, and make fun of the things of God.

It is perhaps difficult not to want to be seen by others, but it is far more difficult to do good without looking at oneself and being satisfied because: “I am good.” It is, nevertheless, the way of enabling us to enter into the secrets of God.

• **7.** The value of prayer does not lie in the quantity of words and the mere repetition of formulas, as if accomplishing a task. The value of prayer lies chiefly in our inner attitude of faith and love of God. We should try to lift our mind

and heart to God as a Father and a friend, a God who loves us and is always waiting for us to share a silent moment with him. To pray is not to talk much, but to surrender our lives into God’s loving hands.

Jesus gives the *Our Father* to his disciples as the perfect prayer coming from the heart of God’s children, expressing as it does, what they should ask and the order in which the requests should be made. Actually we have two texts of the *Our Father*; Luke’s text is shorter (11:1). Many hold that Matthew gives a slightly enlarged formula and better composed which was generally used in the first Christian generation, but this is not at all certain. In Matthew’s text there are twelve verses expressing seven petitions: two perfect numbers. Three (God’s number) that refers to God, four (earth’s number) that refers to our needs. In the language spoken by Jesus, the key word is *come*: *Your kingdom come* (v. 10).

The contemporaries of Jesus used the word Heaven to signify God, because they would not pronounce his name. Jesus says likewise: *Father in Heaven*, meaning: God the Father.

For us the limitless sky by day and by night is the image of a wonderful world where God is everything. In calling on our Father in Heaven, we do not mean that he is far or near, above or below or inside. We only intend to raise our spirits to Him. We recognize that our words

Lev 19:2;
Dt 18:13;
1P 1:16;
Jas 1:4

23:5;
Lk 16:
14-15;
Jn 5:44

Am 4:5

Ps 139:2-3

6:16

2K 4:33;
Dn 6:11

believe that, the more they say, the more chance they have of being heard. ⁸Do not be like them. Your Father knows what you need, even before you ask him.

⁹This, then, is how you should pray:

Our Father in heaven,
holy be your name,

¹⁰your kingdom, come,
your will, be done
on earth, as in heaven.

¹¹Give us today, our daily bread.
¹²Forgive us our debts,
as we forgive those who are in debt
to us.

¹³Do not bring us to the test,
but deliver us from the evil one.

¹⁴If you forgive others their wrongdoings, your Father in heaven will also forgive yours. ¹⁵If you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive you.

Pro 30:8

18:21;
18:35;
26:41;
Jn 17:15Mk
11:25;
Eph4:32;
Col3:13;
Sir
28:1-56:32;
Lk 12:30Lk
11:1-4;
Ezk
36:23;
Jn 17:6

26:39

are not worthy, that our concerns are selfish and limited, when we compare them with the breadth of His thoughts and the generosity of His love. That we can address him and call him Father is not something natural, but a very special privilege. "My Father," says Jesus; also: "Your Father." For he is the only one, and we are adopted children, by the mercy of God who allowed us to be *born again* (Jn 3:1ff).

Scripture speaks of God, and also of the *Name* of God. All of creation is but a manifestation of God, and he fills this universe. He is not contained in it, nor is he in a determined place. Because of this, we speak of his *Name* as a way of designating his active presence, radiance, and splendor which covers everything. It is rather like acknowledging that there is a distance between what we know of him and what he is.

Holy be your name (v. 9). May your Name be known and proclaimed Holy! May your splendor and generosity be seen in those who become your children. May your perfection be recognized through their good works (5:16). May your presence and your riches be welcomed by those who keep your word, according to John 14:23. The Father only wants to pour out his holiness and happiness on the children he has chosen and loved. He wants to seal us with his Name so that, day and night, we will be united with him, like the Father and the Son are united by the Holy Spirit.

Your kingdom come (v. 10). With the coming of Jesus, that kingdom has come near to us. God reigns in every place where people have known him through the teaching of Jesus. There he can act without danger of being misinterpreted for he is now known for what he is. The believers now perceive him, not as a God who imposes obligations, nor as a Savior more powerful than the evil ones, but they recognize him in the gift of his Son, in the humiliation of the Son and in their mutual love. From this discovery, love and mercy pour forth and, in time, we will see on earth some fruits of this kingdom. The reconciled children of God are a leavening element in society, and the whole of humanity with its projects, labor, economic and political plans moves towards a common goal: everyone and everything must return to the Father.

Whether we are good, bad or indifferent, the kingdom of God will come, with or without our help, because it is actually already here.

Your will be done (v. 10). These are the words of Jesus in Gethsemane (Mt 26:39). This prayer condemns many of our prayers through which we want to force God to act. Some people consider themselves to have faith because they always wait for God to solve their problems. The children of God instead lift up their spirit to him so that God's will may be, at last, their own will.

On earth as in heaven (v. 10). This applies to the previous three petitions. It reminds us that everything in this world that is created and subject to time depends on another, uncreated world, where time does not exist and which is nothing less than the mystery of God. There the Father, source of the divine being, enjoys his infinite perfection in the mutual gift of the divine persons. In him there is neither sadness nor resentment and before him are the elect: he sees them as they will be after the resurrection. He sees the universe unified in Christ and his will fulfilled and glorified by all. We, who live in time, are in anguish because of an imperfect situation, in a world in labor where evil appears to triumph. We pray that everything may come about according to the initial plan of God, as it truly will.

We ask the Father for *the bread* he has promised to those who listen to his word. Modern people believe that their material welfare depends only on their own effort. Scripture, however, says that it depends on both God and us. Alone we can bring some economic miracles about for a while, but we may waste the accumulated riches. Only by listening to the word of God (Dt 8:3) will people have bread and be able to distribute it. A person who expects from God, not *his* or *her* bread but *our bread*, will strive to find work, to work in useful ways, and to promote justice where he is working.

What should we say? The bread "we need" or our "daily" bread or sustenance? The original text uses a difficult word that has different meanings. Many have understood that the children of God feel the need of much more than what is asked for the body and that the Eucharist was

Is 58:5 • ¹⁶When you fast, do not put on a miserable face, as do the hypocrites. They put on a gloomy face, so that people can see they are fasting. I tell you this: they have been paid in full already. ¹⁷When you fast, wash your face and make yourself look cheerful, ¹⁸because you are not fasting for appearances or for people, but for your Father, who sees beyond appearances. And your Father, who sees what is kept secret, will reward you.

(Lk 11:34; 12:13)

• ¹⁹Do not store up treasures for yourself here, on earth, where moth and rust destroy it; and where thieves can steal it. ²⁰Store up treasures for yourself with God, where no moth or rust can destroy it, nor thief come and steal it.

²¹For where your treasures is, there, also, will your heart be.

• ²²The lamp of the body is the eye; if your eyes are sound, your whole

Lk 12:
33-34;
Jas
5:2-3;
Sir
29:11

19:21;
Col 3:1

Pro
20:27;
Lk 11:
34-35;
Mt 5:15

already meant as it is in the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves.

The Our Father speaks of *debts* that we must forgive (v. 12). In verse 14, we read *wrongs*. Jesus considers debts and wrongs as the same thing. When we forgive someone who asks for forgiveness, we are not doing that person a favor, nor do we deserve any credit for doing it; we actually free ourselves from some rancor or hatred that is poisoning us. Inasmuch as we stick to our rights, we hold fast to this world. God wants to forgive us and bring us closer to him, but how can he if we remain anchored to the things of this world?

Jesus speaks to the poor who are accustomed to being burdened with debts, which many times they cannot settle. They are obliged to live together with neighbors they have not chosen. All this increases the occasions for offending one another. Many people today live very independent lives and hold as an ideal not to owe anything to anyone. This independence can make it harder for us to understand God's mercy towards us, poor as we really are before God.

Do not bring us to the test (v. 13). Thus speak those who know their weaknesses and little faith.

We will be more prudent if we know that the enemy is not simply *evil*, but *the evil one*. Somebody stronger than ourselves is watching to deceive us, to make us lose faith and fall, as soon as we feel sure of ourselves and abandon the means given by Jesus for perseverance in the faith and in the Church.

See another shorter text in Luke 11:1.

• 16. Here Jesus neither justifies nor condemns fasting. He himself fasted: 4:2; 9:15; 17:21. Fasting is unworthy when done to obtain human approval rather than God's.

All religions know fasting. It is a way of calling upon God, especially when great misfortunes come upon us (Jl 2:12); it befits people who feel guilty, and want to move to compassion the One who forgives them (Jon 3:5). It also teaches self-control and integrates our energies in preparation for divine communication (Ex 34:28).

Scripture puts limited emphasis on fasting. The prophets asserted that fasting without justice towards the neighbor is of no use: Isaiah 58; Zechariah 7:4.

From the time of Mahatma Gandhi, persons and groups have also used fasting as a means of social pressure, as a political weapon to call attention to some demands. This is all right, although it is different from the religious fast of which Jesus speaks. The difference is that a religious fast is addressed to God, not to public opinion (Mt 6:18), and it entails an inner disposition of conversion and sorrow for personal sin on the part of the fasting person.

• 19. *Do not store up treasures*. The Gospel says: "Do not treasure treasures," treasures meaning those savings held in reserve rather than something that is loved. For centuries the majority of human beings rarely had personal reserves: the family or the clan took charge of the reserve in times of adversity. Today each one is in charge of his own resources; it is perhaps better, but how do we escape the obsession of a secure future? Once more Jesus invites us to believe in the Providence of the Father: if we have his interests at heart, he will look after ours.

Store up treasures for yourself with God (v. 20). The Gospel says "in Heaven," and we know that Heaven is one of the names of God.

There also will your heart be (v. 21). (In the Jewish culture the heart is where judgments and decisions are made). I do not possess things but they possess me and by degrees impose on me a certain life-style.

There also will your heart be. It is this certitude that motivates any effort made towards "evangelical poverty." It is a question of being as free as possible for action and for love. Jesus calls us to disinterested action and at the same time warns us against inordinate attachment to persons, to ideas and possessions: we are to be ready for anything but must never get attached to the fruits of action.

• 22. Here eye is the conscience. To be

body will be full of light. ²³If your eyes are diseased, your whole body will be full of darkness. If, then, the light in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

Set your heart on the kingdom

(Lk 12:23; 16:13)

• ²⁴No one can serve two masters; for he will either hate one and love the other; or he will be loyal to the first and look down on the second. You cannot, at the same time, serve God and money.

²⁵Therefore, I tell you, not to be worried about food and drink for yourself, or about clothes for your body. Is not life more important than food; and is not the body more important than clothes? ²⁶Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow, they do not harvest, and do not store food in barns; and yet, your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not less worthy than they are?

²⁷Can any of you add a day to your life by worrying about it? ²⁸Why are you so worried about your clothes? Look at how the flowers in the fields

bright-eyed signifies generosity, to be dark-eyed signifies meanness. Jesus emphasizes what he has just said: a misinformed conscience leads us astray and turns us in on ourselves.

• 24. *No one can serve two masters.* This opening line helps us understand what follows, that Jesus wants us to be free, not of concerns but of all worries, in order to serve God.

Scripture had already taught that we must choose between God and false gods. Jesus affirms that money is a false god, because it offers happiness and security for the future, but robs us of our only riches, that is, the present time. Caught up in making money, we are unable to live truly and freely; we neglect our personal growth and family life, keep silent before evil and lie. We ignore our neighbor and grovel before the powerful.

Why are you so worried? (v. 28). After worrying much because we do not have money, or because we are having a hard time, or because our work is being delayed, we are ashamed at meeting simple persons who share the little they possess with others poorer than they, without feeling sad or thinking they have done something

grow. They do not toil or spin. ²⁹But I tell you, that not even Solomon, in all his glory, was clothed like one of these. ³⁰If God so clothes the grass in the field, which blooms today and is to be burned in an oven tomorrow, how much more will he clothe you? What little faith you have!

³¹Do not worry, and say: What are we going to eat? What are we going to drink? or: What shall we wear?

³²The pagans busy themselves with such things; but your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. ³³Set your heart, first, on the kingdom and righteousness of God; and all these things will also be given to you. ³⁴Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Don't be a judge

(Lk 6:37; 11:9; 6:31; 13:23)

7 • ¹Do not judge; and you will not be judged. ²In the same way you judge others, you will be judged; and the measure you use for others will be used for you. ³Why do you look at the

great. Liberation is the work of God throughout history, and we, shall we have enough faith to free ourselves from so many worries?

The comparison with the flowers and the birds does not mean that we can fold our arms and be idle, because when God gave us arms and brains, it was for us to use them. Rather Jesus teaches that, if God takes care of and beautifies the smallest of creatures, how much more will he care for us that our lives may be beautiful and perfect.

Set your heart first on the kingdom (v. 33). It is a matter of concrete realities: the *kingdom* means the transparency of God in our life; *his justice* is a "putting in order" under his attention of all that we are and all that we do. A risk to run for a young person, or a couple: to begin to think of the future, family and apostolic activity according to the criteria of the Gospel, no longer under pressure of Malthusian fear or the race to maintain their life-style.

• 7.1 No doubt when Jesus spoke these words it was with the same meaning as in 5:43. Usually those who consider themselves as good, or belonging to the group of the converted,

Lk 16:13; Ps62:11

Lk 12:22-31

10:31

1K 10

6:7; Lk 12:30

Is 51:1; Wis 1:1

16:4

Lk 6:37-42; 1Col 4:5

Mk 4:24; Jn 8:7

Rom 2:1; 14:4

speck in your brother's eye, and not see the plank in your own eye? ⁴How can you say to your brother, 'Come, let me take the speck from your eye,' as long as that plank is in your own? ⁵Hypocrite, remove the plank out of your own eye; then, you will see clearly, to remove the speck out of your brother's eye.

• ⁶Do not give what is holy to the dogs, or throw your pearls before pigs. They might trample on them, and then turn on you and tear you to pieces.

• ⁷Ask, and you will receive; seek, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened. ⁸For everyone who asks, receives; whoever seeks, finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. ⁹Would any of you give a stone to your son, when he asks for bread? ¹⁰Or give him a snake, when he asks for a fish? ¹¹However bad you may be, you know how to give good

things to your children. How much more, then, will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!

¹²So, do to others whatever you would that others do to you: there, you have the law and the prophets.

• ¹³Enter through the narrow gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the road, that leads to destruction, and many go that way. ¹⁴How narrow is the gate that leads to life; and how rough, the road; few there are, who find it.

The tree is known by its fruits
(Lk 6:43)

• ¹⁵Beware of false prophets: they come to you in sheep's clothing; but inside, they are voracious wolves. ¹⁶You will recognize them by their fruits. Do you ever pick grapes from thorn bushes; or figs, from thistles?

¹⁷A good tree always produces good fruit. A rotten tree produces bad

1Col
5:12;
Jas 4:11

Lk 11:9;
Mt 18:19

Mk
11:24;
Jn 14:14

15:7;
16:23;
Jas 1:5;
1Jn 3:22;
5:14

Lk 6:31;
Jas 1:17;
Rom
13:8

Lk 13:24

Acts
14:22

Ezk
22:28;
2P 2:1;
Lk 6:26;
Gal 1:8

Lk 6:
43-44;
Mt 12:33;
Mk 9:40;
Lk 9:50;
Mt 10:16;
Jn 10:12;
Acts
20:29

Sir 27:6;
Jas 3:12

judge and criticize those of a different standing. It is a form of pride that spiritual authors call the "fault of beginners." So strongly inscribed is it in human nature that many among the "just" of the Scriptures have expressed their disapproval of the "sinner" who did not observe the Law of God. Contrariwise the new law tells us not to consider ourselves superior or be judges of those who take a different road, or who are led by God to do so. *Do not judge.* We must exercise good judgment in order to distinguish between the good and evil around us. Though it is a factor of success never to displease anyone, we must have the courage to tell others the wrong that they do. Here "to judge" means to condemn.

When we look at our own lives, we realize that those who helped us grow were those who supported and understood us, not those who judged and condemned us.

Do not judge. See Romans 2:1; 14:4; 1Corinthians 5:12; James 4:11.

• 6. *Do not give what is holy to the dogs, or throw your pearls before pigs.* Jesus addressed this warning to his followers living in a hostile world. They should not tell everything to everyone. God has given each of us wonderful gifts: we must not share them with everyone at once, believing that it will bring them to faith.

• 7. See commentary on Luke 11:9; Mark 11:24; John 14:13; 15:7; James 1:5.

• 13. *Enter through the narrow gate.* Maybe someone was asking Jesus: "Who, then, can be saved?" (Mt 19:25). In no instance did Jesus say whether those who would share in eternal life would be many or few. He did say many times that very few would be chosen from among the many called. That means that among the many people privileged to meet him, very few would experience the Gospel's riches and bring forth fruit in themselves and for others. The chosen or approved are those who persevere and strive for perfect freedom.

For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many go that way. They stray from leading a life in which Jesus is everything for them. They waste the gifts of God entrusted to them and apparently become useless for the kingdom. Yet, even so, they are not deprived of God's mercy.

• 15. Most probably Matthew gives us these words of Jesus for the benefit of certain believers in the early Church who considered themselves as charismatic prophets. They may well have received gifts of the Spirit but have degenerated since then. In a wider sense Jesus' words address all who encourage division, untruth and

fruit. ¹⁸A good tree cannot produce bad fruit; and a rotten tree cannot bear good fruit. ¹⁹Any tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰So then, you will know them by their fruit.

Wise and foolish builders

(Lk 6:46; 13:26; Mk 1:22)

• ²¹Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord! Lord!’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my heavenly Father. ²²Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not speak in your name? Did we not cast out devils and perform many miracles in your name?’ ²³Then I will tell them openly, ‘I have never known you; *away from me, you evil people!*’

²⁴“Therefore, anyone who hears these words of mine, and acts according to them, is like a wise man, who built his house on rock. ²⁵The rain poured down, the rivers flooded, and

the wind blew and struck that house. But it did not collapse, because it was built on rock. ²⁶But anyone who hears these words of mine, and does not act accordingly, is like a fool who built his house on sand. ²⁷The rain poured, the rivers flooded, and the wind blew and struck that house; it collapsed, and what a terrible collapse that was!”

• ²⁸When Jesus had finished this discourse, the crowds were struck by the way he taught, ²⁹because he taught with authority, unlike their teachers of the law.

Cure of a leper

(Mk 1:40; Lk 5:12)

8 • ¹When Jesus came down from the mountain, large crowds followed him.

²Then a leper came forward. He knelt before him and said, “Sir, if you want to, you can make me clean.” ³Jesus stretched out his hand, touched

violence, even when they pretend to serve a just cause.

Prophets wore a sheepskin by way of a cloak: a wolf could hide in one. The world has always had a number of “false prophets,” usually prophets of easy life, and if the word of God condemns them, many would say that their words have been misinterpreted. It would be well however to ask ourselves why our holy and sacred liberalism tends to sow death in all domains and smotherers in so many the ability to believe and hope.

Do you ever pick grapes from thorn bushes? (v. 16) Jesus invites us to look at the facts before coming to conclusions. We find it hard to carefully observe the reality in which we live. We prefer to discuss and debate about ideas rather than to analyze particular situations. Jesus, accustomed to manual labor, distrusts ideas and theories.

• ²¹. *Many will say to me on that day.* Matthew probably quotes this sentence pointing out to the charismatic prophets who disturb his communities by not obeying precepts that are addressed to everyone.

Whether we teach or work miracles, these abilities and ministries given us for the good of the community do not assure us that we are in the grace of God. True faith works through love (Gal 5:6) and moves us to fulfill all the law: James 2:8.

Anyone who hears these words of mine (v. 24). Jesus means those who listen to his words and are converted: they believe themselves already saved. If they do not use their initial enthusiasm to build their lives on solid foundations, such as scriptural meditation, generosity, resistance to evil inclinations, sharing in the Christian community—then everything will tumble down later.

• ²⁸. With this paragraph Matthew closes a new discourse wherein he gathers words of Jesus that might serve as a “call to all people of good will.” A new discourse will begin in Chapter 10.

• **8.1** In this new section of his Gospel (8:1–9:35) Matthew has placed a collection of miracles. For him, these miracles are not only extraordinary events: they contain lessons on what a disciple of Jesus is. To begin with: the cure of a leper; on the part of Jesus this is an act of courage, and an act that openly violates the law of purity (see Mk 1:40).

Then, the faith of the centurion, a Roman officer (v. 5). Jesus speaks of the Jews who will be excluded from the kingdom of God. That may also be the case of the new heirs of the kingdom who are the Christians of the West.

3:10;
Lk 3:9;
13:7;
Jn 15:6

12:33

Lk 6:46;
Rom
2:13;
Jas 1:22;
1Jn 1:7

Jer
14:14;
27:15;
Mk 9:38

Ps 6:9;
Mt 10:33;
2Tim
2:12;
Mt 13:41;
25:41

Lk 6:
47-49;
Jas 1:22

Ezk 13:
10-14

Mk 1:
21-22;
Lk 4:
31-32

Mk 1:
40-45;
Lk 5:12-
16;
Mk 1:35;
Lk 4:42

him, and said, "I want to, be clean again." At that very moment, the man was cleansed from his leprosy. ⁴Then Jesus said to him, "See that you do not tell anyone; but go to the priest, have yourself declared clean, and offer the gift that Moses commanded as evidence for them."

Lev 14: 2-32; Mt 9:30; 12:16; Mk 7:38; Lk 17:14

The faith of the centurion
(Lk 7:1; Jn 4:46)

• ⁵When Jesus entered Capernaum, an army captain approached him, to ask his help, ⁶"Sir, my servant lies sick at home. He is paralyzed and suffers terribly." ⁷Jesus said to him, "I will come and heal him."

Lk 7: 1-10; Jn 4: 46-53

⁸The captain answered, "I am not worthy to have you under my roof. Just give an order and my boy will be healed. ⁹For I myself, a junior officer, give orders to my soldiers. And if I say to one, 'Go!' he goes; and if I say to another, 'Come!' he comes; and if I say to my servant, 'Do this!' he does it."

Lk 5:8

¹⁰When Jesus heard this, he was astonished; and said to those who were following him, "I tell you, I have not found such faith in Israel. ¹¹I say to you, many will come from east and west and sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob at the feast in the kingdom of heaven; ¹²but the heirs of the kingdom will be thrown out into extreme darkness; there, they will wail and grind their teeth."

Lk 13: 28-29; Mt 25:10; 19:30; Mk 10:31

Lk 13:23

• 5. See commentary on Luke 7:1.

The heirs of the kingdom (v. 12). These words are intended to express the Jewish term used by Jesus: the sons of the kingdom, that is: those who belong, or: those who side with, are associated with the kingdom. Because all of Jewish life was aimed at inheriting the kingdom promised to them.

Among the Jewish people, at that time, religion was taught by the religious community. There was no problem of personal conversion; the children of Jewish families became Jewish believers. The Jewish teachers did not belittle faith, but in fact they always spoke about practices and commitment.

¹³Then Jesus said to the captain, "Go home now. As you believed, so let it be." And at that moment, his servant was healed.

9:29; 15:28

¹⁴Jesus went to Peter's house and found Peter's mother-in-law in bed with fever. ¹⁵He took her by the hand and the fever left her; she got up and began to wait on him.

Mk 1: 29-31; Lk 4: 38-39

Mk 9:27; Acts 3:7

¹⁶Toward evening, they brought to Jesus many people possessed by evil spirits; and with a word, he drove out the spirits. He also healed all who were sick. ¹⁷In this way, what was said by the prophet Isaiah was fulfilled: *He bore our infirmities and took on himself our diseases.*

Mk 1: 32-34; Lk 4: 40-41; Mk 3:10

Is 53:4; Jn 1:29

¹⁸When Jesus saw the crowd pressing around him, he gave orders to cross to the other side of the lake. ¹⁹A teacher of the law approached him; and said, "Master, I will follow you wherever you go." ²⁰Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head."

Mk 4:35; Lk 8:22

Lk 9: 57-60

2Col 8:9

²¹Another disciple said to him, "Lord, let me go and bury my father first." ²²But Jesus said to him, "Follow me, and let the dead bury their dead."

1K 19:20

Jesus calms the storm
(Mk 4:35; Lk 8:22)

²³Jesus got into the boat and his disciples followed him. ²⁴Without warning,

Mk 4: 36-41; Lk 8: 23-25

Jesus does not belittle the practices, but it is faith that he *admires* and praises; see Matthew 9:2; 9:22; 9:28.

Many will come (v. 11). Likewise for us, practices and religious habits will not introduce us to the kingdom. We must discover the loving presence of the Father while experiencing the power of Jesus' word and controversial deeds.

They will be thrown out into extreme darkness (v. 12). Let us not immediately think of hell: Jesus is using the style of the prophets. Staying with the appearance of a learned religion, one goes everywhere except where life is.

a fierce storm burst upon the lake, with waves sweeping the boat. But Jesus was asleep.

²⁵The disciples woke him up and cried, "Lord save us! We are lost!"

²⁶But Jesus answered, "Why are you so afraid, you of little faith?" Then he stood up and rebuked the wind and sea; and it became completely calm.

²⁷The disciples were astonished. They said, "What kind of man is he? Even the winds and the sea obey him."

The demoniacs and the pigs

(Mk 5:1; Lk 8:26)

Mk 5:
1-20;
Lk 8:
26-39

²⁸When Jesus reached Gadara, on the other side, he was met by two men, possessed by devils, who came out from the tombs. They were so fierce that no one dared to pass that way. ²⁹They cried out, "Son of God, leave us alone! Have you come here to torment us before the time?"

³⁰Some distance away there was a large herd of pigs feeding. ³¹So the demons begged him, "If you drive us out, send us into that herd of pigs."

Lk 4:34;
Acts
16:17

³²Jesus ordered them, "Go!" So the demons left the men and went into the pigs. The whole herd rushed down the cliff into the lake and was drowned.

³³The men in charge of the pigs ran off to the town, where they told the whole story; and also what had happened to the men possessed with the demons. ³⁴The whole town went out to meet Jesus; and when they saw him, they begged him to leave their region.

• **9.1** See commentary on Mark 2:1; Luke 5:17.

They praised God for giving such power to human beings (v. 8). This formula is rather clumsy. The crowd is astonished to see how God's saving power is manifest among people, and through a man, Jesus. Matthew has no wish to separate the Church from Christ: every Christian community received the gifts of God for healing and reconciliation. It is known that the ministers of the Church have special

Jesus cures a paralytic

(Mk 2:1; Lk 5:17)

9 • ¹Jesus got back into the boat, crossed the lake again, and came to his hometown. ²Here, they brought to him a paralyzed man, lying on a bed. Jesus saw their faith and said to the paralytic, "Courage, my son! Your sins are forgiven."

Mk 2:
1-12;
Lk 5:
17-26

8:6;
Acts
9:33;
Lk 7:48

³Some teachers of the law said within themselves, "This man insults God." ⁴Jesus was aware of what they were thinking; and said, "Why have you such evil thoughts? ⁵Which is easier to say: 'Your sins are forgiven' or 'Stand up and walk'?" ⁶But that you may know, that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins," he said to the paralyzed man, "Stand up! Take your stretcher and go home!" ⁷The man got up, and went home.

Jn 10:33

Dn 7:10;
Jn 5:27

⁸When the crowds saw this, they were filled with awe, and praised God for giving such power to human beings.

Acts
9:35

Jesus calls Matthew

(Mk 2:13; Lk 5:27)

• ⁹As Jesus moved on from there, he saw a man named Matthew, at his seat in the custom-house; and he said to him, "Follow me!" And Matthew got up and followed him. ¹⁰Now it happened, while Jesus was at table in Matthew's house, many tax collectors and sinners joined Jesus and his disciples. ¹¹When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why is it,

Mk 2:
13-17;
Lk 5:
27-32;
Mt 18:12

11:19;
Lk 7:34;
15:1;
19:7

authority to pardon, but the grace of God also flows in many other very different channels. (1 Cor 5:3-5; 2 Cor 2:5-11). When we establish relations of mercy and trust, and accept fraternal correction humbly, when there is mutual forgiveness between spouses, Christ is the one who forgives and pardons, and what is forgiven among us *on earth*, is forgiven *in heaven* (Mt 18:18).

• **9.** See commentary on Mark 2:13.

that your master eats with sinners and tax collectors?”

¹²When Jesus heard this, he said, “Healthy people do not need a doctor, but sick people do. ¹³Go, and find out what this means: *What I want is mercy, not sacrifice.* I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”

¹⁴Then the disciples of John came to him with the question, “How is it, that we and the Pharisees fast on many occasions, but not your disciples?”

¹⁵Jesus answered them, “How can you expect wedding guests to mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The time will come, when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then, they will fast.

¹⁶No one patches an old coat with a piece of unshrunk cloth, for the patch will shrink and tear an even bigger hole in the coat. ¹⁷In the same way, you don’t put new wine into old wine skins. If you do, the wine skins will burst and the wine will be spilt. No, you put new wine into fresh skins; then both are preserved.”

A woman healed, a child raised to life
(Mk 5:21; Lk 8:40)

• ¹⁸While Jesus was speaking to them, an official of the synagogue came up to him, bowed before him and said, “My daughter has just died, but come and place your hands on her, and she will live.” ¹⁹Jesus stood up and followed him with his disciples.

²⁰Then a woman, who had suffered from a severe bleeding for twelve years, came up from behind and touched the edge of his cloak; ²¹for she thought, “If I only touch his cloak,

I will be healed.” ²²Jesus turned, saw her and said, “Courage, my daughter, your faith has saved you.” And from that moment, the woman was cured.

²³When Jesus arrived at the official’s house and saw the flute players and the excited crowd, he said, ²⁴“Get out of here! The girl is not dead. She is only sleeping!” And they laughed at him. ²⁵But once the crowd had been turned out, Jesus went in and took the girl by the hand, and she stood up. ²⁶The news of this spread through the whole area.

• ²⁷As Jesus moved on from there, two blind men followed him, shouting, “Son of David, help us!” ²⁸When he was about to enter the house, the blind men caught up with him; and Jesus said to them, “Do you believe that I am able to do what you want?” They answered, “Yes, sir!”

²⁹Then Jesus touched their eyes and said, “As you have believed, so let it be.” ³⁰And their eyes were opened. Then Jesus gave them a stern warning, “Be careful that no one knows about this.” ³¹But as soon as they went away, they spread the news about him through the whole area.

³²As they were going away, some people brought to Jesus a man who was dumb, because he was possessed by a demon. ³³When the demon was driven out, the dumb man began to speak. The crowds were astonished and said, “Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel.” ³⁴But the Pharisees said, “He drives away demons with the help of the prince of demons.”

• ³⁵Jesus went around all the towns

• 18. See commentary on Mark 5:21. *She touched the edge of his cloak* (v. 20). As a good Jew, Jesus had fringes on his cloak (Num 15:38; Mt 23:5).

• 27. *Two blind men followed him shouting.*

In what manner, if they were blind? Stumbling and being carried by others perhaps. When you sin, shout to the Lord and keep on looking for Christ.

• 35. With this paragraph that briefly summarizes the ministry of Jesus in Galilee, Matthew

1Tim 1:15

12:7; Hos 6:6

Mk 2: 18-22; Lk 5: 33-39; Mt 11:18; Lk 18:12

Rom 7:6; 2Col 5:17

Mk 5: 21-43; Lk 8: 40-56; Mt 8:3; Mk 6:5; Lk 13:13

Lev 15:25

Acts 19:12; 3:16

Jn 11:11

Mk 1:34

20: 29-34

20:34; 8:13; 5:28

Mk 7:36

12:22-24; Lk 11: 14-15; 12:10; 11:29

Mk 7: 32-37; 9:17; 2:12

Mk 3:22

Lk 10:1; Mt 4:23; 12:15; Lk 4:44; Mk 6:54; Lk 6:17

and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom; and he cured every sickness and disease.³⁶ When he saw the crowds, he was moved with pity; for they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.³⁷ Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is abundant, but the workers are only few.³⁸ Ask the master of the harvest to send workers to gather his harvest.”

Mk 6:34;
Mt 14:14;
15:32;
1K22:17

Lk 10:2;
Jn 4:
35-38

The Twelve apostles

(Mk 3:13; Lk 6:12)

Mk 3:
13-19;
Lk 6:
12-16;
Mk 1:34;
6:7;
Lk 9:1

10 • ¹ Jesus called his Twelve disciples to him, and gave them

authority over unclean spirits, to drive them out, and to heal every disease and sickness.

² These are the names of the Twelve apostles: first Simon, called Peter, and his brother Andrew; ³ James, the son of Zebedee, and his brother John; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew, the tax collector; James, the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; ⁴ Simon, the Canaanite, and Judas Iscariot, the man who would betray him.

Jn 1:35;
Acts
1:13

Jn 1:40;
1:43

26:25;
27:3;
Jn 6:84

Jesus sends out the first missionaries

(Lk 9:1; 10:1; Mk 6:7)

• ⁵ Jesus sent these Twelve on mission, with the instructions: “Do not

Mk 6:7;
Lk 9:1;
10:1;
9:53;
Jn 4:9;
Acts 8:5

intends to show that indeed the kingdom of God is there: evil has been given a fatal blow.

He was moved with pity (v. 16), because they were like sheep without a shepherd. See Numbers 27:17; Ezekiel 34:5; Zechariah 10:3; John 4:35; Mark 6:34; and Luke 10:2.

HEALINGS

God himself, in Jesus, had come down to cure humankind. Because this work would be very long and painful, it was necessary to provide some visible signs to help people believe in this almost imperceptible healing.

Jesus ought to heal sick persons and, even in our days, the Christian community should give signs of what they preach. They must cure today's world of its sicknesses. The gifts of healing are not limited to healing bodily ills and the devil is responsible for more than individual maladies.

People seek after those who can cure their illnesses, and so great crowds followed Jesus. For him, however, sickness as well as the exploitation of the human person, hunger and war, are only fruits and signs of a deeper illness attached to our heart, which is sin. Constant work and the unity of all people of goodwill are sufficient to remedy some of our misfortunes, but the only way to eradicate evil at its roots is to restore human persons to their dignity as children of God. This requires a personal transformation that comes from God sending us his Spirit.

Jesus asks each of us to serve humankind with our own talents. He needs also *workers for the harvest* of the kingdom, that is, to gather into the Church those who receive a call from God. “Pray,” says Jesus, “and you will perhaps hear God's call.”

Of course, each Christian community prays to God and the Spirit brings forth the charisms and ministers and pastors that are needed. Here

Jesus asks us to pray for workers in the mission field: they are and always will be too few, especially those who evangelize and build the Church among the poor.

• **10.1** Till then, Jesus had spoken only in the synagogues around Capernaum. Now he attracts fame and followers and begins to draw multitudes. In that moment he establishes the group of the Twelve. He needs them to prepare meetings, to spread his doctrine, to multiply the miraculous signs effected among the sick.

At the same time, Jesus is planning his Church and wants to give it a head: this will be the group of the apostles. They will be the witnesses of Jesus among people, so he teaches them a way of living a common life that will serve as a pattern for the Church.

These are the names of the Twelve (v. 2). The Jewish nation was integrated into twelve tribes. This is why Jesus calls Twelve apostles: he wants them to understand that they are the foundation of the new people God will form (Ps 102:19). See Luke 22:30; Revelation 21:14.

He called those he wanted (Mk 3:13). These, in turn, will call others. In the Church everyone can do “apostolic work,” but no one makes himself into an apostle, an official witness of Christ: one has to be called to this responsibility.

Regarding these *Twelve*, see commentary on Mark 3:16.

• 5. From the paragraph beginning in 9:35, Matthew was preparing this third “Jesus’ discourse” (see Introduction). Jesus has begun his mission, he forms and sends out missionaries.

Apostles mean “sent” and “mission” also means “being sent.” The Father has sent his Son to earth, and the Son, in turn, sends his apostles. The Father sends messengers of his

Jer 50:6; Mt 15:24
 visit pagan territory and do not enter a Samaritan town. ⁶Go, instead, to the lost sheep of the people of Israel.

4:17; Lk 10:9
 Is 55:1; Acts 8:20
 Lk 9:3; 10:4; Num 18:31; 1Col 9:14
 Mk 6: 10-11; Lk 9: 4-5; 10:5-12
⁷Go, and proclaim this message: The kingdom of heaven is near. ⁸Heal the sick, bring the dead back to life, cleanse the lepers, and drive out demons. Freely have you received, freely give. ⁹Do not carry any gold or silver or money in your purses. ¹⁰Do not take a traveling bag, or an extra shirt, or sandals, or a walking stick: workers deserve to be compensated.

¹¹When you come to a town or a village, look for a worthy person, and stay there until you leave.

¹²When you enter the house, wish it peace. ¹³If the people are worthy people, your peace will rest on them; if they are not worthy people, your blessing will come back to you.

Acts 13:51; 18:6
 11:24; Gen 19:24; 2P 2:6; Jd 1:7
¹⁴And if you are not welcomed, and your words are not listened to, leave that house or that town, and shake the dust off your feet. ¹⁵I assure you, it will go easier for the people of Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment, than it will for the people of that town.

You will be persecuted

(Lk 12:11; Mk 13:9; 8:38)

Mk 13: 9-13; Lk 21: 11-19; Jn 10:12; Acts 20:29; Rom 16:19
 24:9
 Jn 16:1; 15:27
 • ¹⁶Look, I send you out like sheep among wolves. You must be as clever as snakes and as innocent as doves. ¹⁷Be on your guard with people, for they will hand you over to their courts, and they will flog you in their synagogues. ¹⁸You will be brought to trial before rulers and kings because of me, so that you may witness to them and the pagans.

word, but he also sends his Spirit to touch the hearts and minds of those who listen. Through the Spirit they recognize the word of God in the poor preaching of these messengers who have received no great instruction. The Spirit will give signs: healings and astounding graces supporting the witness of the missionaries.

The successors of the apostles will be missionaries like them. They will not be primarily the administrators of an established Church, but living poorly among the poor, they will establish new Churches (see 1 Cor 3:10; 12:28). This new chapter will speak of a mission, the major responsibility of a Christian community. In the first part (vv. 5-16) Jesus addresses the first missionaries of Galilee. In the second part (vv. 17-42) we find Jesus' words pronounced in different circumstances that Matthew adapts for his readers at the very time in which the Church begins to be persecuted in the Roman world.

See commentary on Mark 6:7 and Luke 10:1.

Do not visit pagan territory. Let us not forget that many pagan communities were established in Galilee together with the Jewish ones. Jesus follows his Father's plan of salvation as described in the Scriptures. The Savior should first gather the *strayed sheep of Israel*, and then bring salvation to all the *pagan nations*: Isaiah 49:6; 60:1-10; Zechariah 14:16; Matthew 15:24.

Whoever welcomes you (v. 40). To reject the messengers is to ignore the call of the Father and to lose the greatest opportunity of one's life.

• 16. THE MARTYRS

Matthew here puts advice that Jesus gave to his witnesses on how to confront persecution. Jesus himself spent long weeks hidden away and his first missionaries probably had to take similar precautions. In relating these instructions Matthew has perhaps adapted them a little to the situation of Christians of his time; he has not invented them.

We have just spoken of witnesses, and martyr in Greek means: witness. Some of these martyrs were before long glorified, but the majority remain unknown. They have often been disfigured by calumny (5:11; Lk 21:17) isolated even from the Christian community and later eliminated. In certain cases entire Christian communities were massacred as in the time of the Roman empire. Today in certain countries such atrocities continue without the media even mentioning it. In many other cases, persons or Christian groups became martyrs that had assumed a risky position. When Stephen was assassinated (Acts 7) the apostles were not pursued, and many may have taken Stephen to be a fanatic. When the young Christian women of the Roman Empire were persecuted for having decided to remain virgins many said: Why do they flout their family duties? When the Catholics of England, France or China refused to form national churches separated from communion with Rome, were they not rebelling against the laws of their nation?

Maybe we must recognize that martyrdom is a grace and is not given to everyone. Many would

Lk 12: 11-12 • ¹⁹But when you are arrested, do not worry about what you are to say, or how you are to say it; when the hour comes, you will be given what you are to say. ²⁰For it will not be you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father, speaking through you.

4:10; Jn 15:26; Acts 4:8
Mic 7:6
24:9, 13
²¹Brother will hand over his brother to death, and a father his child; children will turn against their parents and have them put to death. ²²Everyone will hate you because of me, but whoever stands firm to the end will be saved.

16:28; 24:27; 25:31; 26:64; Mk 13:26
²³When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next. I tell you the truth, you will not have passed through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.

Lk 6:40; Jn 13:16; 15:20
²⁴A student is not above his teacher, nor a slave above his master. ²⁵A student should be content to become like his teacher, and the slave like his

master. If the head of the household has been called Beelzebul, how much more, those of his household! So, do not be afraid of them!

Lk 12: 2-7; Mt 5:15; Lk 8:17; 11:33
²⁶There is nothing covered that will not be uncovered. There is nothing hidden that will not be made known. ²⁷What I am telling you in the dark, you must speak in the light. What you hear in private, proclaim from the housetops.

1P 3:14; Rev 2:10; Jas 4:12
²⁸Do not be afraid of those who kill the body, but have no power to kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of him who can destroy both body and soul in hell. ²⁹For a few cents you can buy two sparrows. Yet not one sparrow falls to the ground without your Father knowing. ³⁰As for you, every hair of your head has been counted. ³¹Do not be afraid: you are worth more than many sparrows!

be ready to give their life for Christ, but confronted with situations of violence or corruption, they do not see the necessity to expose a scandal and so submit in order to avoid the worst. Others, on the contrary, understand that God is asking them to witness (v. 18) to the Good News that is opposite to what is imposed. In so doing they face the repression by which Society defends itself. Revelation affirms that the murder of witnesses advances Salvation History.

• 19. *Brother will hand over his brother to death...* (v. 21) you will be hated by all. This is usual in a climate of terror. Without going so far, witnesses to Christ may find themselves unappreciated by a majority, in their own Church, while perhaps their persecutors are acclaimed (Lk 6:26). In time the Holy Spirit will reveal the truth, but the majority of those witnesses, the lowly, often those who suffer most and are the greatest, will remain unknown until the day when Jesus himself will *acknowledge them before his Father* (v. 32).

In reality, Jesus does not only speak of those who are massacred. Far more numerous and doubtless nearer to us are those who have had to conquer fear (26; 28; 31) of being his witnesses on the streets, in schools and in every area of this perverted and evil world. (Gal 1:4; Phil 2:15).

Do not worry. The witnesses of Jesus do not work on their own, and the more they are identified with Jesus in persecution and in prison,

the more they are assisted by the Spirit. By worrying while preparing their legal case, they would hinder the freedom of the Spirit and also lose the peace that the Spirit grants the persecuted.

• 23. *You will not have passed through...* Possibly this sentence would have been better placed in the first part of the speech, which is about the mission in Galilee. But it may refer also to Christians of Jewish origins who were persecuted by the Pharisees at the time Matthew wrote his Gospel.

Matthew gives this sentence a broader meaning: though people may cast out the future missionaries, they will never be short of work until the second coming of Jesus.

• 28. We are cowards and Jesus is aware of this. He has already said, "Do not fear," when he invited us not to look for security in money. Now, dealing with the fear of repression, he adds, "If you cannot free yourselves from cowardice, consider where the greater threat comes from, from God or people?"

This is the only time Jesus refers to "fear of God." When the Old Testament mentioned fear of God, it generally meant giving due respect to God. Respect is far from fear. Respect is an attitude proper to a free person. God does not threaten to throw us into hell; rather he reminds us that to lose him is to lose ourselves also, and this is hell.

Mk 8:38; Lk 12: 8-9; 9:26; 2Tim 2:12; Rev 3:5

• ³²Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will acknowledge before my Father in heaven. ³³Whoever rejects me before others, I will reject before my Father in heaven.

Lk 12: 51-53; 2:34; 22:36

• ³⁴Do not think that I have come to establish peace on earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.

Mic 7:6

³⁵For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. ³⁶Each one will have as enemies, those of one's own family.

Lk 14: 26-27; Mk 8:34; Lk 9:23; 12:9; D1 33:9

³⁷Whoever loves father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me. And whoever loves son or daughter more than me, is not worthy of

16:24-25

me. ³⁸And whoever does not take up his cross and follow me, is not worthy of me. ³⁹Whoever finds his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life, for my sake, will find it.

Mk 8: 34-35; Lk 9: 23-24; 17:33; Jn 12:25

18:5; Mk 9:37; Lk 9:48; 10:16; Jn 12: 44-45; 13:20; Gal 4:14

⁴⁰Whoever welcomes you, welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me, welcomes him who sent me. ⁴¹The one who welcomes a prophet, as a proph-

et, will receive the reward of a prophet; the one who welcomes a just man, because he is a just man, will receive the reward of a just man. ⁴²And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones, because he is my disciple, I assure you, he will not go unrewarded."

1K 17:9; 2K 4:8

Mk 9:41; 9:36; Lk 9:49; 11:23

Jesus and John the Baptist

(Lk 7:18; 16:16; 10:13)

11 • ¹When Jesus had finished giving his twelve disciples these instructions, he went on from there, to teach and to proclaim his message in their towns. ²When John the Baptist heard in prison about the deeds of Christ, he sent a message by his disciples, ³asking him, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?"

Lk 7: 18-28

⁴Jesus answered them, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: ⁵the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are made clean, the deaf hear, the dead are brought back to life, and the poor hear the good news; ⁶and

Is 26:19; 35:5-6; 42:18; 61:1

13:57; 26:31; Jn 6:61

• ³². *Whoever acknowledges me.* After stressing the sovereign power of his Father, Jesus puts himself on the same level: He will decide our eternal fate. Jesus refers not only to recognizing him in the ultimate sense, that is, by not denying our Christian faith before others; his words also convey a day-by-day demand. We must not be ashamed to act or talk as people of faith, to go public about our Christian convictions when necessary.

• ³⁴. *Do not think that I have come to establish peace.* The peace of the believer comes from the certainty of being loved by God: the angels of Bethlehem said so: Luke 2:14.

Jesus gives no peace to the world, because the rest of the world is made up of confusion, half-truths, people who live midway between greed and fear of risking. The peace of the world, whether in a family or in society, veils unjust conditions imposed by the strongest, or a shared mediocrity. The Gospel awakens everywhere a critical spirit; so that the presence of only one Christian living by the truth is enough to worry many persons: John 3:20; 15:18.

The Gospel moves us to make decisions with greater freedom, disregarding the criticism of those close to us whenever we are convinced

that they cannot understand the Gospel values which motivate us.

Moreover, the devil stirs up persecutions against those who convert to scare them and make them turn away.

He is not worthy... (v. 37). Jesus addresses this to others besides missionaries or persons with an exceptional mission. Each one must break away from forms of dependency within the family, which do not nurture the human and spiritual growth of the members. One who loves Christ finds a thousand and one opportunities to free himself from activities, entertainments and worries about his own family, which keep both him and the family at a mediocre level.

• **11.1** See commentary on Luke 7:18.

Jesus has sent the first missionaries: for Matthew it is the time to show how the kingdom comes—the coming of which they have proclaimed. The visit of the disciples of John will help us to understand what Jesus brings and what cannot be expected of him.

The paragraph which follows in 11:25 will show in its way that what is all-important in the kingdom is the person of Jesus himself.

And the poor hear the good news... (v. 5). Jesus' message includes a preferential love of

how fortunate is the one who does not take offense at me!”

⁷As the messengers left, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: “When you went out to the desert, what did you expect to see? A reed swept by the wind? ⁸What did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? People who wear fine clothes live in palaces. ⁹What did you really go out to see? A prophet? Yes, indeed, and even more than a prophet. ¹⁰He is the man of whom Scripture says: *I send my messenger ahead of you, to prepare the way before you.*

¹¹I tell you this: no one greater than John the Baptist has arisen from among the sons of women; and yet, the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. ¹²From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven is something to be conquered; and violent men seize it.

¹³Up to the time of John, there was only prophesy: all the prophets and the law. ¹⁴And if you believe me, John is indeed that Elijah, whose coming was predicted. ¹⁵Let anyone with ears listen!

¹⁶Now, to what can I compare the people of this day? They are like chil-

dren sitting in the marketplace, about whom their companions complain: ¹⁷“We played the flute for you, but you would not dance. We sang a funeral song, but you would not cry!”

¹⁸For John came fasting, and people said, ‘He is possessed by a demon!’ ¹⁹Then, the Son of Man came. He ate and drank; and people said, ‘Look at this man: a glutton and drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ Yet, wisdom is vindicated by her works.”

• ²⁰Then Jesus began to denounce the cities in which he had performed most of his miracles, because the people there did not change their ways. ²¹“Alas for you Chorazin and Bethsaida! If the miracles worked in you had taken place in Tyre and Sidon, the people there would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. ²²But I assure you, for Tyre and Sidon; it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you. ²³And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to heaven? You will be thrown down to the place of the dead! For if the miracles which were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would still be

God for the poor and for those who share with them in their poverty. The Gospel is not for them also, but for them first.

EVANGELIZATION OF THE POOR AS A PRIORITY

And the poor hear the good news (v. 5). This text is to be read together with Luke 1:52; 4:18; 6:20; 10:23.

It would be wrong to interpret this text as thinking that God only asks of us to catechize less instructed people, or those of lower condition in life. In the time of Jesus the Pharisees already thought their duty was to teach simple and uneducated people; Jesus instead sent his apostles, poor among the poor, to enable them to discover the presence and working of God the Father. The concrete life of the rural and urban poor is the context in which fundamental experiences occur that will renew the world and the spiritual life of everyone.

Verse 6. See another way of translating this sentence in Luke 7:23.

Verse 11. *No one greater than John the Baptist has arisen.* This verse refers to a prophet or to a political leader.

Verse 12. This sentence could also be translated: “The kingdom of heaven is advancing forcefully.” The kingdom of God is the moving force that makes history progress, taking advantage of both gentle and violent changes in human life. The believers are called to participate actively in this constant transformation. Death and resurrection are at work among us and all over the world.

• 20. Chorazin and Bethsaida: these two cities were the seats of higher schools of religion but had not received the Gospel. Tyre and Sidon: two pagan cities, cursed by the prophets.

21:32;
Mk 9:13;
Lk 16:16

14:5;
21:26;
Lk 1:76;
Dt 18:15;
Jn 1:15;
6:14

Mal 3:1;
23:20

Lk
16:16;
Mt 5:18

Mal 3:23;
Mk 9:11;
Lk 1:17;
Jn 1:21

Rev 2:7

Lk 7:
31-35

Lk 1:15;
Mt 3:4;
9:14

9:11;
Lk 15:1;
Mt 19:17

Lk 10:
13-15;
Mt 13:58;
Jn 15:24;
12:37

Mk 6:6;
Is 23:
1-18;
Ezk
26-28;
Am 1-9;
Zec 9:2;
Es 4:1

Jl 3:4

Is 14:
13, 15;
Gen 19;
2P 2:6

10:15 there today! ²⁴But I tell you, it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you.”

Take my yoke upon you
(Lk 10:21)

Lk 10: 21-22; Jn 7: 48-49; 1Co: 1:17-29

• ²⁵On that occasion, Jesus said, “Father, Lord of heaven and earth, I praise you; because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to simple people. ²⁶Yes, Father, this was your gracious will.

28:18; Jn 3:35; 13:3; 17:2; Phil 2:9; Wis 2:13; Jn 1:18; 10:15

²⁷Everything has been entrusted to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father; and no one knows the Father except the Son, and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

Sir 24:19

Jer 31:25; Hos 10:11; Pro:17; Jer 6:16

1Jn 5:3; Gal 5:1; Acts 15:10

²⁸Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble of heart; and you will find rest. ³⁰For my yoke is easy; and my burden is light.”

Jesus, Lord of the Sabbath
(Mk 2:23; 3:1; Lk 6:1; 14:1)

12 • ¹It happened that, Jesus was walking through the wheat fields on a Sabbath. His disciples were hungry; and they began to pick some heads of wheat, to crush and to eat the grain. ²When the Pharisees noticed this, they said to Jesus, “Look at your disciples! They are doing what is prohibited on the Sabbath!”

Mk 2: 23-28; Lk 6:1-5; Dt 23:26

20:10; Dt 5:14

³Jesus answered, “Have you not read what David did, when he and his men were hungry? ⁴He went into the House of God, and they ate the bread offered to God, though neither he nor his men had the right to eat it, but only the priests. ⁵And have you not read in the law, how, on the Sabbath, the priests in the temple desecrate the Sabbath, yet they are not guilty?”

1S 21: 2-7; Lev 24: 5-9

Num 28:9

⁶I tell you, there is greater than the temple here. ⁷If you really knew the meaning of the words: *It is mercy I want, not sacrifice*, you would not have condemned the innocent.

12:41; Lk 11:31

9:13; Hos 6:6

• ²⁵ Jesus’ prayer impressed the disciples. In this text it is a short prayer, prompted by the most recent events; events and daily life are also a source of prayer.

You have hidden these things. Intelligent people are not excluded from the faith, of course, but it is the glory of God that faith should not seem to be the privilege of the wise and the intelligent; human wisdom never gives what is essential and often hides it. There were in Palestine at the time some wise people and many others who pretended to be so, but they were rarely seen among the disciples of Jesus.

Everything has been entrusted to me (v. 27). God does what is needed for people to have always and in all places thousands of ways of knowing him. In this life it is only through Jesus that we have the revelation of the Father.

Must we translate “learn from me for I am...” or “learn from me that I am...”? The humility of Jesus reveals to us the humility of God who never seeks to put us down or intimidate us, but instead always wants to raise us to him. Such humility does not prevent him from being God, and he may exact everything from us because he does not use external force: his influence reaches to the depths of our heart. See Luke 10:21.

Come to me (v. 28): I will not relieve you of

your load but by placing my yoke on you, I give you the means of carrying the load.

Jesus plays with the two words yoke and load, for the Jews used to call “load” the divine teachings imparted to pupils, and yoke the balancing of the teacher’s sentences, which should be learned by heart.

Jesus, the patient and humble teacher, enables us to see the mercy of God in our lives and in our own cross. He shows us the love of God even in the requirements of the law. Only God is good; and good is the authority of Christ.

• **12.1** This chapter records the conflicts of Jesus with the Pharisees regarding the Sabbath. Why does the Gospel make so much of these conflicts? Perhaps because at the time of Jesus the heavy load of religious obligations was a formidable obstacle for those searching for God. It may have been also because the Christians lost no time making new laws to which they gave an exaggerated importance. If Jesus deliberately violated the most sacred of the laws given by God to Moses, what about our ecclesiastical laws not guaranteed by the word of God? In the name of man-made laws, adapted to a context that is not ours, Christian communities have at times been paralyzed and we let millions of people look for

Jn 5: 16-17
 8 Besides, the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.”

Mk 3:1-6; Lk 6: 6-11
 Lk 14:3
 9 Jesus then left that place and went into one of their synagogues. 10 A man was there with a paralyzed hand, and the people who wanted to bring a charge against Jesus asked him, “Is it permitted to heal on the Sabbath?”

6:26; 10:31; Lk 12:7; 13:16; Jn 7:23
 Jn 5:9; 9:14
 11 But he said to them, “What if one of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath? Will you not take hold of your sheep and lift it out? 12 Is a human being less worthy of help than a sheep? Therefore, it is permitted to do good on the Sabbath.” 13 Then Jesus said to the man, “Stretch out your arm.” He stretched it out and it was completely restored, as sound as the other one.

27:1; Mk 11:18; Jn 5:16
 Lk 6:17; Mt 14:35
 8:4; 9:30; Mk 3:12; 5:43; 7:36
 14 Then the Pharisees went out, and made plans to get rid of Jesus. 15 As Jesus was aware of their plans, he left that place. Many people followed him, and he cured all who were sick. 16 But he gave them strict orders not to make him known.

17 In this way, Isaiah’s prophecy was fulfilled:

Is 42:1-4
 18 *Here is my servant, whom I have chosen; the one I love, and with whom I am pleased. I will put my spirit upon him; and he will announce my judgment to the nations.*

19 *He will not argue or shout, nor will his voice be heard in the streets.* 20 *The*

bruised reed he will not crush, nor snuff out the smoldering wick until he brings justice to victory, 21 *and in him, all the nations will put their hope.*

The unforgivable sin

(Mk 3:22; Lk 11:15)

• 22 Then some people brought to him a possessed man, who was blind and mute. Jesus healed the man; who was then able to speak and see. 23 All in the crowd were amazed and said, “Could he be the Son of David?” 24 When the Pharisees heard this, they said, “It is by Beelzebul, prince of the devils, that this man drives out devils.”

25 Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said to them, “Every kingdom that is divided against itself is destroyed; and every city, or family, that is divided against itself will not last long. 26 So, if Satan drives out Satan, he is divided: how then can his reign endure? 27 And, if it is by Beelzebul that I drive out devils, by whom do your own people drive them out? For this reason, they will be your judges.

28 But, if it is by the Spirit of God that I drive out devils, then the kingdom of God has already come upon you. 29 How can anyone break into the strong man’s house and make off with his belongings, unless he first ties him up? Only then can he plunder his house.

churches where they have the communities and pastors they have been deprived of.

• 22. See commentary on Mark 3:22. *Your own people* (v. 27). Jesus refers here to the Jewish exorcists who cast out demons with prayers and formulae, as told in Acts 19:13.

Blasphemy against the Spirit. This means attributing to the devil the good actions of the Spirit, as we see in Mark 3:30.

Neither in this age nor in the age to come (v. 32). This is a Jewish idiom meaning that this sin cannot be forgiven, by God or people. How can God forgive one who puts himself out of reach of the forgiving God?

If you have a healthy tree (v. 33). This is another application of the sentence read in 7:16. It deals here with the accusation against the Pharisees: they slander whatever is good because they have an evil heart.

Your own words will declare you either innocent or guilty (v. 37). See Luke 19:22. Not only the isolated acts of our life are to be judged. Throughout the years we have built up a practical philosophy and a vision of existence. Beginning with that we judge all which in other people questions our own choices. It is that itself, these words with which we justify ourselves and condemn others, that deserve to be condemned.

Lk 11: 14-30; Mt 9: 32-34

Mk 3:22

Acts 10:38

Is 49:24; Jn 12:31

³⁰The one who is not with me, is against me; and the one who does not gather with me, scatters.

³¹And so, I tell you this: people can be forgiven any sin and any evil thing they say against God, but blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven.

³²The one who speaks against the Son of Man, will be forgiven; but the one who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, neither in this age nor in the age to come.

³³If you have a healthy tree, its fruit will be healthy; if you have a rotten tree, its fruit will be rotten. You can know a tree by its fruit. ³⁴You brood of vipers, how can you say anything good, when you are so evil? For the mouth speaks what fills the heart. ³⁵A good person produces good things from his good store, and an evil person produces evil things from his evil store.

³⁶I tell you this: on the day of judgment, people will have to give an account of any careless word they have spoken. ³⁷Your own words will declare you either innocent or guilty.”

Jesus criticizes his own generation

(Mk 8:11; Lk 11:16)

• ³⁸Then, some teachers of the law and some Pharisees spoke up, “Teacher, we want to see a sign from you.”

³⁹Jesus answered them, “An evil and unfaithful people want a sign; but no

sign will be given, them except the sign of the prophet Jonah. ⁴⁰In the same way, as Jonah spent three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so will the Son of Man spend three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

⁴¹At the judgment, the people of Nineveh will rise with this generation, and condemn it; because they reformed their lives at the preaching of Jonah, and here, there is greater than Jonah. ⁴²At the judgment, the Queen of the South will stand up and condemn you. She came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and here, there is greater than Solomon.

⁴³When an evil spirit goes out of a person, it wanders over arid wastelands, looking for a place to rest, but it cannot find any. ⁴⁴Then it says: ‘I will go back to my house which I had to leave.’ So it goes back, and finds the house empty, clean, and in order. ⁴⁵Off it goes again, to bring back with itself, this time, seven spirits, more evil than itself. They move in, and settle there; so that this person is, finally, in a worse state at the end, than he was at the beginning. This is what will happen to this evil generation.”

• ⁴⁶While Jesus was talking to the people, his mother and his brothers wanted to speak to him, and they

• 38. Jesus did not perform any miracle that day, because the experts in religion were demanding an account of him, instead of listening to him.

An evil and unfaithful people (v. 39). The text of the Gospel says in fact: “evil and adulterous”. This expression in Scripture means the unfaithful believer who, without denying God in words, keeps other gods to himself.

The story of the unclean spirit, meaning the devil, is directed towards the contemporaries of Jesus. They accepted John’s call to conversion and for a while changed their way of life. Theirs was not a real experience of God, neither did they discover the inner power that would have

enabled them to persevere, and so their blindness remained.

The Ninevites: see Jonah 3:5.

The Queen of the South: 1 Kings 10.

The sign of Jonah is the resurrection of Jesus. The similarity seen in the three days that Jonah was in the belly of the fish and the time Jesus spent in the tomb is somewhat forced.

• 46. *His mother and his brothers.* If they were true brothers of Jesus, sons of Mary, the Gospel would say: “his mother and the sons of his mother,” for this was the Jewish manner of speaking. See commentary on Mark 3:31.

Mk 9:38;
Lk 9:49;
Mk 9:40;
Lk 9:50

10:19;
Mk 8:38;
Lk 9:26;
21:14;
1Tim
1:13;
Lk 12:10

7:16-20;
Lk 6:
43-45

3:7;
23:33;
Lk 3:7

15:18;
Mk 7:21

Jas 3:1

Mk 8:
11-12;
Lk 11:16;
11:29-32;
Mk 16:
1-4;
1Col
1:22;
Lk 12:54;
12:1

Jon 2:1

Jon 3

1K
10:1-10

Lk 11:
24-26

Mk 5:9;
Lk 8:2;
Jn 5:14;
2P 2:20

Mk 3:
31-35;
Lk 8:
19-21;
Jn 2:12;
Acts
1:14

waited outside. ⁴⁷So someone said to him, “Your mother and your brothers are standing outside; they want to speak with you.”

⁴⁸Jesus answered, “Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?” ⁴⁹Then he pointed to his disciples and said, “Look! Here are my mother and my brothers. ⁵⁰Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”

The parable of the sower

(Mk 4:1; Lk 8:4; 10:23; 13:20)

13 ¹That same day, Jesus left the house and sat down by the lakeside. ²Many people gathered around him. So he got into a boat, and sat down, while the crowds stood on the shore; ³and he spoke to them in parables about many things.

⁴Jesus said, “The sower went out to sow; and, as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path; and the birds came and ate them up. ⁵Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where there was little

soil, and the seeds sprouted quickly, because the soil was not deep. ⁶But as soon as the sun rose, the plants were scorched; and they withered, because they had no roots. ⁷Again, other seeds fell among thistles; and the thistles grew and choked the plants. ⁸Still, other seeds fell on good soil and produced a crop: some a hundredfold, others sixty, and others thirty. ⁹If you have ears, then hear!”

• ¹⁰Then his disciples came to him and said, “Why do you speak to them in parables?”

¹¹Jesus answered, “To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but not to these people. ¹²For the one who has will be given more; and he will have in abundance. But the one who does not have will be deprived of even what he has. ¹³That is why I speak to them in parables; because they look and do not see; they hear; but they do not listen or understand.

• **13.1** Here we have the beginning of the third “discourse of Jesus” in Matthew’s Gospel (see Introduction). Jesus had his apostles proclaim the coming of the kingdom; the first signs were seen: healings and victories over demons but opposition was not wanting and it would seem that on the whole, people did not respond. What must we think of this “kingdom of God” which changes very little of real life? Matthew replies with the following seven parables.

Jesus uses comparisons just as simple country folk and working people usually do. Proverbs and parables have always been an effective way of teaching wisdom. But we must observe that a parable is not just any comparison; its characteristic is to awaken in the listeners an awareness of their present situation and oblige them to make a decision.

For those listening to Jesus, the reign of God signified first of all a liberation of his oppressed people, and this called for clear explanation. Jesus, for his part, could only give an answer to those who accompanied him; for the kingdom is one of those things that cannot be seen as long as one has no belief in it. Jesus will only speak of it in images and we will understand according to the degree of our experience of that kingdom which is developing throughout the world.

For this parable of the Sower which gives the

general direction of this chapter, see the commentary of Mark 4:1 and Luke 8:4.

• **10.** *To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom* (v. 11). To you who took Christ’s call seriously and decided to follow him. Because you came to be the co-workers of Christ, the Father will reveal to you his secrets.

The quotation from Isaiah that follows may shock us due to the fact of our not fully understanding Hebrew expressions. Does Jesus speak in parables because the audience does not want to understand, or so that they will not understand? It could be both at the same time (compare vv. 13 and 15, and also 35). See the commentary on Mark 4:11.

For the one who has will be given more (v. 12). Here has means produce, bear as does the tree that “has” fruit. It will be given to those who are fruitful.

The kingdom of heaven. We already said that “Heaven” was a Jewish expression referring to God. The kingdom of heaven is the kingdom of God, as the Father of Heaven is God the Father. Not realizing this, many have mistakenly thought that the Gospel announced only the kingdom of God in Heaven after our present life. Actually Jesus came to tell us that God had come to rule among us.

Lk 2:
49-50

Mk4:1-9;
Lk 8:4-8;
5:1

11:15;
13:43;
Mk 4:23;
Lk 14:35;
Rev 2:7

Mk 4:
10-12;
Lk 8:
9-10

1Col4:1;
Eph 3:3;
6:19;
Col 2:2

25:29;
Lk 19:26

Is 6:9-10; Jn 12:40; Acts 28: 26-27
 14 In them, the words of the prophet Isaiah are fulfilled: *However much you hear, you do not understand; however much you see, you do not perceive.*

15 *For the heart of this people has grown dull. Their ears hardly hear and their eyes dare not see. If they were to see with their eyes, hear with their ears and understand with their heart, they would turn back, and I would heal them.*

Lk 10: 23-24
 16 But blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear.

Eph 3:5; 1P 1:12
 17 For I tell you, many prophets and righteous people have longed to see the things you see, but they did not see them; and to hear the things you hear, but they did not hear them.

Mk 4: 13-20; Lk 8: 11-15
 • 18 Now listen to the parable of the sower.

19 When a person hears the message of the kingdom, but does not take it seriously, the devil comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed that fell along the footpath.

20 The seed that fell on rocky ground stands for the one who hears the word, and accepts it at once with joy.

Kingdom or Reign of God? See commentary on Luke 8:10.

• 18. Who will welcome the word of God? This has nothing to do with intelligence or ability to reflect, or interest in religious things: those who are open to hope receive the word.

The seed that fell along the footpath (v. 19) are those not interested in the word they have received, perhaps because they cannot see further than their own interests (they are selfish), or perhaps they have taken another direction in life.

Next come those who do not dare to face contradiction and are easily discouraged and cowed: these are *soon burnt*. Yet to hope means to be firm despite any obstacle. If God puts us on a road in life, this road will lead somewhere. Hope is courage and endurance.

Next are those *that fell among the thistles* (v. 22). They are believers, but the fruits to be harvested along the difficult path seem not to satisfy them. They want to “save their lives,” to

21 But such a person has no roots, and endures only for a while. No sooner is he harassed or persecuted because of the word, than he gives up.

22 The seed that fell among the thistles is the one who hears the word; but then, the worries of this life and the love of money choke the word; and it does not bear fruit.

23 As for the seed that fell on good soil, it is the one who hears the word and understands it; this seed bears fruit and produces a hundred, or sixty, or thirty times more.”

The parable of the weeds

• 24 Jesus told the people another parable, “The kingdom of heaven can be compared to a man, who sowed good seed in his field. 25 While everyone was asleep, his enemy came, and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away.

26 When the plants sprouted and produced grain, the weeds also appeared. 27 Then, the servants of the owner came, and said to him, ‘Sir, was it not good seed that you sowed in your field? Where did the weeds come from?’

28 He answered them, ‘This is the work of an enemy.’ They asked him,

serve God and Money at the same time. They are dragged down by their aim of winning material success, and hope in the kingdom of God becomes but a flimsy desire for them.

• 24. With the parable of the *weeds*, Jesus answers those who are scandalized at seeing evil everywhere. Good and bad will be mixed till the end of the world. Good and evil will always be found together in persons and institutions.

God respects people. He knows that temptation is often stronger than their good intentions and they need time to find and to choose steadily what is good.

God is patient. The reconciliation of so many contradictory groups, forces and cultural currents active in the world will be attained only at the end of time. In the meantime we are not to label any of them as “the” good ones and “the” bad ones.

Jesus himself commented on this parable: see verse 36.

Lk 12: 16-21; 1Tm 6:9

Jn 15: 8, 16; Gal 5:22

‘Do you want us to go and pull up the weeds?’²⁹ He told them, ‘No, when you pull up the weeds, you might uproot the wheat with them.’³⁰ Let them grow together, until harvest; and, at harvest time, I will say to the workers: Pull up the weeds first, tie them in bundles and burn them; then gather the wheat into my barn.”

The mustard seed and the yeast

(Mk 4:30; Lk 13:18)

• ³¹ Jesus offered them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field.

³² It is smaller than all other seeds, but once it is fully grown, it is bigger than any garden plant; like a tree, the birds come and rest in its branches.”

• 31. With the parable of the *mustard seed* Jesus shows us that the kingdom of God must be a sign; it has to be something very noticeable in the world.

Any spiritual aspiration, cultural innovation or revolutionary movement must be expressed concretely, through one or several institutions, to make it a clearer and more visible entity. Likewise Jesus projects his Church as the bearer (not the owner) of the kingdom of God. *Church* means: “Assembly of those called together.” Two of the characteristics of this Church are indicated here:

- first it must be very visible and fruitful for the world, like a tree giving shade to birds;
- secondly, it must be immersed in human reality.

Believers are not to separate themselves from those who do not believe, for they are the yeast of the world.

Jesus does not want an “invisible Church,” that is an emotional fellowship and spiritual communion among all those in the whole world who believe in him. He wants a gigantic tree (in another place Jesus says: a city built on a hill), so that everyone can recognize that the seed was good and full of life. We need organized Christian communities, and ties between these communities, a hierarchy... Nevertheless the believers are not to enclose themselves in their chapels or little communities or to spend all their energies working for “their” Church. They must be useful and fruitful in the world together with all people of goodwill.

Let them be yeast for the dough, not small separate and finer dough. The yeast transforms human history, not by bringing all people into

³³ He told them another parable, “The kingdom of heaven is like the yeast that a woman took, and hid in three measures of flour, until the whole mass of dough began to rise.”

• ³⁴ Jesus taught all these things to the crowds by means of parables; he did not say anything to them without using a parable. ³⁵ This fulfilled what was spoken by the Prophet: *I will speak in parables. I will proclaim things kept secret since the beginning of the world.*

• ³⁶ Then he sent the crowds away and went into the house. And his disciples came to him, saying, “Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field.” ³⁷ Jesus answered them, “The one who sows the good seed is the

the Church, but by infusing into human activity the spirit that gives life to humankind.

• 34. *Jesus taught all these things to the crowds by means of parables.* On reading Matthew 13:12, we might think that Jesus speaks in parables in order to hide his teaching. Here we find another explanation that corrects and completes the first. Jesus spoke in parables because that was the best method to convey a teaching relevant for all times.

I will speak in parables (v. 35). These are the first words of Psalm 78, as adapted by the evangelist. He means that the secrets of the kingdom of God revealed by Jesus answer the most important questions of humankind.

From the beginning of civilization, people were confronted with problems and challenges they could not solve on their own, and Jesus offers the key to these contradictions. Science has discovered many elements of human destiny; we have still to discover who we are.

Jesus’ answer is not given as a theory and it upsets the “little intellectuals” who are used to the language of books. He gives us something much richer with these images or enigmas which require some creativity and to which we have to return. Each of us will have to ponder them as long as we live, and humankind as long as history. Only with time shall we discover all that they mean.

• 36. *The field is the world* (v. 38). This parable does not refer to what happens within each of us, or only in the Church, as described in *the net* (v. 47). Rather it teaches that the kingdom of God exists and grows in the world, in all

Jn 15:6

Mk 4:30-32; Lk 13:18-19

Lk 17:20; Ezk 17:6; Ps 78:2; Dn 4:9, 18

Lk 13:20-21; 1Col 5:6; Gal 5:9

Mk 4:33-34

Ps 78:2

Lk 15:15; Mk 4:10

1Jn 3:10 Son of Man. ³⁸The field is the world; the good seed are the people of the kingdom; the weeds are those who follow the evil one. ³⁹The enemy who sows the weeds is the devil; the harvest is the end of time, and the workers are the angels.

3:10; 7:19; Jn 15:6; Rev 14:15
⁴⁰Just as the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so will it be at the end of time. ⁴¹The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom all that is scandalous and all who do evil. ⁴²And these will be thrown into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and

Zep 1:3; Dn 3:6; Rev 21:8; Mt 8:12; 13:50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30

gnashing of teeth. ⁴³Then the just will shine, like the sun, in the kingdom of their Father. If you have ears, then hear. Dn 12:3

The treasure, the pearl and the net

• ⁴⁴The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure, hidden in a field. The one who finds it, buries it again; and so happy is he, that he goes and sells everything he has, in order to buy that field. Pro 2:4; 4:7

⁴⁵Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a trader, who is looking for fine pearls. ⁴⁶Once he has found a pearl

dimensions of the secular world. Sacred history is more than an ancient history in the land of Jesus; it is the entire human story of which the risen Christ is Lord.

So will it be at the end of time (v. 40). Jesus speaks to us of a judgment. The expectation of God's judgment on the world was an essential element of prophetic teaching. Let us not only see in it a desire for vengeance on the part of honest people who suffered. To know for certain that our life will be judged by one who knows us through and through is one of the bases of the Christian vision of existence. This enables us to understand the tragic character of the decisions we make from day to day directing us either to the truth or a refusal of the light.

This certitude shocks many of our contemporaries just as in the past it terrified the majority of people. It is for that reason they have often taken refuge in metempsychosis—a series of existences. The faults of the present life could be rectified in the one that followed. The importance of our choices is doubted, and the sense of sin is blurred just as is the sense of the presence of God. Before long we could doubt the unique value of our life and of the human person.

While reaffirming the judgment, this short parable contains an extremely revolutionary element: the judgment is God's secret and up to the end of the world, both good and evil are in each of us, as well as in institutions. When we read the Scriptures, we are perhaps shocked to see that not only in the Old Testament but also even in the New, the world is constantly divided between the good and the wicked. It seems to us that it should not be: the inner being of a person is a deep mystery. There isn't a group of the good (we, of course, and those who believe in God, and those who observe the same morality that we observe...) and then the others. Why then does Jesus divide humans?

Our quick reply is that Jesus has spoken as the prophets spoke. To speak of the good and

the wicked was a simple way, suitable to the mentality of people less developed than ourselves, to show that each one of us, in each of our acts, takes a step in one of two opposed directions. For centuries women and men have felt themselves interpreted by this way of speaking: it is still effective and pedagogic for us on many occasions. It is very important to understand that Jesus is not duped by images. For the majority of us, the separation is not made, even if after a conversion or two, until we have taken decisive steps.

The *servants* represent the believers, but especially the "supervisors" of the Church. Their zeal for repressing those they judge as straying in order to preserve what seems good to them may well be tainted interiorly. They would like to suppress all the errors. Rather they rely too much on force, or on authority. If the "masters" of the faith were not to give the faithful the possibility to think for themselves and make mistakes, the Church would be without life.

God prefers to let matters clarify: he wants people to learn from experience. Evil is part of the mystery of the cross; in doing what is good and living in the light we defeat evil (Rom 12:21).

• ⁴⁴. The parables of *the treasure* and *the pearl* invite us not to let opportunities pass by, when the kingdom of God comes to us.

Some have been waiting for years for that word, or person or sign of hope that would give new meaning to their lives. One day they found it. Sometimes it was found through simple things: a forgiving word, a friendly smile, a first commitment offered to them and accepted. Then they understood that this was the way to gain all they were waiting for, and they entered the kingdom happily.

The parable says: *he buries it again*. Ordinarily it is God who hides the treasure again after having shown it to us, for it will be really ours when we have worked for it and persevered.

of exceptional quality, he goes away, sells everything he has and buys it.

• ⁴⁷ Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a big fishing net, let down into the sea, in which every kind of fish has been caught. ⁴⁸ When the net is full, it is dragged ashore. Then they sit down and gather the good fish into buckets, but throw the bad away. ⁴⁹ That is how it will be at the end of time; the angels will go out to separate the wicked from

the just, ⁵⁰ and to throw the wicked into the blazing furnace, where they will weep and gnash their teeth.” ^{13:42}

⁵¹ Jesus asked, “Have you understood all these things?” “Yes,” they answered. ⁵² So he said to them, “Therefore, every teacher of the law, who becomes a disciple of the kingdom of heaven, is like a householder, who can produce from his store things both new and old.”

Everything must be sold. We have to divest ourselves of all those habits, pleasures... that occupy our hearts without filling them. When trials come upon us like a frosty, icy night, we should not forget the treasure we have once seen, until we recover it. Plato, the great pagan philosopher, said, “It is during the night that it is beautiful to believe in the light.”

“The pearl” is, in a certain sense, Christ himself. He alone gives meaning to all the sacrifices of a Christian life. These are not really “sacrifices,” but the search for a love that has already been proven.

EVIL IN THE CHURCH

• 47. The Church has given the kingdom to those who entered, but some of them belong to the visible family of the chosen ones, without having the spirit of the kingdom.

By speaking of the net, Jesus reminds us that the first activity of the Church must be mission: “to catch people.” Many of them surely will not persevere, but a Church that closes itself would die.

How we would like to have a perfect Church made of upright persons, in which each one would discover the gifts of God! Christ, however, did not want a Church like that, nor is that the way for the Church to save the world.

HELL

They will throw the wicked into the blazing furnace (v. 49). This affirmation which we have already seen (v. 30) only confirms what the whole Scripture says: we shall be judged and the plenitude of life offered to those who will be “in” God will have as counterpart the despairing lot of those who have refused life.

The Church has always spoken, according to the terms of the Scriptures, of an eternal hell. She has also adopted towards the twelfth century the word “purgatory” to designate the painful purification the saved will experience, unless they have already known on earth the terrible burning of the pure love of God.

The affirmation of purgatory shocks those who have not experienced divine holiness which is never without a burning of everything that be-

longs to us; have they ever really pondered what “becoming God in God” exacts of us? Hell does not hurt less. We know, of course, that fire is only a figure of speech and we should not interpret it as a vengeance of God: it is the “damned” who are unable to renounce the harrowing solitude in which they have enclosed themselves; it is at the same time their enjoyment and their torture. However, we no longer accept the idea of pain that has no end and we readily support this with philosophic argument.

Certainly Jesus spoke the language of his time, not ours. This division of the world into good and bad was present in every culture. It is also certain that Jesus had deep and true knowledge of God and human beings. Had he found in this punishment something contrary to the infinite goodness of God he would have said so without any concern of scandal. He has spoken as he did because the infinite love of God does not take away our freedom to escape him and defy him.

However it is to be noted that Jesus does not only speak of condemnation for some horrible crimes: loss or salvation is an option for all. We must also recognize that he does not speak according to our categories of hell and purgatory: Hell (Mt 5:22; 10:28), or fire (Mk 9:42) are imprecise terms that can designate both at the same time. The “fire of hell” is said to be “eternal” in several places (Mk 9:47; Mt 18:8; Mt 25:41), but this word has not exactly the meaning we give it: it could be something that goes beyond our experience of time.

We can then ask questions, but we must also question ourselves on two matters. Firstly, to speak of what God should or should not do is rather like asking him to be just. But “justice” is not something that exists in itself: it is only an aspect of the mystery of God. What do we know of his mystery? Then let us not teach him justice. We must also reply to this question: if Jesus wanted to say that certain people go to unending suffering, how must he say it in order that we may not doubt it?

The mystery remains. If we understood to what God invites us—and for an eternity in its truest sense, and that life is unique and that here

• ⁵³When Jesus had finished these parables, he left that place. ⁵⁴He went to his hometown and taught the people in their synagogue. They were amazed and said, “Where did he get this wisdom and these special powers? ⁵⁵Isn’t he the carpenter’s son? Isn’t Mary his mother and aren’t James, Joseph, Simon and Judas his brothers? ⁵⁶Aren’t all his sisters living here? Where did he get all these things?” ⁵⁷And so they took offense at him.

Jesus said to them, “The only place where prophets are not welcome is his hometown and in his own family.” ⁵⁸And he did not perform many miracles there because of their lack of faith.

John the Baptist beheaded

(Mk 6:14; Lk 9:7)

14 • ¹At that time, the reports about Jesus reached king Herod. ²And he said to his servants, “This man is John the Baptist. John has risen from the dead, and that is why miraculous powers are at work in John.”

³Herod had, in fact, ordered that John be arrested, bound in chains and put in prison, because of Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip. ⁴For John had said to Herod, “It is not right for

you to have her as your wife.” ⁵Herod wanted to kill him but he did not dare, because he feared the people, who regarded John as a prophet.

⁶On Herod’s birthday the daughter of Herodias danced among the guests; she so delighted Herod ⁷that he promised under oath to give her anything she asked for. ⁸The girl, following the advice of her mother, said, “Give me the head of John the Baptist, here, on a dish.”

⁹The king was very displeased, but because he had made his promise under oath, in the presence of his guests, he ordered it to be given to her. ¹⁰So he had John beheaded in prison, ¹¹and his head brought on a dish and given to the girl. The girl then took it to her mother.

¹²Then John’s disciples came, took his body and buried it. Then they went and told Jesus.

First miracle of the loaves

(Mk 6:32; Jn 6)

• ¹³When Jesus hear of it, he set out by boat for a secluded place, to be alone. But the people heard of it, and they followed him on foot from their towns. ¹⁴When Jesus went ashore, he saw the crowd gathered there, and he had compassion on them. And he healed their sick.

below we shall give our response and finally give birth to our eternity—are there words too strong for someone who has lost everything?

• 53. Compare with Luke 4:14. See commentary on Mark 3:31.

• 14.1 For Chapters 14 and 15 see commentaries on Mark 6 and 7.

It would seem that this series of narratives that occupy Chapters 14 and 15 and the beginning of Chapter 16 formed a collection dating from the first years of the Church; an identical collection is found in Mark and a part in Luke. As in all these texts that have been passed on orally over a time, there were general ideas and keywords that helped them to be linked to each

other. Here bread must have been one of the common themes.

Do not forget that bread was by far the main food and *to eat bread* signified to have a meal (15:2).

On the other hand there were few needs besides food and clothing, so religion gave much importance to everything related to food and cooking. That explains the questions presented in these chapters and the answers given by Jesus. Even the *bread from the children* (15:26) gave the opportunity to complete the teaching about the Eucharist that was drawn from the two miracles of the loaves.

• 13. See commentary on Mark 6:35 and John 6.

Mk 6:1-6;
Lk 4:
16-24;
Jn 7:15

Lk 3:23;
Jn 6:42

Jn 4:44

Mk 6:
14-29;
Lk 9:7-9
16:14

Lk 3:
19-20

Lev
18:16;
20:21

Mk 6:
32-44;
Jn 6:
1-13;
Mt 15:
32-38

9:36

¹⁵Late in the afternoon, his disciples came to him and said, “We are in a lonely place and it is now late. You should send these people away, so that they can go to the villages and buy something for themselves to eat.”

¹⁶But Jesus replied, “They do not need to go away; you give them something to eat.” ¹⁷They answered, “We have nothing here but five loaves and two fishes.” ¹⁸Jesus said to them, “Bring them here to me.”

¹⁹Then he made everyone sit down on the grass. He took the five loaves and the two fishes, raised his eyes to heaven, pronounced the blessing, broke the loaves, and handed them to the disciples to distribute to the people. ²⁰And they all ate, and everyone had enough; then the disciples gathered up the leftovers, filling twelve baskets. ²¹About five thousand men had eaten there, besides women and children.

Jesus walks on the water

(Mk 6:45; Jn 6:16)

• ²²Immediately, Jesus obliged his disciples to get into the boat and go ahead of him to the other side, while he sent the crowd away.

²³And having sent the people away, he went up the mountain by himself, to pray. At nightfall, he was there alone. ²⁴Meanwhile, the boat was very far from land, dangerously rocked by the waves, for the wind was against it.

²⁵At daybreak, Jesus came to them, walking on the sea. ²⁶When they saw

him walking on the sea, they were terrified, thinking that it was a ghost. And they cried out in fear. ²⁷But at once, Jesus said to them, “Courage! Don’t be afraid. It’s me!” ²⁸Peter answered, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.”

²⁹Jesus said to him, “Come!” And Peter got out of the boat, and walked on the water to go to Jesus. ³⁰But seeing the strong wind, he was afraid, and began to sink; and he cried out, “Lord, save me!” ³¹Jesus immediately stretched out his hand and took hold of him, saying, “Man of little faith, why did you doubt?”

³²As they got into the boat, the wind dropped. ³³Then those in the boat bowed down before Jesus, saying, “Truly, you are the Son of God!”

³⁴They came ashore at Gennesaret. ³⁵The local people recognized Jesus and spread the news throughout the region. So they brought to him all the sick people, ³⁶begging him to let them touch just the hem of his cloak. All who touched it became perfectly well.

God’s command and human tradition

(Mk 7:1)

15 • ¹Then, some Pharisees, and teachers of the law, who had come from Jerusalem, gathered around Jesus. And they said to him, ²“Why don’t your disciples follow the tradition of the elders? For they, they don’t wash their hands before eating.”

³Jesus answered, “And you, why do you break God’s command for the

- 22. See commentary on Mark 6:45.

They were terrified (v. 26): thinking that it was a ghost. The apostles shared the same fears and superstitions that their kinsfolk had. Only in time would they reach mature faith which drives away these paralyzing beliefs.

Command me to come to you (v. 28). Matthew is not interested in emphasizing Peter’s doubt, but his faith. Peter alone dared to attempt something that seemed to be reserved for Jesus, and after joining his companions again in the

boat he was, though soaked, the happiest of them all.

Man of little faith (v. 31). Once more Jesus’ reproaches are addressed to his best disciples (as in 6:30; 8:26; 16:8; 17:20)—in order to convince future disciples, like us, that much is still lacking in our faith.

- 15.1 See commentary on Mark 7:1.

They don’t wash their hands (v. 2). The Pharisees upheld something that is excellent

Jn
11:41;
17:1

2K 4:43

Mk 6:
45-52;
Jn 6:
15-21

Lk 6:12;
9:28

Lk 24:37

Jn 21:7

8:25-26

Mk 4:39

16:16;

26:63;

27:54;

Mk 14:61;

15:39;

Lk 22:70;

Jn 1:49

Mk 7:
1-13

Gal
1:14;
Col 2:8;
Lk 11:38

sake of your traditions? ⁴For God commanded: *Do your duty to your father and your mother, and: Whoever curses his father or his mother is to be put to death.* ⁵But you say, that anyone may say to his father or mother, ‘What you could have expected from me, is given to God.’ ⁶In this case, according to you, a person is freed from his duty to his father and mother. And so, you have nullified the command of God for the sake of your traditions.

⁷Hypocrites! Isaiah rightly prophesied of you when he said: ⁸*This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.* ⁹*The worship they offer me is worthless, for they only teach human rules.*

Washing hands and cleanness of heart
(Mk 7:14; Lk 6:39)

• ¹⁰Jesus then called the people to him, and said to them, “Listen and understand: ¹¹What enters into the mouth does not make a person unclean. What defiles a person is what comes out of his mouth.”

¹²After a while the disciples gathered around Jesus and said, “Do you know that the Pharisees were offended by what you said?” ¹³Jesus answered, “Every plant which my heavenly Father has not planted shall be uprooted. ¹⁴Pay no attention to them! They are blind, leading

the blind. When a blind person leads another, the two will fall into a pit.”

¹⁵Peter said to him, “Explain this parable to us.” ¹⁶Jesus replied, “So even you, too, are dull? ¹⁷Do you not see, that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach, and then out of the body? ¹⁸But what comes out of the mouth comes from the heart, and that is what makes a person unclean.

¹⁹Indeed, it is from the heart that evil desires come: murder, adultery, immorality, theft, lies, slander. ²⁰These are the things that make a person unclean; but eating without washing the hands does not make a person unclean.”

The faith of the Canaanite woman
(Mk 7: 24)

²¹Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon.

²²A Canaanite woman from the area, came and cried out, “Lord, Son of David, have pity on me! My daughter is tormented by a demon.” ²³But Jesus did not answer her, not even a word. So his disciples approached him and said, “Send her away! See how she is shouting after us.”

²⁴Then Jesus said to her, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the nation of Israel.”

²⁵But the woman was already kneeling before Jesus, and said, “Sir, help me!” ²⁶Jesus answered, “It is not

and which we ourselves practice. Jesus’ vision, however, goes further: all these good customs and religious practices (feasts and meditations included) easily become a smoke screen, hiding the essential from us: a constant readiness to listen to God’s call, a simple trust in his mercy which alone can save us.

- 10. See commentary on Mark 7:14.

Using only human criteria, human societies are not able to distinguish good from evil.

For the Jewish people, the worship of God was everything and they felt very much concerned about exactly who and what things were

worthy of being part of this worship. Thus they made a distinction between the clean and the unclean. Jesus shows that true purity is that of *the heart*.

It could be that the code for correct behavior in our society and its numerous goodwill institutions be just a modern way of distinguishing the pure and the impure. In the Church itself, in past centuries, there has been a tendency to attribute to sacred ministers a “purity” that reserved to them the handling of sacred things. It is one of the reasons why in the Middle Ages Communion was not given in the hand, as had been the custom for over ten centuries.

20:12;
Dt 5:16;
21:17;
Lev20:9;
Eph 6:2

Is 29:13;
Ps78:36

Mk 7:
14-23

23:16;
Lk 6:39;
Rom
2:19

1Col
5:10;
6:9;
Eph 5:3;
Col 3:5;
1Tim1:5;
2Tim3:2;
Rev21:8;
22:15

Mk
7:24-30

9:27;
20:30;
Mk10:47

right to take the bread from the children and throw it to puppies.”²⁷ The woman replied, “That is true, sir, but even puppies eat the crumbs which fall from their master’s table.”²⁸ Then Jesus said, “Woman, how great is your faith! Let it be as you wish.” And her daughter was healed at that moment.

Second miracle of the loaves

(Mk 7:31)

•²⁹ From there, Jesus went to the shore of Lake Galilee, and then went up into the hills, where he sat down.³⁰ Great crowds came to him, bringing the dumb, the blind, the lame, the crippled, and many with other infirmities. People carried them to the feet of Jesus, and he healed them.³¹ All were astonished when they saw the dumb speaking, the lame walking, the crippled healed, and the blind able to see; and they glorified the God of Israel.

³² Jesus called his disciples and said to them, “I am filled with compassion for these people; they have already followed me for three days and now have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them away fasting, or

they may faint on the way.”³³ His disciples said to him, “And where shall we find enough bread in this wilderness to feed such a crowd?”³⁴ Jesus said to them, “How many loaves do you have?” They answered, “Seven, and a few small fish.”

³⁵ Jesus ordered the people to sit on the ground.³⁶ Then, he took the seven loaves and the small fish, and gave thanks to God. He broke them and gave them to his disciples, who distributed them to the people.

³⁷ They all ate and were satisfied, and the leftover pieces filled seven wicker baskets.³⁸ Four thousand men had eaten, besides women and children.³⁹ Then Jesus sent the crowd away, got into the boat and went to Magdala.

The Pharisees ask for a sign

(Mk 8:11; Lk 11:16; 12:54)

16 •¹ The Pharisees and Sadducees appeared. They wanted to put Jesus to the test and asked him for some heavenly sign.

² Jesus answered, “(When evening comes, you say, ‘It will be a good day, for the sky is red.’³ And in the morning

Mk 8:
11-13;
Lk 11:
16, 29;
Mt 12:
38-39;
Lk 11:16;
Jn 6:30;
1 Col
1:22

Lk 12:
54-56

• 29. On two occasions Jesus multiplied bread. It is one of his miracles that most impresses us.

The word “miracle” is often devalued. Scripture uses different words to denote what clearly appears as an act of God: sign, wonder, work of power. Miracle in its full meaning is all that at the same time: a sign by which God makes us discover his will or the invisible order of the world, a wonder that disconcerts our limited vision, a work which God alone is capable of doing.

The multiplication of loaves is the kind of miracle which most shocks our contemporaries and their absolute faith in the “laws of nature” that God himself would not have the power to surpass, or which he could not ignore without contradicting himself. Many do not openly deny the testimony of the apostles, but they avoid taking any stand and say for example: “The miracle is still more beautiful if we imagine that Jesus merely invited the people to share their individual snacks, so that finally there was enough for everyone: a miracle of solidarity!”

Here the Gospel is not praising solidarity: it wishes rather to celebrate the absolute freedom of God and of Christ: nature itself must be silent, because here the dead are raised to life. For a Christian, creation is not a huge machine that God has passed on to people as he abdicated; it is a reflection of God where the laws—shadows of the wisdom, the order and the justice that are in God—never exclude his freedom.

Throughout all Christian history the Lord has multiplied and continues to multiply bread, items of food and even canned food for those who have given everything or risked all for him: many are able to witness to this.

• 16.1 They wanted to put Jesus to the test and asked him for some heavenly sign. They want a miracle that will undoubtedly be the work of God.

No sign will be given them (v. 4). Jesus refuses to prove his authority by multiplying miracles. People who love truth and seek what is right will recognize the seal of God in the deeds of

you say, 'Stormy weather today, for the sky in the east is red.' If you know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, why can't you interpret the signs of the times?)⁴ An evil and unbelieving people want a sign, but no sign will be given them, except the sign of Jonah."

And Jesus left them and went away.

• ⁵When the disciples went to the other side, they forgot to take bread.

⁶Jesus said to them, "Pay attention, and beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees." ⁷But the disciples said to one another, "He means, the bread we did not bring."

⁸Aware of this, Jesus said to them, so he said to them, "You of little faith! Why are you arguing among yourselves about having no bread? ⁹Do you still not understand? Do you not remember the five loaves, for the five thousand; and how many baskets you

took up?¹⁰ Or the seven loaves for the four thousand, and how many wicker baskets you took up?"

¹¹How can you not understand, that I was not talking about bread, when I said to you: Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees?"

¹²Then they understood, that he was not talking about yeast for bread, but about the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

Peter's faith; Jesus' promises

(Mk 8:27; Lk 9:18; Jn 6:69)

• ¹³After that, Jesus came to Caesarea Philippi. He asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" ¹⁴They said, "For some of them, you are John the Baptist; for others Elijah, or Jeremiah, or one of the prophets."

¹⁵Jesus asked them, "But you, who do you say I am?" ¹⁶Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." ¹⁷Jesus replied, "It is well

Jesus—and of his followers—no matter how many speak ill of them.

The sign of Jonah is the resurrection of Jesus (see 12:40). Yet this resurrection that is the most decisive sign, will be understandable only to the believers. Thus people who demand miracles before they will believe, receive no answer.

Verses 2-4: the sentences we put in parenthesis are lacking in the oldest manuscripts.

• 5. The Gospel has kept very little of all that would have been exchanged between Jesus and his apostles over the long months of their life together. How fortunate that at least they recorded here one of the many stupid things uttered in his presence! If they misunderstood his warning, it was that they were very much worried about those "necessary" things that it would be better to leave in the hands of God.

Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees (v. 6). See commentary on Mark 8:11.

Very often the Gospel associates these two names. We have already seen that the Sadducees were the party of the chief priests. They were by family right, responsible for the national and religious life of the people of God. The Pharisees for their part were a party devoted to defending the Law of God. They were enemies of the Sadducees. Let us not say: "They were perverse people." Opposition to Jesus

came quite naturally from the civil and religious authorities of his people. How could God visit his people and be welcomed by the majority of its leaders, if they feel and act as owners of their titles, of their authority, of their own merits?

• 13. One parable of the kingdom of God already foretold the Church (Mt 13:31-33). This present text openly refers to the Church:

- it tells us what its foundation is: faith in Jesus, the Christ and Son of God;
- it focuses on the primacy of Peter among all the apostles;
- it suggests that the Church will always need a visible head. This is the successor of Peter, the pope.

Faith in the Son of God, which Peter, among the apostles is the first to proclaim, really comes from God. This faith is not a human opinion, or a sentimental attachment. It does not come from *flesh and blood*, an expression that for the Jews meant what is purely human, what a human being does and understands by his own capacity. The words with which Jesus greets Peter, *it is well for you Simon Barjona*, are true for all the believers. For it is *the Father* who has chosen us and has brought us to Christ: see John 6:37; 6:44.

Next, the primacy of Peter is emphasized. His name was Simon, but Jesus gave him this

Mk 8:
14-21;
Lk 12:1

Mk 8:
27-30;
Lk 9:
18-21

for you, Simon Barjona, for it is not flesh or blood that has revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven.

¹⁸And now I say to you: You are Peter; and on this Rock I will build my Church; and never will the powers of death overcome it.

18:18;
Rev 3:7

¹⁹I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven: whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you unbind on earth shall be unbound in heaven.”

17:9;
Mk 9:9

²⁰Then he ordered his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Christ.

Jesus predicts his death

(Mk 8:31; Lk 9:22; 12:9; 14:27)

• ²¹From that day, Jesus began to make it clear to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem; that he would suffer many things from the Jewish authorities, the chief priests and the teachers of the law; and that he would be killed and be raised on the third day.

Mk 8:
31-33;
Lk 9:22;
Mt 17:12;
20:17-
19;
Lk 2:38

²²Then Peter took him aside and began to reproach him, “Never, Lord! No, this must never happen to you!”

²³But he turned and said to Peter, “Get

surname of Rock, foreseeing that he would be for his Church a foundation rock (Jn 1:40). This change of his name attests that a mission is given to him as happened to Abraham and Jacob (Gen 17:5 and 32:19). Other texts attest to the leadership and faith of Peter: Matthew 10:2; 14:28; 17:25; Luke 5:8-10; 22:32; John 6:68; 21:15-19.

Is what Jesus tells Peter true also of his successors? No one can deny that even in the Old Testament God wanted his people to have a visible head. Jerusalem and the nation had as their center the temple and the kings, sons of David. When God chose David, the first king of Israel, he promised him that his sons would rule the kingdom of God forever: this promise was fulfilled in Christ. Now Jesus chooses Peter to be forever the visible foundation of the building. In the future his successors will be for the Church, what Peter was in the early Church.

For the Jews, to bind and to unbind (v. 19) meant to state what is forbidden and what is allowed. So Peter and his successors will have the last word about what is, or is not, the faith of the Church. The history of the primitive Church shows that already in the first centuries the local churches were conscious of the supreme authority of the bishop of Rome, successor of Peter. His role could not but develop in the course of history, which was all the more necessary because of the growing tensions between Christians, and diverse continents and cultures endlessly divided in their religious expressions. In spite of the fact that as humans Peter's successors can commit mistakes, Christ does not ignore what they ultimately decide on: *whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven* (v. 19).

The recognition of this mission of Peter's successor, however, does not mean that his word drowns all other voices in a silent Church, or that his authority justifies a structure that might crush life.

This text does not contradict other statements

of the Gospel that are equally important, where the basis of the Church is a “college” of apostles, where nothing is done without dialogue. Peter is the “door keeper” (Mk 13:34) but he is neither “Master” nor “Father” (Mt 23:9).

His authority is only genuine in a Church where all have the right to express themselves, where the leaders are not only imposed, but also accepted.

The powers of death (v. 18). The text says “the gates of Hades.” “Gates” here signifies “Power”; as for Hades, it designates the netherworld, the world of the dead and demonic powers. Even if deathly strength tried to crush the Church, or sow there the seed of corruption it would not be prevented from accomplishing its mission of salvation. A part of Revelation (Rev 12-17) depicts such a confrontation.

The fact that Peter is the foundation of the Church does not contradict other verses that say that its basis is the Twelve apostles (Eph 2:20 and Rev 21:14). They also receive the power to bind or loose in John 20:21, but in this case it refers clearly to the forgiveness of sins.

Upon reading the narratives in Mark 8:27 and Lk 9:18, some questions regarding Peter's faith arise: see commentary on Luke 9:18.

Jesus, Rock and Foundation: Mark 12:10; 1 Corinthians 3:11; 1 Peter 2:6.

- 21. See commentary on Mark 8:31.

Get behind me, Satan... (v. 23). When Peter stands in front of Jesus to block the way to the cross, Jesus recognizes in his words the same spirit that tempted him in the desert. Jesus calls him Satan, meaning tempter. Let Peter get behind Jesus and follow him as is proper for a disciple.

Whoever chooses to save his life will lose it (v. 25). Jesus draws attention to the great option of every human life: we cannot discover God; we cannot make a success of life without sacrificing it. All the rest is idle talk. The option terrifies us in the same measure that life for us

behind me, Satan! You are an obstacle in my path. You are thinking not as God does, but as people do.”

Mk 6:34-9:1; Lk 9:23-27; 10:38; Mk 8:35; Lk 14:25; 17:33; Jn 12:25; 4:8
 24 Then Jesus said to his disciples, “If you want to follow me, deny yourself. Take up your cross and follow me. 25 For whoever chooses to save his life will lose it, but the one who loses his life, for my sake, will find it. 26 What will one gain by winning the whole world, if he destroys his soul? Or what can a person give, in exchange for his life?”

25:31-46; 2Thes 1:7; Ps 28:4; 62:13; Rev 22:12; 10:23; 20:21
 27 Know, that the Son of Man will come, in the glory of his Father with the holy angels, and he will reward each one according to his deeds. 28 Truly, I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death, before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.”

The transfiguration of Jesus

(Mk 9:2; Lk 9:28)

Mk 9:2-8; Lk 9:28-36; 2P 1:16-18; Mt 4:8; 28:3
17 • 1 Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James, and his brother John, and led them up a high mountain, where they were alone. 2 Jesus’ appearance was changed before them: his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as snow. 3 Then suddenly, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Jesus.

4 Peter spoke up and said to Jesus, “Master, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will make three tents: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.”

40:35; Mt 24:30; Dt 18:15; Is 42:1; Mt 12:18; Mk 1:11
 5 Peter was still speaking, when a bright cloud covered them with its shadow; and a voice from the cloud

said, “This is my Son, the Beloved, my Chosen One. Listen to him.”

6 On hearing the voice, the disciples fell to the ground, full of fear. 7 But Jesus came, touched them, and said, “Stand up, do not be afraid!” 8 When they raised their eyes, they no longer saw anyone except Jesus. 9 And as they came down the mountain, Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone what they had seen, until the Son of Man be raised from the dead.

10 The disciples asked him, “Why do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first?” 11 Jesus answered, “So it is: first comes Elijah; and he will restore all things. 12 But I tell you, Elijah has already come; and they did not recognize him; and they treated him as they pleased. And they will also make the Son of Man suffer.”

13 Then the disciples understood that Jesus was referring to John the Baptist.

Jesus heals an epileptic boy

(Mk 9:14; Lk 9:37)

• 14 When they came to the crowd, a man approached Jesus, knelt before him and said, 15 “Sir, have pity on my son, who is an epileptic and suffers terribly. He has often fallen into the fire, and at other times into the water. 16 I brought him to your disciples but they could not heal him.”

17 Jesus replied, “O you people, faithless and misled! How long must I be with you? How long must I put up with you? Bring him here to me.”

18 And Jesus commanded the evil spirit to leave the boy, and the boy was immediately healed.

seems promising. It is also the reason why marriage and family frighten many.

Christian freedom and happiness are found only in the joyous acceptance of the will of God which invites us to listen to his Son and follow him down the road and paths that he traveled.

• 17.1 See commentaries on Mark 9:2 and Luke 9:28.

• 14. See commentary on Mark 9:14. Verse 21 is lacking in many old texts: compare with Mark 8:28-29.

¹⁹Later, the disciples approached Jesus and asked him privately, "Why couldn't we drive out the spirit?"

Mk 11:
22-23;
Lk 17:6;
Mt
21:21;
1Col
13:2

²⁰Jesus said to them, "Because you have little faith. I say to you: if only you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you could tell that mountain to move from here to there, and the mountain would obey. Nothing would be impossible for you. ²¹(Only prayer and fasting can drive out this kind of spirit.)"

Mk 9:
30-32;
Lk 9:
44-45

• ²²While Jesus was in Galilee with the Twelve, he said to them, "The Son of Man will be delivered into the hands of men, ²³and they will kill him. But he will rise on the third day." The Twelve were deeply grieved.

16:21;
17:12;
20:17-
19

The temple tax

30:13

• ²⁴When they returned to Capernaum, the temple tax collectors came to Peter and asked him, "Does your master pay the temple tax?" ²⁵He answered, "Yes."

• 22. Several times Jesus announced his death: see 16:21; 20:17. Never did he present it as a misfortune that might counteract his mission. John will say that Jesus looked for it as the means for giving glory to his Father and reconciling humankind (Jn 17). Jesus speaks of himself in the third person: *the Son of Man*, because he looks at his destiny as an outsider. This is the will of his Father, and he is not concerned about himself.

• 24. All the Jews paid a tax for the maintenance of the temple.

The collectors approach Peter as owner of the house where Jesus also lives.

Jesus observes the law, but takes this opportunity to give a hint as to who he is: the collectors do not realize they are addressing "the Son." Notice how the Lord has control over all creatures even fish, and see also his intimate solidarity with Peter.

The coin mentioned in 27 was worth the temple tax. Matthew may have had a special interest for this story because at the time he wrote Christians of Jewish origins were wondering whether they should be still paying this tax.

• **18.1** Here we have the beginning of the fourth discourse of Matthew's Gospel, not very

Peter then entered the house; and immediately, Jesus asked him, "What do you think, Simon? Who pay taxes or tribute to the kings of the earth: their sons or strangers and aliens?"

²⁶Peter replied, "Strangers and aliens." And Jesus told him, "The sons, then, are tax-free. ²⁷But, so as not to offend these people, go to the sea, throw in a hook, and open the mouth of the first fish you catch. You will find a coin in it. Take the coin and give it to them for you and for me."

Who is the greatest? Scandals

18 • ¹At that time, the disciples came to Jesus and asked him, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"

Mk 9:
30-32;
Lk 9:
46-47;
22:24-
26

²Then Jesus called a little child, set the child in the midst of the disciples, ³and said, "I assure you, that, unless you change, and become like little children, you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven. ⁴Whoever becomes humble, like this child, is the greatest in

19:13-
14;
20:26;
Mk10:15;
Lk18:17;
Jn 3:5

20:26

consonant but centered on the life of the community. Those who say "Our Father" are not isolated. In place of the nation of Israel, Jesus offers them his Church, which is first of all community of communities.

6-11: concern for the *little ones*;

12-14: care for those who have strayed;

15-20: a fraternal community in the presence of Christ;

21-35: a community of pardon.

For the commentary on verses 1-5 see Mark 9:33.

THE LITTLE ONES

With verse 5 we pass from the *children* to the *little ones*, that is, simple people (*such a child* refers perhaps to the lowly one). They are little, because they do not count for much in society.

Woe to the one who causes a scandal (v. 7). Must we recall the real meaning of the word "scandal"? "*Scandalon*" in Greek is the little pebble that when unnoticed causes a fall: scandal is not something that makes noise or causes a stir in society but which leads consciences astray and causes those who seemed honest to fall.

Jesus then speaks (v. 7) of the harm caused by social pressures. Many times the little ones strive to raise their standard of living and

10:40; Mk 9:37; Lk 9:48; 10:16; Jn 13:20 the kingdom of heaven,⁵ and whoever receives such a child, in my name, receives me.

Mk 9:42; Lk 17:1-2; Mt 5:29 ⁶If any of you should cause one of these little ones, who believe in me, to stumble and fall, it would be better for him to be thrown into the depths of the sea with a great millstone around his neck.

⁷Woe to the world, because of so many scandals! Scandals necessarily come, but woe to the one who causes a scandal.

5:29-30; Mk 9:43-47 ⁸If your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life without a hand or a foot, than to be thrown into the eternal fire with two hands and two feet. ⁹And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye, than to be thrown into the fire of hell with two eyes.

Acts 12:15; Heb 1:14 ¹⁰See that you do not despise any

of these little ones; for I tell you, their angels in heaven continually see the face of my heavenly Father.

¹¹(The Son of Man has come to save the lost). Lk 19:10

• ¹²What do you think of this? If someone has a hundred sheep and one of them strays, won't he leave the ninety-nine on the hillside, and go to look for the stray one? ¹³And I tell you, when he finally finds it, he is more pleased about it, than about the ninety-nine that did not go astray. ¹⁴It is the same with your Father in heaven. Your Father in heaven doesn't want even one of these little ones to perish.

Living together in the Church

(Lk 17:3)

• ¹⁵If your brother has sinned against you, go and point out the fault to him, when the two of you are alone; and if he listens to you, you have won back Lk 17:3

become more self-reliant, better educated and able to earn more. Often enough, society puts obstacles in the way of anyone who does not want to play dirty and who refuses to imitate the lifestyle of selfish persons. Because of this, the *little ones* will have to give up, to accept failure, to *lose an eye* before losing the most important thing, which is to live in the sight of God.

It is better for you to enter life without a hand or a foot (v. 8). Jesus stresses the incomparable value of eternal life. At times, to gain the kingdom we will have to sacrifice even our job, our security and our life.

Woe to the one who causes a scandal (v. 7). Sometimes it is an individual who leads others to sin; at other times it is society itself with its corruption, violence and unjust social structures. Jesus invites us to be aware of sin, personal and social: the bad structures will be destroyed, no matter how, by tears and blood (Lk 23:28).

Scandals necessarily come. Jesus lived in a world of violence, but apparently he did not complain about the situation. He did not encourage us to dream of paradise on earth. While some Christian communities aspire to be a flock of sheep meekly surrounding their shepherd, Jesus has a different vision of Christian life.

The real world, the one God is saving, was not created to be an oasis of happiness, but a place where free persons grow through their struggles. Scandals are part and parcel of this

world, but the power of evil does not diminish in any way the glory that God will receive in the end. Through suffering and hunger for justice God will awaken love and make it grow.

Verse 10: See commentary on Daniel 12:6.

• 12. The parable of the *one hundred sheep* is also found in the Gospel of Luke (15:1). It teaches us several things: Jesus' special concern for sinners and those who stray and, therefore, the missionary dimension of his apostolate. In fact, Jesus came "to seek and save the lost" (Lk 19:10), "I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners" (Mt 9:13). This attitude should impel our parishes and Christian communities to constantly reach out to the unchurched and marginalized, instead of just working with those who already are in touch with the Church.

• 15. *If your brother has sinned...* Jesus had told Peter before: Whatever you tie on earth will be tied in Heaven. He declares it now for the whole Church. The believers must attempt to settle their suits among themselves, knowing that Christ is among them, as signified in his name Emmanuel: God-with-us.

The text of 18:15 is doubtful. Perhaps it was written *if your brother or sister has sinned, go ...* in which case it would refer to the effort of the Christian community to correct one who has gone astray.

Lev 19:17; Dt 19:15; Jn 8:17; 2Col 13:1; 1Tim 5:19
 1Col 5:11; Tit 3:10
 your brother. ¹⁶If he doesn't listen to you, take with you one or two others, so that the case may be decided by the evidence of two or three witnesses. ¹⁷And if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the assembled Church. But if he does not listen to the Church, then regard him as a pagan, or a tax collector.

16:19
¹⁸I say to you: whatever you bind on earth, heaven will keep bound; and whatever you unbind on earth, heaven will keep unbound.

7:7; 21:22; Mk 11:24; Jn 15:7
 28:20; Jn 14:23
¹⁹In like manner, I say to you, if, on earth, two of you agree in asking for anything, it will be granted to you by my heavenly Father; ²⁰for where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there, among them."

Lk 17:4; Mt 6:12
 • ²¹Then Peter asked him, "Lord, how many times must I forgive the offenses of my brother or sister? Seven times?" ²²Jesus answered, "No, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.

The unmerciful servant

• ²³This story throws light on the kingdom of Heaven: A king decided to settle accounts with his servants. ²⁴Among the first of them was one who owed him ten thousand pieces of gold. ²⁵As the man could not repay the debt, the king commanded that he be sold as a slave with his wife, his children and all his goods, as repayment.

²⁶The servant threw himself at the feet of the king and said, 'Give me time, and I will pay you back everything.' ²⁷The king took pity on him, and not only set him free, but even canceled his debt.

²⁸When this servant left the king's presence, he met one of his fellow servants, who owed him a hundred pieces of silver. He grabbed him by the throat and almost choked him, shouting, 'Pay me what you owe!' ²⁹His fellow servant threw himself at his feet and begged him, 'Give me time, and

Gathered in the name of Jesus (v. 20). The prayer of the community, of the apostolic group, of the Christian couple.

Have we noticed that this chapter on the Church is so short? Yet Matthew is the one who is most concerned about the Church of Jesus, whether in the parables of the kingdom or in Peter's profession of faith.

Jesus does not seem to have said anything whatsoever to his apostles about structures that would emerge (or even disappear): nothing but a community spirit. Welcome for the poor and lowly, never-ending forgiveness and acceptance of others, prayer of a community that has apostolic ambitions and cries to God to give what is asked of him; there we have the sum total of the wisdom and means the Church has in order to confront all that challenges its evangelization.

While we participate in the common activities, overcoming unavoidable conflicts, and persevering in apostolic work, we grow as children of God in truth, thus knowing the Father in truth. The Church, therefore, is that sacred place where we find God, and to express this reality we say that the Church is "the sacrament of God."

We also speak of several "sacraments": Baptism, Eucharist... Some people want to receive the sacraments without having any commitment

to the Church; they forget that religious rites confer the grace of God because they are gestures of the Church, which is "the" sacrament of God. God is not contained inside things, but rather reveals himself through the family of Christ, where he wants us to find him: *Whatever you tie on earth...* Our faithfulness within the Christian community, even if we have to dissent from it, is a sign that we are in the grace of God.

• 21. *Seventy-seven times*. Compare with Genesis 4:24. Forgiveness must replace the thirst for revenge.

This is about the forgiveness of one who returns repentant: see Luke 17:1.

• 23. THE PARDON

The offenses we suffer from our *companions* are nothing compared with our offenses against God. While God *forgives all*, we do not even give others enough breathing space. God does not demand his rights, but we, in demanding them, behave like *wicked servants* (see Mt 5:43).

This parable goes beyond personal problems. The world needs, above everything else, the forgiveness of God, and those who want a more just society will not achieve it through accusations and hatred.

I will pay everything.’³⁰ But the other did not agree, and sent him to prison until he had paid all his debt.

³¹ Now the servants of the king saw what had happened. They were extremely upset, and so they went and reported everything to their lord.

³² Then the lord summoned his servant and said, ‘Wicked servant, I forgave you all that you owed me when you begged me to do so. ³³ Weren’t you bound to have pity on your fellow servant, as I had pity on you?’ ³⁴ The lord was now angry. He handed the wicked servant over to be punished, until he had paid the whole debt.”

³⁵ Jesus added, “So will my heavenly Father do with you, unless you sincerely forgive your brothers and sisters.”

Jesus speaks about divorce

(Mk 10:2; Mt 5:31; Lk 16:18)

19 • ¹ When Jesus had finished these sayings, he left Galilee and arrived at the border of Judea, on the other side of the Jordan River. ² Large crowds followed him; and there, too, he healed their sick.

³ Some Pharisees approached him. They wanted to test him and asked,

“Is a man allowed to divorce his wife for any reason he wants?”

⁴ Jesus replied, “Have you not read, that, in the beginning, the Creator *made them male and female?* ⁵ And the Creator said: *Therefore, a man shall leave father and mother, and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one body.* ⁶ So, they are no longer two, but one body. Let no one separate what God has joined.”

⁷ They asked him, “Then why did Moses command us to write a bill of dismissal in order to divorce?” ⁸ Jesus replied, “Moses knew the hardness of your hearts, so he allowed you to divorce your wives; but it was not so in the beginning. ⁹ Therefore, I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, unless it be for immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.”

¹⁰ The disciples said, “If that is the condition of a married man, it is better not to marry.” ¹¹ Jesus said to them, “Not everybody can accept what you have just said, but only those who have received this gift. ¹² There are eunuchs born so, from their mother’s womb. Some have been made that way by others. But there are some who have given up the possibility of

5:25;
Lk 12:58

6:15;
Mk 11:25;
Eph 4:32;
Col 3:13

Mk 10: 1-12

16:11;
Lk 11:54;
Jn 8:6

Gen 1:27

Gen 2:24;
Eph 5:31;
1Col 6:16

Dt 24:1

5:32;
Lk 16:18;
1Col 7:10

1Col 7:1;
7:8;
7:32-34

The parable helps us understand much better another verse in the Scriptures: *Revenge is mine, says the Lord; I will pay each one according to his own conduct.* God will not demand an account regarding his own rights, (what we owe him), but regarding the rights of the *little ones* who, unable to pay, were deprived of them. He will also demand an account regarding those who were sorry for their sins but were not forgiven by others.

The fourth discourse of Matthew’s Gospel ends with this parable on the duty to forgive. The Church has not always been as holy as she should have been. Yet nobody can deny that, at all times, in the Church the mercy of God has been preached and people have learned to forgive.

• **19.1** See commentary on Mark 10:2; Matthew 5:31.

Every human society has had its laws on mar-

riage, and it was the same for Israel. There was then a law on divorce, in harmony with the difference of status accorded by society to man and woman; it was in Scripture (Dt 24:1). Jesus does not want to be involved in the discussions of teachers and interpreters of the law: he opposes this law with another word of Scripture which presents God’s point of view regarding human attitudes which he tolerates.

In doing this Jesus shows how he brings the Law to “perfection” (5:17), but clearly this “Law of God” can only be heard by those who have received the Spirit from Jesus, a fact that is emphasized in the reaction of the disciples (v. 10).

Better not to marry (v. 10). Jesus does not apologize for these demanding words. He only proposes something more difficult to understand. He praises those to whom have been given to choose celibacy as a way of life for love of the kingdom.

marriage, for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let the one who can accept it, accept it.”

Jesus and the children

(Mk 10:13; Lk 18:15)

Mk 10: 13-16; Lk 18: 15-17
Lk 9:47; 1P 2:1-2
13 Then little children were brought to Jesus, that he might lay his hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples scolded those who brought them. 14 Jesus then said, “Let the children be! Don’t hinder them from coming to me; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to those who are humble, like these children.” 15 Jesus laid his hands on them and went away.

The rich young man

(Mk 10:17-22; Lk 18:18-23)

Mk 10: 17-22; Lk 18: 18-23; 10:25
Lev 18:5; Lk 10:28
20:12-16; Dt 5: 16-20; Rom 13:9
Lev 19:18
16 It was then, that a young man approached him and asked, “Master, what good work must I do to receive eternal life?” 17 Jesus answered, “Why do you ask me about what is good? One, only, is good. If you want to enter eternal life, keep the commandments.” 18 The young man said, “Which commandments?” Jesus replied, “Do not kill; do not commit adultery; do not steal; do not bear false witness; 19 honor your father and mother. And love your neighbor as yourself.”

6:20; 19:29
20 The young man said to him, “I have kept all these commandments. What do I still lack?” 21 Jesus

answered, “If you wish to be perfect, go, sell all that you possess, and give the money to the poor; and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come back and follow me.” Ps62:11; Mk 14:5; Lk 12:33; Jn 12:5; Acts 2:45; 4:34

22 On hearing this, the young man went away sad, for he was a man of great wealth.

23 Jesus said to his disciples, “Truly I say to you: it will be hard for one who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven. 24 Yes, believe me: it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of the needle than for the one who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven.” Mk 10: 23-27; Lk 18: 24-27

25 On hearing this, the disciples were astonished and said, “Who, then, can be saved?” 26 Jesus looked at them and answered, “For human beings it is impossible, but for God all things are possible.” Lk 13:23; Job 42:2; Gen 18:14; Lk 1:37

27 Then Peter spoke up and said, “You see, we have given up everything to follow you. What, then, will there be for us?” Mk 10: 28-31; Lk 18: 28-30

28 Jesus answered, “You, who have followed me, listen to my words: on the Day of Renewal, when the Son of Man sits on his throne in glory, you, also, will sit, on twelve thrones, to judge the twelve tribes of Israel. Lk 22:30; Wis 3:8; Dn 7:9; Mt 20:21; 1Col 6:2; Rev 3:21

29 As for those who have left houses, brothers, sisters, father, mother, children or property for my Name’s sake, they will receive a hundredfold, and

- 16. See commentary on Mark 10:17.

Jesus faces a question. He discloses three aspects and gives three answers:

One only is good (v. 17). This man has been captivated by the personality of Jesus, and Jesus, as always, directs him to the Father. There is, in fact, a distortion to Christian faith, dangerous as it is subtle: to speak only of Jesus: “Jesus sees you...” “Jesus loves you...” “Jesus is love...” as if we were not living for God. Love of the Father means wanting to be perfect as the Father is and working for his kingdom. First of all it needs to be free, and the rich can only be free through voluntary poverty.

This man also wanted to know how to receive eternal life (the text says in Hebrew style “to

have in heritage”) and Jesus will clearly state at the end, that even if we obey the commandments, we do not “merit” eternal life: salvation is always a gift of God.

Finally there is the question that bothers us most for all that touches money affects us deeply, and it is there that the Gospel shocks us: *it is easier for a camel...* (v. 24).

The call of the rich young man has always been considered the model of the religious, apostolic vocation. Without effective, voluntary poverty a person will never attain union with God that is the goal of the true religious. Besides, as long as the apostles share the life of comfortable people, they will be able to be their friends but they will never have deep conversions nor will

7:13;
8:11-12;
25:10-
12;
Lk 13:30;
Mt 20:16

be given eternal life. ³⁰Many who are now first, will be last, and many who are now last, will be first.

The workers in the vineyard

21:28

20 • ¹This story throws light on the kingdom of heaven: A landowner went out early in the morning, to hire workers for his vineyard. ²He agreed to pay each worker the usual daily wage, and sent them to his vineyard.

³He went out again, at about nine in the morning, and, seeing others idle in the town square, ⁴he said to them, 'You also, go to my vineyard, and I will pay you what is just.' ⁵So they went.

The owner went out at midday, and, again, at three in the afternoon, and he made the same offer. ⁶Again he went out, at the last working hour—the eleventh—and he saw others standing around. So he said to them, 'Why do you stand idle the whole day?' They answered, 'Because no one has hired us.' The master said, 'Go, and work in my vineyard.'

Lev
19:13;
Dt 24;
14-15

⁸When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, 'Call the workers and pay them their wage, beginning with the last and

ending with the first.' ⁹Those who had gone to work at the eleventh hour came up, and were each given a silver coin. ¹⁰When it was the turn of the first, they thought they would receive more. ¹¹But they, too, received one silver coin. On receiving it, they began to grumble against the landowner.

¹²They said, 'These last, hardly worked an hour; yet, you have treated them the same as us, who have endured the heavy work of the day and the heat.' ¹³The owner said to one of them, 'Friend, I have not been unjust to you. Did we not agree on one silver coin per day?' ¹⁴So, take what is yours and go. I want to give to the last the same as I give to you. ¹⁵Don't I have the right to do as I please with what is mine? Why are you envious when I am kind?'

¹⁶So will it be: the last will be first, the first will be last." 19:30

Third prophecy of the passion

(Mk 10:32; Lk 18:31)

¹⁷When Jesus was going to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside and said to them, ¹⁸"See, we are going to Jerusalem. There, the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law;

Mk 10:
32-34;
Lk 18:
31-33

they during this time reach the immense world of the poor.

The problem of poverty is also at the heart of the family in today's world: for the greater number, believers or non-believers, the joys and blessings that God showers on a large family will only be given to those who have ceased to evaluate everything according to the criteria of money and security.

• **20.1 THE MASTERS**

Many are surprised at this parable. They find it unfair to give the same reward to everyone, without taking into account the labor and sacrifices of everyone.

Without doubt Jesus wanted to shock us and shatter the idea we obstinately cling to: that we have merits that God must recognize. However we should pay closer attention to the story: Jesus makes a comparison, not of several laborers,

but of several groups of laborers. Each group represents a nation or a social class, and while some of them have long ago received the word of God, others have just become believers.

All throughout history, God has been calling different people to work in his vineyard. He called Abraham first and placed his descendants in charge of his work in the world. Later on, during the time of Moses many others joined his group in order to leave Egypt and that has continued throughout history. The elders never cease to claim their right to receive better treatment than the others. Actually the vineyard has not been confided to them exclusively.

Then, with the coming of Christ, the Gospel was brought to other nations that were until then pagan. They came into the Church and shaped Christianity. They also claimed to be owners of the kingdom of God and the Church.

To this day, there are also social groups that

and they will condemn him to death. ¹⁹They will hand him over to the foreigners, who will mock him, scourge him and crucify him. But he will be raised to life on the third day.”

The mother of James and John asks for the first seats
(Mk 10:35)

• ²⁰ Then the mother of James and John came to Jesus with her sons, and she knelt down, to ask a favor. ²¹ Jesus said to her, “What do you want?” And she answered, “Here, you have my two sons. Grant, that they may sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom.”

²² Jesus said to the brothers, “You do not know what you are asking. Can you drink the cup that I am about to drink?” They answered, “We can.” ²³ Jesus replied, “You will indeed drink my cup; but to sit at my right or at my left is not for me to grant. That will be for those, for whom my Father has prepared it.”

²⁴ The other ten heard all this, and were angry with the two brothers. ²⁵ Then Jesus called them to him and said, “You know, that the rulers of nations behave like tyrants, and the powerful oppress them. ²⁶ It shall not

be so among you: whoever wants to be great in your community, let him minister to the community. ²⁷ And if you want to be the first of all, make yourself the servant of all. ²⁸ Be like the Son of Man, who came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life to redeem many.”

²⁹ As they left Jericho, a great crowd followed them on the way. ³⁰ Two blind men were sitting by the roadside; and when they heard that Jesus was passing by, they began to call out, “Son of David, have mercy on us!” ³¹ The people told them to keep quiet. But they shouted even louder, “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!” ³² Jesus stopped, called out to them and asked, “What do you want me to do for you?” ³³ They said, “Lord, open our eyes.”

³⁴ Jesus was moved with compassion and touched their eyes. Immediately, they recovered their sight, and they began to follow Jesus.

Jesus enters Jerusalem

(Mk 11:1; Lk 19:28; Jn 12:12)

21 • ¹ When they drew near Jerusalem and arrived at Bethphage, on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples, ² saying, “Go

are amazed when the Church criticizes their demand for privileges and does not assign them the first benches in the temple for they had always believed that the Church was theirs.

In this parable, all are treated on equal terms and *receive one silver coin* each. Let them be happy for having been invited to work, as they were unemployed.

• **20.** See commentary on Mark 10:35. Compare Matthew 20:23 and Mark 10:46.

• **21.1** See commentary on Mark 11.

Matthew, Mark and Luke place the incident about those selling in the temple at the time of Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem. John, on the other hand, situates this event at the beginning of Jesus' mission. Once more we see how each of the evangelists disposes of events following the plan he has chosen to develop the mystery

of Salvation. Their aim is not to draw up a life of Jesus where events would be placed in the exact order in which they occurred.

Besides, there are several details in this triumphant entrance of Jesus that remind us more of the Feast of the Tabernacles (which was celebrated in September), than of the days before the Passover:

– The joyous spirit of the people is more appropriate to that feast day, which was the most popular of all.

– The branches and palms, as in the procession of the feast day, on the way to the fountain of Siloe, while singing Psalm 118: “Blessed be he who comes in the name of the Lord!” and shouts of “*Hosannah!*” (that is: Save us!).

– Mention of the Mountain of Olives, where tents of branches and leaves were erected for the feast.

See, in this respect, Zechariah 14 that refers

16:21;
17:12;
Lk 9:22;
24:7;
1Col
15:4

Mk 10:
35-40

Lk 22:30

26:39;
Jn 18:11

Mk 10:
41-45;
Lk 22:
25-27

18:1-4;
23:11;
Mk 9:35;

Lk 9:46;
18:14

26:28;
Phil
2:7-8;
1Tim
2:6;
Rom 5:6

Mk 10:
46-52;
Lk 18:
35-43

9:27;
15:22

Mk 11:
1-11;
Lk 19:
12-38;
Jn 12:
12-16

to the village ahead, and there, you will find a donkey tied up, with its colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. ³If anyone says something to you, say that the Lord needs them, and that he will send them back immediately.”

⁴This happened in fulfillment of what the prophet said: ⁵*Say to the daughter of Zion: See, your king comes to you in all simplicity, riding on a donkey, a beast of burden, with its colt.*

⁶The disciples went, as Jesus had instructed them, ⁷and they brought the donkey with its colt. Then they threw their cloaks on its back, and Jesus sat on them.

⁸Many people also spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut leafy branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹The people who walked ahead of Jesus, and those who followed him, began to shout, *“Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!”*

¹⁰When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was disturbed. The people asked, “Who is this man?” ¹¹And the crowd answered, “This is the Prophet Jesus from Nazareth of Galilee.”

Jesus expels the dealers

(Mk 11:11; Lk 13:35; Jn 2:14)

• ¹²Jesus went into the temple, and drove out all who were buying and selling in the temple area. He overturned the tables of the money changers, and the stools of those who sold pigeons. ¹³And he said to them, *“It is written: My house shall be called a house of prayer. But you have turned it into a den of thieves.”*

¹⁴The blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and Jesus healed them.

¹⁵The chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things that Jesus did, and the children shouting in the temple area, “Hosanna to the Son of David!” ¹⁶They became angry and said to Jesus, “Do you hear what they say?” Jesus answered them, “Yes. But have you never read this text: *From the mouths of children and infants you have perfect praise?*”

¹⁷So leaving them, he went out of the city and came to Bethany, where he spent the night.

Jesus curses the fig tree

(Mk 11:12; Lk 13:6)

• ¹⁸While returning to the city early in the morning, Jesus felt hungry. ¹⁹He noticed a fig tree by the road,

to this feast day (14:16) and foretells the purification of the temple.

Very possibly, the evangelists placed the entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem on the eve of the Passover for the simple reason that they only related one trip of Jesus to Jerusalem.

They arrived at Bethphage. The small village of Bethphage was the entrance to the district of Jerusalem towards the east. According to the law, the Passover should be celebrated in Jerusalem, but the city was not big enough to accommodate more than a hundred and fifty thousand pilgrims for the festival. So it was necessary to enlarge the juridical limits of Jerusalem, embracing therefore some small villages like Bethphage. During those days, Jesus also used to lodge in Bethany (21:17).

• 12. See commentary on Mark 11:15.

Jesus cleanses the temple, fulfilling the prophecy of Zechariah 14:21. Malachi 3 also foretold this event: The Lord would come to purify his people and his temple. Jesus comes as a prophet to demand respect for God. Also, as God, he inaugurates the new era of religion in spirit and in truth. That is how John also understood this event in John 2:21, where he speaks of the new Temple, Christ.

You have perfect praise (v. 16). These words of Psalm 8 were addressed to God, but Jesus applies them to himself, as he did with some other Scriptural texts.

• 18. This incident helps us understand the strange behavior of Jesus in looking for figs out of season and then *cursing the tree* as if it were responsible. Jesus behaved this way for a purpose: to call something to the attention of

Is 62:11;
Zec 9:9;
Gen
49:11;
Mt 11:29

1K
1:33-34

2K 9:13

Ps
118:25-
26;
Mt
23:39

Mk 11:
11...17;
Lk 19:
45-46;
Jn 2:
14-16

Is 56:7;
Jer 7:11

2S 5:8
(LXX)

Jn 12:19

Ps 8:3
(LXX)

Lk 21:37

Mk 11:
12...24;
Lk 13:
6-9

went up to it and found nothing on it but leaves. So he said to the tree, "Never again bear fruit!" And immediately, the fig tree withered.

²⁰When the disciples saw this, they were astonished and said, "How did the fig tree suddenly dry up?" ²¹Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you: if you had faith and did not doubt, not only could you do what I did to the fig tree, but you could even say to that mountain, 'Go, and throw yourself into the sea!' and it would be done. ²²Whatever you ask for in prayer, full of faith, you will receive."

Jesus' response to the authorities

(Mk 11:27; Lk 20:1)

• ²³Jesus had entered the temple and was teaching, when the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the Jewish authorities came to him, and asked, "What authority have you to act like this? Who gave you authority to do all this?"

²⁴Jesus answered them, "I will also ask you one question. If you answer me, then I will also tell you by what authority I do these things." ²⁵Where did John's baptism come from? From heaven or from people?"

They discussed this among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say, 'Then why did you not believe him?'" ²⁶And if we say, 'The baptism of John was merely some-

thing human', we've got to beware of the people, for all consider John to be a prophet." ²⁷So they answered Jesus, "We do not know."

And Jesus said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things."

The parable of the two sons

• ²⁸Jesus went on to say, "What do you think of this? A man had two sons. He went to the first and said to him, 'Son, go and work today in my vineyard.'" ²⁹And the son answered, 'I don't want to.' But later he thought better of it and went. ³⁰Then the father went to his other son and said the same thing to him. This son replied, 'I will go, sir,' but he did not go.

³¹Which of the two did what the father wanted?" They answered, "The first." And Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you: the publicans and the prostitutes are ahead of you on the way to the kingdom of heaven. ³²For John came, to show you the way of goodness, and you did not believe him; but the publicans and the prostitutes did. You were witnesses of this, but you neither repented nor believed him."

The parable of the tenants

(Mk 12:1; Lk 20:9)

³³Listen to another example: There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a fence around it, dug a

the apostles, through a teaching method used by the prophets. The fig tree is a figure of the Jewish people, who did not produce the fruits expected by God.

• 23. Jesus is what we would call today a simple layman. He respects the priests of the people of God and their high priest. He shows however that if they want others to be accountable, for their part they must be ready to take a stand on the things of God when the people need this. They had been and were unwilling to give such a response in the case of John the Baptist.

• 28. This parable refers to the refusal of the

chief priests to recognize John the Baptist as a messenger of God.

A good number of sinners were converted by John's preaching and confessed their sins. Such people were well disposed to receive the message of Jesus that opened for them the kingdom of God and showed them the true face of God the Father. Because of that, they were *ahead of the priests*, who were indifferent to John's call, for they felt neither the desire nor the need to change.

Every parish that carries out a mission experiences the same thing: many uncommitted Christians will neither work as missionaries, nor receive them, believing they do not need conversion.

hole for the wine press, built a watchtower, leased the vineyard to tenants, and then, went to a distant country. ³⁴When harvest time came, the landowner sent his servants to the tenants to collect his share of the harvest. ³⁵But the tenants seized his servants, beat one, killed another, and stoned a third.

³⁶Again, the owner sent more servants; but they were treated in the same way.

³⁷Finally, he sent his son, thinking, 'They will respect my son.' ³⁸But when the tenants saw the son, they thought, 'This is the one who is to inherit the vineyard. Let us kill him, and his inheritance will be ours.' ³⁹So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

⁴⁰Now, what will the owner of the vineyard do with the tenants when he comes?" ⁴¹They said to him, "He will bring those evil men to an evil end, and lease the vineyard to others, who will pay him in due time."

⁴²And Jesus replied, "Have you never read what the Scriptures say? *The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This was the Lord's doing, and we marvel at it.*

⁴³Therefore I say to you: the kingdom of heaven will be taken from you, and given to a people who will produce its fruit.

⁴⁴(Whoever falls on this stone, he will be broken to pieces; on whomsoever this stone falls, he will be ground to dust.)"

⁴⁵When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard these parables, they realized that Jesus was referring to them. ⁴⁶They would have arrested him, but they were afraid of the crowd, who regarded him as a prophet.

Lk 14:5;
16:14;
21:11;
21:26;
Lk 7:16;
Jn 4:19

The wedding feast

(Lk 14:15)

22 • ¹Jesus continued speaking to them in parables:

Lk 14:
15-24;
Pro
9:1-6

²"This story throws light on the kingdom of heaven: A king gave a wedding banquet for his son. ³He sent his servants to call the invited guests to the banquet, but the guests refused to come.

21:34

⁴Again, he sent other servants, instructing them to say to the invited guests, 'I have prepared a banquet, slaughtered my fattened calves and other animals, and now, everything is ready. Come to the wedding!' ⁵But they paid no attention and went away, some to their farms, and some to their work. ⁶Others seized the servants of the king, insulted them and killed them.

⁷The king was furious. He sent his troops to destroy those murderers and burn their city. ⁸Then he said to

• **22.1 THE BANQUET**

This parable contains two parts.

In the first part, God invites us to a banquet where there is a place for everyone. All through history he has been sending his prophets to preach justice, the mercy of God and trust in him. The Jewish nation, however, did not heed God's call through these prophets and now will pay even less heed to Jesus. God's plan will not fail. He will send his apostles to preach the Gospel in foreign nations (*go to the crossroads*) so that non-Jews, too, may enter the Church. Some Jews, however, the *selected few among so many called*, will be the first members of the Church.

The king *celebrates the wedding of his son*, Christ, who deserves to be called "the bridegroom" of humankind (Mk 2:19), because he has become one body with it. All throughout history the Risen Christ gathers together mortal and divided human beings. The Spirit of God will transform and raise them from the dead, so that they may *sit at the table* of the living, according to the parable.

The only table of Christ that Christians usually know is the Eucharist. While taking part in it, we must not forget what has been said above. Our meeting in the Mass should remind us that God calls us to prepare, in our daily lives, for the banquet reserved by him for all humankind.

Jn 3:16

Gal 3:16;
4:7;
Heb 1:2;
13:12

Ps 118:
22-23;
Is 28:16;
Acts 4:11;
1P 2:4-7

Acts 13:5;
Rom 11:11

his servants, ‘The wedding banquet is prepared, but the invited guests were not worthy. ⁹Go instead to the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding feast.’

Rev
19:7

13:47

¹⁰The servants went out into the streets and gathered all they found, good and bad alike, so that the hall was filled with guests.

¹¹The king came in to see the wedding guests, and he noticed a man not wearing a wedding garment. ¹²So he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you get in without the wedding clothes?’ But the man remained silent. ¹³So the king said to his servants, ‘Bind his hands and feet and throw him into the outer darkness, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

Rev
19:8

8:12;
25:30;
Lk 13:28

- ¹⁴For many are called, but few are chosen.”

- **Paying taxes to Caesar**

(Mk 12:13; Lk 20:20)

Mk 12:
13-17;
Lk 20:
20-26

¹⁵The Pharisees went away, considering how they could trap Jesus by his own words. ¹⁶They sent to him their disciples, along with members of Herod’s party, saying, “Master, we

know that you are an honest man, and truly teach God’s way. You are not influenced by others, nor are you afraid of anyone. ¹⁷So tell us what you think: is it against the law to pay taxes to Caesar or not?”

¹⁸But Jesus understood their evil intentions, and said to them, “Hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? ¹⁹Show me the coin with which you pay taxes.”

They showed him a silver coin, ²⁰and Jesus said to them, “Whose head is this, and whose name?” ²¹They answered, “Caesar’s.” Then Jesus replied, “So give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and give to God what is God’s.”

Rom
13:7

²²Astonished by his answer, they left him and went away.

The resurrection of the dead

(Mk 12:18; Lk 20:27)

- ²³That same day, some of the Sadducees came to Jesus. Since they claim that there is no resurrection, they questioned him in this way: ²⁴“Master, Moses said, that if a man dies without any children, his brother must take the wife and have a child, who will be

Mk 12:
18-27;
Lk 20:
27-40;
Acts
23:8

Dt 25:
5-6;
Gen
38:8

Ours is the task of uniting and reconciling all people.

What if we do not answer? Then, little by little, the life of the holy and universal Church will be withdrawn from our assemblies of comfortable Christians, and others will be called to take charge of the work of God: *invite to the wedding*.

The second part of the parable points this out: You, Christians, who are already inside the Church, do you wear the new garment—a life of justice, honesty and trustworthiness?

Let us not believe that the surprised guest who was not properly dressed for the occasion was some kind of poor person. No, for it was customary during those times to supply all guests with the robe they should wear at the banquet. This one could have put on the robe but did not, so he had nothing to answer.

- 14. *Many are called* (v. 14). Some are disturbed upon reading this: does it mean that only a few persons will be saved?

If we associate this sentence with the first part of the parable, it means that, of those first

invited, few will enter the banquet. These guests were the Jews and very few, indeed, entered the Church of Jesus. Interpreted in connection with the second part of the parable, it would mean that few of those entering the Church have the necessary dispositions, so the majority would be condemned at the time of judgment. This contradicts what was related in the parable, because only one of the guests was thrown out.

It is better not to associate this saying too much with the parable of the banquet, because we find it also in other places in the Gospel. Here Jesus advises us (as in 7:13) that only a few discover through the Gospel true freedom and new life. Then, are they saved? Yes and no—because salvation, for Jesus, does not mean to escape from the punishment of hell, but to reach perfection.

- 15. See the commentary in Mark 12:13.

- 23. See the commentary in Mark 12:18.

In verse 24 the text reads: “take as a wife the sister-in-law and raise a descendant to his brother.”

considered the child of the deceased man.²⁵ Now, there were seven brothers. The first married a woman, but he died; since he had no children, he left his wife to his brother.²⁶ The same thing happened to the second brother, and to the third, until the seventh.²⁷ Then, last of all, the woman died.²⁸ Now, in the resurrection of the dead, to which of the seven will she be wife, for they all had her as wife?"

²⁹ Jesus answered, "You are totally wrong, because you understand neither the Scriptures nor the power of God.³⁰ First of all, in the resurrection of the dead, neither men nor women will marry, but they will be like the angels in heaven.³¹ As for the resurrection of the dead, have you never reflected on what God said to you:³² *I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?* He is God, not of the dead but of the living."

³³ The people who heard him were astonished at his teaching.

³⁴ When the Pharisees heard how Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they assembled together.³⁵ One of them, a lawyer, questioned him to test him,³⁶ "Teacher, which commandment of the law is the greatest?"

³⁷ Jesus answered, "*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.*³⁸ This is the first and the most

important of the commandments.³⁹ The second is like it: *You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*⁴⁰ The whole law and the prophets are founded on these two commandments."

The Messiah, Son of God

(Mk 12:35; Lk 20:41)

⁴¹ While the Pharisees were assembled, Jesus asked them,⁴² "What do you think of the Messiah? Whose son is he?" They answered, "David's."

⁴³ Jesus then asked them, "Why did David, inspired by God, call the Messiah Lord? For David says in a psalm:⁴⁴ *The Lord said to my Lord: Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet.*⁴⁵ If David calls him Lord, how can he be his son?"

⁴⁶ No one could answer him, not even a word. From that day on, no one dared question him anymore.

Do not imitate the teachers of the law

(Lk 20:45; Mk 12:38)

23 • ¹ Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples,

• ² "The teachers of the law and the Pharisees have sat down on the chair of Moses.³ So you shall do and observe all they say; but do not do as they do,⁴ for they do not do what they say. They tie up heavy burdens and load them on the shoulders of the people, but they do not even lift a finger

• **23.1** The fifth discourse of Matthew's Gospel begins here. Only a few days separate us from Jesus' departure from this world and it is here that Matthew places the words and parables of Jesus that enlighten the disciples on the attitude to adopt in face of the times to come. Scarcely born, the Church will have to face the formidable opposition of Jewish power, especially that of the Pharisees. She will therefore follow her own way and separate herself from the Jewish communities. This is the main theme of Chapter 23. Chapter 24 declares that God will confirm this separation through the ruin of the Jewish nation. The Church, then, should turn towards the future and await the return of Christ. Let her not waste time in waiting for the

end of the world but be always ready in active vigilance: this is Chapter 25.

• **2. RELIGIOUS AUTHORITIES**

Jesus was not from the tribe of Levi, to which the priests and those in charge of religious activities belonged. He did not, likewise, belong to any religious association, as the Pharisees did. He was on the side of the people and saw how the leaders of God's people and the organized religious elite acted.

Obviously Matthew wants the words of Jesus to fall on the ears of important personages in the communities. Jesus judges in advance the authorities of the Church and more especially any group that sees itself the better, the more

Lev 19:18;
Mt 5:43;
Rom 13:10;
Gal 5:14
7:12

Mk 12: 35-37;
Lk 20: 41-44;
2S 7:16

Ps 110:1;
Acts 2:34;
1Col 15:25;
Heb 1:13

Mk 12: 38-39;
Lk 20: 45-47;
11:39

Rom 2:17

11:30;
Lk 11:46

36

7:28;
13:54

Mk 12: 28-31;
Lk 10: 25-28

Dt 6:5

6:1; Num 15:38
 to move them. ⁵They do everything in order to be seen by people: they wear very wide bands of the law around their foreheads, and robes with large tassels. ⁶They enjoy the first places at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues, ⁷and they like being greeted in the marketplace, and being called 'Master' by the people.

Lk 14:7
⁸But you, do not let yourselves be called *Master*, because you have only one Master, and all of you are brothers and sisters. ⁹Neither should you call anyone on earth *Father*, because you have only one Father, he who is in heaven. ¹⁰Nor should you be called *Leader*, because Christ is the only Leader for you. ¹¹Let the greatest among you be the servant of all. ¹²For whoever makes himself great shall be humbled, and whoever humbles himself shall be made great.

20:26;
 Lk 22:26

Lk 1:52;
 Job 22:29;
 Pro 29:23;
 Ezk 21:31;
 Lk 14:11

Seven woes for the Pharisees

(Lk 11:39)

Lk 11:39...52
 • ¹³But woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites!

You shut the door to the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. You, yourselves, do not enter it, nor do you allow others to do so.

¹⁴Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You devour widows' property; and as a show, you pray long prayers! Therefore, you shall receive greater condemnation. ¹⁵Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel by sea and land to make a single convert; yet, once he is converted, you make him twice as fit for hell as yourselves!

¹⁶Woe to you, blind guides! You say: To swear by the temple is not binding; but, to swear by the gold of the temple is binding. ¹⁷Foolish men! Blind men! Which is of more worth: the gold in the temple, or the temple which makes the gold a sacred treasure? You say: ¹⁸To swear by the altar is not binding, but to swear by the offering on the altar is binding. ¹⁹How blind you are! Which is of more value: the offering on the altar, or the altar which makes the offering sacred?

5:33;
 15:14;
 Rom 2:19

aware and the more efficacious. The Pharisees pretended to be just that, and in a sense they were.

The teachers of the law and the Pharisees have sat down on the chair of Moses. The Gospel says it with more precision: *they have seated themselves in the chair of Moses.* This rather ironic formula suggests that the ambitious appropriate to themselves the authority over the people of God and that to a certain point God tolerates it. Matthew, in recording these words of Jesus, wants to preserve in the Church fundamental equality. It is the whole Church that enjoys the Holy Spirit, and the heads or *doctors* will have no authority unless they are deeply rooted in the community's life.

Paul will speak of Christ and the Church using the comparison of the head and the body (Eph 5:25). Likewise in the Church the authority of the bishop goes hand in hand with fidelity to the Church that he governs. He has accepted the Church as it is and does not seek to impose his own projects.

Do and observe all they say (v. 3). The bad example of the authorities does not discredit the word of God. Nor does it lessen the principle of authority. Their bad attitude discredits only

their pretense at being superior to others. They cannot renounce their authority on the pretext of humble service and then carry out what the majority has decided.

Jesus speaks of the form of authority. *Do not be called Master or Father.* Do not be called "Master," the one "who knows" and before whom one is silent; neither must you be called "Father," the one who is venerated and imitated, forgetting to look directly at the One who alone is good. No one in the Church should eclipse the only "Father."

Doubtless everyone will say that the word "Father" is simply the expression of respectful affection but Jesus affirms that the word has perverse effects.

The purity of faith, which submits to God alone, always suffers because of the cult of personality. The Church should be a community of free persons able to speak frankly.

• 13. *You shut the door to the kingdom of heaven.* Do not forget that "the kingdom of Heaven" means the kingdom of God. Many teachers of the people of God are an obstacle on the path leading to the true knowledge of God the Father. Even in the smallest village, the

29:37 ²⁰Whoever swears by the altar, is swearing by the altar and by everything on it. ²¹Whoever swears by the temple, is swearing by the temple, and by God, who dwells in the temple. 5:33 ²²Whoever swears by heaven, is swearing by the throne of God, and by him, who is seated on it.

Lev 27:30; Mic 6:8; Am 5:21 ²³Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You do not forget the mint, anise and cumin seeds when you demand the tenth of everything; but then, you forget what is most fundamental in the law: justice, mercy and faith! You should have done these things without neglecting the others. ²⁴Blind guides! You strain out a mosquito, but swallow a camel.

Mk 7:4 ²⁵Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You fill the plate and the cup, with theft and violence, and then pronounce a blessing

over them. ²⁶Blind Pharisee! Purify the inside first, then the outside, too, will be purified.

²⁷Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, beautiful in appearance; but, inside, there are only dead bones and uncleanness. ²⁸In the same way, you appear religious to others, but you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness within. Acts 23:3 Lk 16:15

• ²⁹Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You build tombs for the prophets, and decorate the monuments of the righteous. ³⁰You say: Had we lived in the time of our ancestors, we would not have joined them in shedding the blood of the prophets. ³¹So, you, yourselves, confess to be the descendants of those who murdered the prophets.

Jews had teachers of the Law but in fact, crowds came to Jesus to ask for what those priests and teachers did not give them. How can we forget that even in the Church religious education is often limited to moral compartment and keeping within religious norms? Hearing and constantly meditating on the word of God would have favored the awakening of great ambitions: the search for God and apostolic creativity.

You say: To swear by the treasure of the temple (vv. 16-22). Jesus refers to the common practices in his time. Some teachers found ways to get around certain oaths. In that manner, clever people could swear falsely and deceive their opponents by swearing firmly without promising much.

THE DEFENDERS OF THE FAITH

How could Jesus call such men hypocrites when they were so versed in the knowledge of the Scriptures?

In the language of Jesus, the word “hypocrite” equally denotes what is superficial as well as the one who makes light of what is of God. Obviously not all the Pharisees were hypocrites; but Jesus denounces a frequent deformation in the religious elite. He calls us to be wary of those institutions born of possessors of wealth and culture who aspire to direct others—and the Church—without having learned from the poor or practiced true humility.

The mystery of God is so deep that no one can present himself as his lieutenant. The Pharisees trained, taught and gained many followers

in the faith but their fasts and alms were already rewarded. Pride and love of money were given their place.

THE PROPHETS

• ²⁹. We have on one side “*the prophets*” and on the other those who “*kill the prophets.*” Scripture shows us that the prophets meet with much opposition among the people of God and especially among its leaders.

There is a people of God and these people have necessarily its institutions which help it to be faithful to its mission. In fact, these people follow their reflexes and social prejudices, and the whole institution, even if born of the Spirit, becomes heavy and hardens with time. Prophets are readily condemned when they challenge peace and unity in mediocrity or even unfaithfulness to the word of God.

The Jewish people, harassed by foreigners, closed ranks around the temple, religious practice and the Pharisee group. Moved by fear, the Jews did what any society would do when threatened: they became fanatically conservative and felt secure in the institutions God had given them in the past. (We are at present experiencing the same phenomenon. Our generation suddenly finds itself facing, in all areas, crises and threats for which it was not prepared; all our certitudes are questioned, and because of this we see emerging in all religions fundamentalist groups offering an appearance of safety by enclosing themselves in structures and systems of thought—or no thought—inherited from the past.)

Acts 7:52 ³² And now, finish off what your ancestors began!

Lk 3:7 ³³ Serpents, race of vipers! How can you escape condemnation to hell?

1Thes 2:15 ³⁴ Therefore, indeed, I send prophets, wise men and teachers to you; but some you will murder and crucify; some, you will flog in your synagogues; some, you will drive from one city to the next.

10:23; 27:25; Rev 16:6; Gen 4:8; Heb 11:4; 24:20-22 ³⁵ Because of this, you will be accountable for all the innocent blood that has been shed on the earth, from the blood of upright Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the altar and the Sanctuary. ³⁶ Truly I say to you: the present generation will pay for all this.

Lk 13:34; Jer 7:14; 1K 9:7; Tb 14:4; Ezk 11:23 ³⁷ Jerusalem, Jerusalem! You murder the prophets and stone those sent to you by God. How often would I have gathered your children together, just as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings; but you refused! ³⁸ Look! Your house shall be left to you, deserted! ³⁹ I tell you, that you will no longer see me, until you say: *Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!*

Ps 118:25; Mk 11:10

The ruin of Jerusalem and the end of the world

(Mk 13; Lk 21; 17:23; 12:36)

24 ¹ Jesus left the temple, and as he was walking away, his disciples came to him and pointed out to him the imposing temple buildings. ² But he said, "You see all this? Truly I say to you: not one stone will be left upon another here. All will be torn down."

³ Later when Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples approached him privately and asked, "Tell us, when this will take place. What sign will be given us of your coming, and the end of the world?"

⁴ Jesus answered, "Be on your guard; and let no one mislead you. ⁵ Many will come in my name, saying: 'I am the Messiah,' and they will mislead many people. ⁶ You will hear about wars, and rumors of wars; but do not be troubled, for these things must happen; but the end is still to come. ⁷ Nations will fight one another, and kingdoms oppose one another. There will be famine, and earthquakes in different places; ⁸ but all this is only the beginning, the first pains of childbirth.

the blood of Christ, the blood of the first Christians killed by the Jews.

Your house shall be left to you, deserted! (v. 38) The presence of God in his temple would leave them once more and be established among the converted pagans, as in Ezra 8. There will be no further intervention by God to establish his kingdom in Israel among the Jewish people until the day they welcome the Christ.

• **24.1** With reference to this great discourse see commentary on Mark 13.

In this discourse the Gospel uses the style of apocalyptic books (see the Introduction to Revelation). In this kind of literature signs announced great events. Hence the question of those closest to Jesus: "What will be the sign of your coming at the end of time?"

The discourse that follows comprises words pronounced by Jesus in very diverse circumstances. Jesus refuses speculation and reminds us that Christian history is one of persecution; he encourages us to be faithful.

The defenders of the Jewish community were not ready to listen to their prophet. It was one thing to honor the prophets of the past and keep the sacred books, another to accept the criticism addressed to them by God, not in the sacred books, but from the lips of Jesus, the carpenter.

Thus it was that the prominent Jews let the moment when God *visited them* slip by—following the path that would lead their nation to ruin.

The example of the Jewish nation must serve as a warning to us. Are our Christian communities, confronted today by a major crisis, able to build a poorer and more demanding Church? Will they be less preoccupied with their personal survival rather than giving the Gospel to the world?

• **37.** How harshly Jesus speaks! Jerusalem was destroyed in the year 587 B.C. If we read the prophets, we find that Jerusalem's destruction was a punishment for its crimes. Now, Jesus announces another destruction of wider historical consequences: *the blood of the prophets,*

Mk 13: 1-23; Lk 21: 5-24

Lk 19:44

13:39

Jn 5:43

Jn 16:21; Rom 8:22; 1Thes 5:3; Rev 12:2

10:17; Jn 16:2
 9 Then, they will arrest you; they will torture and kill you. All nations will hate you, for you bear my name.

10 In those days, many will be led into sin; they will betray and hate one another. 11 False prophets will appear and mislead many; 12 and because of such great wickedness, love in many people will grow cold. 13 But the one who holds out to the end will be saved.

28:19; 10:16; Rom 10:18
 14 The Good News of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the world, to all the nations, a Testament to all peoples. Then will the end come.

Dn 9:27; 1Mac 1:54; 6:7
 15 When you see what the prophet Daniel spoke about, *the idol of the invader, set up in the temple* (let the reader understand!), 16 then, let those in Judea flee to the mountains.

Lk 17:31
 17 If you are on the housetop, do not come down to take anything with you.

18 If you are in the field, do not turn back to fetch your coat. 19 How hard it will be for pregnant women, and for mothers with babies at the breast!

Dn 12:1; Jl 2:2; Rev 7:14
 20 Pray, that you don't have to flee in winter, or on a Sabbath; 21 for there will be great tribulation, such as was never known, from the beginning of

the world until now, and is never to be known again. 22 And if that time were not to be shortened, no one would survive. But God will shorten those days, for the sake of his chosen ones.

23 Then, if anyone says to you, 'Look! The Messiah is here! He is there!', do not believe it. 24 For false Messiahs and false prophets will appear, and perform signs and wonders so great, that they would deceive even God's chosen people, if that were possible. 25 See, I have told you everything ahead of time.

26 So, if anyone tells you, 'He is in the desert,' do not go. If they say, 'He is in the inner rooms,' do not believe it. 27 For the coming of the Son of Man will be like lightning, which flashes from the east even to the west. 28 Wherever the body is, the vultures will gather.

The coming of the Son of Man

(Mk 13:28; Lk 17:20)

29 And later, after that distress, *the sun will grow dark, the moon will not give its light, the stars will fall from the skies, and the whole universe will be shaken.* 30 Then the sign of the Son

In paragraph 24:4-28 Jesus speaks of the *days of trial* (vv. 21 and 29) that will conclude with the destruction of Jerusalem that Jesus' listeners will witness. It will be possible to run away before the disaster occurs (vv. 15-20).

The idol of the invader (v. 15). The Gospel repeats an expression of Daniel (9:27) to indicate on this occasion, the taking over of the temple by the Roman troops (see commentary on Mk 13:14).

It will be a time for evangelization, a time for persecutions and for Christians' testimony before the Jewish and pagan worlds (vv. 9-14). The Jewish people who did not recognize Jesus as their Savior, will let other saviors, or messiahs, stir them up against the Romans.

In paragraph 26-28, Jesus shows that this general confusion about the true savior is very far removed from what will happen when he returns at the end of time.

In paragraph 29-31 Jesus talks about his glorious coming. Then Jesus again asserts two things: the events and signs that refer to the end of Jerusalem will take place in the present gen-

eration (vv. 32-35). The *day of Jesus* (vv. 36 and 42) will come much later.

The comparison of the *two men (or women)* working together means that, upon the coming of Jesus, the Judgment will take place, and there might be a separation within the same social or family group: some headed towards the Lord, others to be condemned (vv. 37 and 41).

Why is it that the Gospel draws a parallel with the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of time? Simple, because Matthew addresses Christians who have just experienced the first event and are awaiting the second. It is the moment when there emerges the Christian vision of the history of these two great stages.

First, we have the time of the Old Testament. God taught the people of Israel and nurtured their development in order that their history and experiences be enlightening for other people. At the end of this period, Jesus came during a national crisis to give them the full knowledge of their mission as a people of God. A minority believed, but the nation did not convert and crashed.

Mk 13:21; Lk 17:22

1Jn 2:18; Dt 13:2; 2Thes 2:9; Rev 13:13

Lk 17:37

Mk 13: 24-32; Lk 21: 25-33; Am 8:9; Is 13:10; Ezk 32:8; Jl 3:4

1Thes 3:13; 2Thes 2:1;

2P 3:4; Rev 6:12; Zec 12: 10-12; Dn 7:1 3-14; Rev 1:7

of Man will appear in heaven. As all the nations of the earth beat their breasts, *they will see the Son of Man coming, in the clouds of heaven*, with divine power and great glory. ³¹ He will send his angels to sound the trumpet; and they will gather his chosen ones from the four winds, from one end of the earth to the other.

³² Learn a lesson from the fig tree: when its branches grow tender and its leaves begin to sprout, you know that summer is near. ³³ In the same way, when you see all these things, know that the time is near, even at the door. ³⁴ Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have happened. ³⁵ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

³⁶ But, as for that Day and that Hour, no one knows when it will come, not even the angels of God, nor the Son, but only the Father.

³⁷ At the coming of the Son of Man, it will be just as it was in the time of Noah. ³⁸ In those days before the Flood, people were eating and drinking, and marrying, until that day when Noah went into the ark. ³⁹ Yet, they did not know what would happen, until the flood came and swept them away. So will it be, at the coming of the Son of Man: ⁴⁰ of two men in the field, one will be taken and the other left; ⁴¹ of two women grinding wheat together at the mill, one will be taken and the other left.

Be on the alert

⁴² Stay awake then, for you do not know on what day your Lord will come. ⁴³ Obviously, if the owner of the house knew at what time the thief was coming, he would certainly stay up and not allow his house to be broken into. ⁴⁴ So be alert, for the Son of Man will come at the hour you least expect.

⁴⁵ Imagine a faithful and prudent servant, whom his master has put in charge of his household, to give them food at the proper time. ⁴⁶ Fortunate, indeed, is that servant, whom his master will find at work when he comes. ⁴⁷ Truly I say to you, his lord will entrust him with everything he has.

⁴⁸ Not so with the bad servant, who thinks, 'My master is delayed.' ⁴⁹ And he begins to ill-treat his fellow servants, while eating and drinking with drunkards. ⁵⁰ But his master will come on the day he does not know, and at the hour he least expects. ⁵¹ He will punish that servant severely; and place with him with the hypocrites. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

The ten bridesmaids

(Mk 13:35; Lk 13:25)

25 • ¹ This story throws light on what will happen in the kingdom of heaven: Ten bridesmaids went out with their lamps to meet the bridegroom. ² Five of them were foolish, and five were sensible.

The message is then presented to other nations, and thus began the time of the New Testament. The Church teaches all people who must mature as nations and Christians. Scripture implies that New Testament times are leading up to a universal crisis where the Gospel will more than ever be a reality: "Believe or you will die." It is then that both the New Testament and history will end.

• 25.1 FAITHFULNESS

The three parables that follow tell us how to

await the return of Christ, being alert and active. The first, "the ten bridesmaids" is the most beautiful parable on fidelity. The ten girls followed the custom of waiting through the night for the bridegroom who will be accompanied to his house. The bridegroom is late, something that should astonish no one. The bride is not mentioned: perhaps they will discover at the end that there was no other than themselves.

They all grew drowsy and fell asleep (v. 5). Once the sun has set, all is dark and nothing more can be done (Jn 9:4). No further work

Is 27:13;
1Col
15:52;
1Thes
4:16

10:23;
16:28

5:17;
Lk 16:17

Acts 1:7;
1Thes
5:3

Lk 17:
26-27;
Mk 24:27;
Mk 13:33;
Gen 7

Jas 5:7;
2P 3:4;
1Jn 2:28

Lk 17:
34-35

25:13;
Lk 12:
39-40;
Mk 13:33
Lk 12:22;
1Thes
5:2;
2P 3:10;
Rev 3:3

Lk 12:
42-46

19:28;
25:21

8:12;
13:42

Lk 12:
35-38

³The careless bridesmaids took their lamps as they were, and did not take extra oil. ⁴But those who were sensible, took flasks of oil with their lamps. ⁵As the bridegroom delayed, they all grew drowsy and fell asleep.

⁶But at midnight, a cry rang out, 'The bridegroom is here, come out and meet him!' ⁷All the maidens woke up at once, and trimmed their lamps. ⁸Then the foolish ones said to the sensible ones, 'Give us some oil, for our lamps are going out.' ⁹The sensible ones answered, 'There may not be enough for us and for you. You had better go to those who sell, and buy some for yourselves.'

¹⁰When the bridegroom came, the foolish maidens were out buying oil, but those who were ready went with him into the wedding feast, and the doors were shut.

¹¹Later the other bridesmaids arrived and called out, 'Lord, Lord, open to us!' ¹²But he answered, 'Truly I do not know you.'

¹³So stay awake, for you do not know the day nor the hour.

The parable of the talents

(Lk 19:12; Mk 4:25; 13:34)

• ¹⁴Imagine someone who, before going abroad, summoned his servants to entrust his property to them. ¹⁵He gave five talents of silver to one ser-

vant, two talents to another servant, and one talent to a third, to each, according to his ability; and he went away. ¹⁶He who received five talents went at once to do business with the talents, and gained another five. ¹⁷The one who received two talents did the same, and gained another two. ¹⁸But the one who received one talent dug a hole in the ground, and hid his master's money.

¹⁹After a long time, the master of those servants returned and asked for a reckoning. ²⁰The one who had received five talents came with another five talents, saying, 'Lord, you entrusted me with five talents, but see, I have gained five more.' ²¹The master answered, 'Well done, good and faithful servant, since you have been faithful in a few things, I will entrust you in charge of many things. Come and share the joy of your master.'

²²Then the one who had received two talents came and said, 'Lord, you entrusted me with two talents; with them I have gained two more.' ²³The master said, 'Well done, good and faithful servant, since you have been faithful in little things, I will entrust you in charge of many things. Come and share the joy of your master.'

²⁴Finally, the one who had received one talent came and said, 'Master, I know that you are a hard man. You

7:13;
8:11;
Lk 13:24;
Rev
19:7

Lk 13:25

Mk
13:35

Lk 19:
11-27

18:23

19:28;
24:47;
Lk
16:10;
Jn 15:10

Jn 4:
37-38

except fidelity of heart (Dt 5:2): oil will be needed to keep the flame alive.

Here as in other places, the Gospel shows us that more than conversion and enthusiasm is needed: it is necessary to last (7-24). Being sure of having a reserve of oil is to take the means that enable us to persevere in our vocation.

Some will say that Matthew has placed this parable here for the benefit of the first Christians, for after having awaited the return of Christ, they saw that nothing happened. Error! Jesus speaks to the believers of all times. For them one day or another fidelity becomes burdensome: "I did not know to what I was committing myself." There lies the grandeur of fidelity. It cannot be known in advance; giving one's

hand to God is a jump into the unknown. Only through this perseverance can we be saved (Mt 24:13), in other words, find ourselves.

The Lord demands faithfulness and perseverance from those he has chosen: this is how we save a world that seeks truth everywhere and does not know to which Lord to surrender.

• 14. TO WORK—TO TRUST ONESELF

During the time of Jesus, a talent was an amount, thirty kilograms of precious metal, but in this parable when Jesus spoke of talents he referred to the abilities given by God to each of us. Since then, people came to understand the word "talent" in this sense.

Good and faithful servant (v. 21). Faithful:

reap what you have not sown, and gather what you have not scattered. ²⁵I was afraid, so I hid your money in the ground. Here, take what is yours! ²⁶But his master replied, 'Wicked and worthless servant, you know that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered. ²⁷You should have deposited my money in the bank, and given it back to me with interest on my return.

²⁸Therefore, take the talent from him, and give it to the one who has ten. ²⁹For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who are unproductive, even what they have will be taken from them. ³⁰As for that useless servant, throw him out into outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

The last judgment

(Lk 9:26)

• ³¹When the Son of Man comes in his glory with all his angels, he will sit on the throne of his glory. ³²All the nations will be brought before him; and, as a shepherd separates the

sheep from the goats, ³³so will he do with them, placing the sheep on his right hand and the goats on his left.

³⁴The king will say to those on his right, 'Come, blessed of my Father! Take possession of the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world. ³⁵For I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty, and you gave me something to drink. ³⁶I was a stranger, and you welcomed me into your home. I was naked, and you clothed me. I was sick, and you visited me. I was in prison, and you came to see me.'

³⁷Then the righteous will ask him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry, and give you food; thirsty, and give you something to drink; ³⁸or a stranger, and welcome you; or naked, and clothe you? ³⁹When did we see you sick, or in prison, and go to see you?'

⁴⁰The king will answer, 'Truly I say to you: just as you did it for one of the least of these brothers or sisters of mine, you did it to me.'

⁴¹Then he will say to those on his left, 'Go, cursed people, out of my sight, into the eternal fire, which has

Lk
22:30;
Rom
8:17;
Eph 1:4

Is 58:7

Pro
19:17;
Mk 9:41;
Lk
10:16;
Acts 9:5

7:23;
Mk 9:48;
Rev
20:10

it would be better translated: "reliable." We do not find any word of religious vocabulary in this parable.

God sees the way one has used his talents, and the sin is to have kept for self what one has received. What condemnation of a society where it is usual to enjoy and consume what has been received: a better human formation and knowledge inherited from the homeland which should be transmitted to one's descendants, the blessings and benefits of a family where the parents knew how to sacrifice themselves for their children, and perhaps the word of God to be carried out in order to realize God's great plan for the world.

I will entrust you in charge of many things (v. 21). What we achieve on earth is not definitive but only the scaffolding: quite other will be the riches that God will distribute to those who will live in him.

You know that I reap where I have not sown (v. 26). As in Luke 18:1, Jesus is aware of our unavowed defiance towards God and takes us at our word. If we do not aspire to the place that

the husband reserves for a wife (25:1), let us try at least not to be useless servants.

There are many opportunities for us to take initiatives, but we often are afraid to put ourselves forward: "I am not the most qualified." What if those who are qualified have not budgeted? Then, *take the talent from him and give it to someone else (v. 28).*

• 31. THE UNIVERSAL JUDGEMENT

We know that Christians are a minority in the world. As we do now, the Jews wondered about the majority of nations in the world, who were not among the Chosen People and did not know about God or his promises. The Jews envisioned a huge multitude, ready to "devour them," a restless world where God should one day impose his law. They used to call them: the nations.

Jesus goes beyond these narrow perspectives and shows us how he will judge everyone, making no distinctions based on origins when he comes as king of all nations. All those who, without knowing Christ, have shared in the

13:12;
Mk 4:25;
Lk 8:18;
19:26

Zac 14:5;
Rev
3:21;
20:11

Ezk
34:17;
Lk 12:32

been prepared for the devil and his angels! ⁴²For I was hungry, and you did not give me anything to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave me nothing to drink; ⁴³I was a stranger, and you did not welcome me into your house; I was naked, and you did not clothe me; I was sick, and in prison, and you did not visit me.'

⁴⁴They, too, will ask, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry, thirsty, naked or a stranger, sick or in prison, and did not help you?' ⁴⁵The king will answer them, 'Truly I say to you: just as you did not do it for one of the least of these, you did not do it for me.'

⁴⁶And these will go into eternal punishment; but the just, to eternal life."

Dn 12:2;
Jn 5:29

26 ¹When Jesus had finished all he wanted to say, he told his disciples, ²"You know that in two days' time it will be the Passover, and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified."

Mk 14:
1-2;
Lk 22:
1-2;
12:1-14

³Then the chief priests and the elders of the people gathered together, at the palace of the High Priest, whose name was Caiaphas, ⁴and they agreed to arrest Jesus and to kill him. ⁵But they said, "Not during the feast, lest there be an uprising among the people."

Jn
11:47;
Acts
4:25-27

The anointing at Bethany

(Jn 12; Mk 14:9)

Mk 14:
3-9;
Jn 12:
1-8;
Lk 7:
36-50

⁶While Jesus was in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper, ⁷a woman

common destiny of humankind, will be judged by him. In fact, he never abandoned them, but placed at their side "those little ones who are his brothers and sisters," as his representatives.

See, Christ reveals the innumerable human deeds that have built what is best in our civilization, and people brought before him loved with amazement at the God whom they loved or despised in the person of their neighbor. Although the majority of them never thought of the afterlife, the kingdom of God is presented to them with its only law: Love.

There is no neutral place. The fire means the torment of those who condemned themselves by closing and freezing their hearts so that they became incapable of love: now the splendor of God, who is love, burns and pains them.

Whenever you did this to one of these little ones, my brothers and sisters (v. 40). Jesus speaks of looking after our neighbor, be he friend or foe, not of serving the community, or a class, or a nation in general, because using these words, we often exclude a group of our brothers and sisters, who do not belong to our nation or to our class. On the other hand, one who really loves, acknowledges his sisters and brothers without giving too much importance to any labels: it is the person who exists and lives for God.

And these will go into eternal punishment (v. 46). There is something that shocks us today in the division of the good and the wicked, and it seems to us to be an outdated view (see commentary on Mt 13:36). In one sense it is true. Up to the recent times people were mainly "of one idea." It did not take long for youth to see what were the options in life, rarely did a person find more than one religion in the local milieu and he would choose either the "right" road or

the "wrong" road. Some conversions for better or worse would follow (Ezra 8), but humanity seemed to be divided between the good and the evil. Today it is quite different: the choices we make are extremely complex and it takes time to discern clearly. All of life or much of it today may be lived by a person who has within himself a good and an evil being at the same time.

Let us understand then that Jesus spoke the language of the prophets, schematizing options. In fact Jesus denounces, not heinous crimes but selfishness in daily life as is found in each of us, and he depicts, like a father to his children the end towards which we are heading. It is to be hoped that the great majority will not reject the truth; certain persons consciously choose their own ruin and unfortunately are capable of continuing in their choice to the bitter end.

To say that God is so good that he will save them at the last moment is to affirm something that Jesus never intended to say. It would mean that all that a person lived through was of slight importance and that our freedom was no more than a game.

What Jesus says about judging non-Christian people likewise applies to us. But we would be mistaken if we repeatedly presented this parable as expressing the totality of Christian duties. What the world needs above all is not bread and water and clothing, but the truth and the hope that God entrusted to his chosen people. Christians would be unfaithful to their mission if they confined themselves to merely talking about assistance, housing and the like and forgot what is really life for humankind—first, the knowledge and love of their Lord. He will always be first and we need him to be so for us. He takes as done to himself all that we do for our sisters and brothers but does not want to be confused with them.

came up to him, carrying an alabaster jar of expensive perfume. She poured it on Jesus' head as he was at table. ⁸Seeing this, the disciples became indignant and said, "What a useless waste! ⁹The perfume could have been sold for a large sum, and the money given to the poor."

¹⁰Jesus was aware of this, and said to them, "Why are you troubling this woman? What she has done for me is indeed a good work. ¹¹You have the poor with you always; but me, you will not have always. ¹²When she anointed my body with perfume, she was preparing me for my burial. ¹³Truly I say to you: wherever the gospel is proclaimed, all over the world, what she has done will be told in memory of her."

¹⁴Then one of the Twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, ¹⁵"How much will you give me if I hand him over to you?" They promised to give him thirty pieces of silver; ¹⁶and from then on, he kept looking for the best way to hand Jesus over to them.

The last supper

(Mk 14:12; Lk 22:7; Jn 13:1)

¹⁷On the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, the disciples came to Jesus and said to him, "Where do you want us to prepare the Passover meal for you?" ¹⁸Jesus answered, "Go into the city, to the house of a certain man, and tell him, 'The Master says: My hour is near, and I will celebrate the Passover with my disciples in your house.'"

¹⁹The disciples did as Jesus had ordered, and prepared the Passover meal.

²⁰When it was evening, Jesus sat at table with the Twelve. ²¹While they were eating, Jesus said, "Truly I say to you: one of you will betray me." ²²They

were deeply distressed, and they asked him, one after the other, "You do not mean me, do you, Lord?"

²³He answered, "*The one who dips his bread with me will betray me.*" ²⁴The Son of Man is going as the Scriptures say he will. But alas for that one who betrays the Son of Man: better for him not to have been born."

²⁵Judas, the one who would betray him, also asked, "You do not mean me, Master, do you?" Jesus replied, "You have said it."

²⁶While they were eating, Jesus took bread, said a blessing and broke it, and gave it to his disciples saying, "Take and eat: this is my body."

²⁷Then he took a cup, and gave thanks, and passed it to them, saying, "Drink this, all of you, ²⁸for this is my blood, the blood of the Covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. ²⁹Yes, I say to you: From now on I will not taste the fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink new wine with you in my Father's kingdom."

³⁰After singing psalms of praise, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

³¹Then Jesus said to them, "You will falter tonight because of me, and all of you will fall. For Scripture says: *I will strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered.*" ³²But after my resurrection, I will go before you to Galilee."

³³Peter responded, "Even though all stumble and fall, I will never fall away!" ³⁴Jesus replied, "Truly I say to you: this very night, before the cock crows, you will deny me three times."

³⁵Peter said, "Even if I must die with you, I will never deny you!" And all the disciples said the same thing.

Gethsemane

(Mk 14:32; Lk 22:39)

³⁶Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to

Dt 15:11

Jn 11:57

Zec
11:12;
Gen
37:28;
Mt 27:3Mk 14:
12-16;
Lk 22:
7-13;
12:14

Jn 2:4

Mk 14:
17-21;
Lk 22:14,
21-23;
Jn 13:
21-30Ps 41:10;
Jn 13:18Ps 22:
Is 53:9;
Jn 17:12Mk 14:
22-25;
Lk 22:
19-20;
1Col
11:23-
25;
Mt 14:19;
15:361Col
10:1624:8;
Is 53:12;
Jer
31:31;
Zec 9:11;
Heb
9:20Jn
12:23;
13:1;
17:1Mk 14:
26-31;
Lk
22:39,
31-34;
Jn 13:
36-38

Zec 13:7

SMt 26
35
Jn
11:16Mk 14:
32-42;
Lk 22:
39-46;
Jn 12:
27-30;
18:1;
Heb
5:7-10

his disciples, "Sit here while I go over there to pray."

17:1; Mk 5:37 ³⁷He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee with him, and he began to be overwhelmed by anguish and distress.

³⁸And he said to them, "My soul is full of sorrow, even to death. Remain here and stay awake with me."

Jn 4:34; 6:38; Rom 5:19; Phil 2:8 ³⁹He went a little farther and fell to the ground, with his face touching the earth, and prayed, "Father, if it is possible, take this cup away from me. Yet, not what I will, but what you will." ⁴⁰He went back to his disciples and found them asleep; and he said to Peter, "Could you not stay awake with me for one hour? ⁴¹Stay awake and pray, so that you may not fall into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

6:13 ⁴²He went away again, and prayed, "Father, if this cup cannot be taken away from me without my drinking it, your will must be done." ⁴³When he came back to his disciples, he, again, found them asleep, for they could not keep their eyes open. ⁴⁴So leaving them again, Jesus went to pray for the third time, saying the same words.

20:22 ⁴⁵Then he came back to his disciples and said to them, "You can sleep on now and take your rest! The hour has come, and the Son of Man will be handed over to sinners. ⁴⁶Get up, let us go! See, the betrayer is here!"

Jesus arrested

Mk 14: 43-52; Lk 22: 47-53; Jn 18: 2-11 ⁴⁷Jesus was still speaking when Judas, one of the Twelve, arrived. With him was a crowd armed with

swords and clubs, who had been sent by the chief priests and the elders of the people. ⁴⁸The traitor had given them a sign: "The one I kiss, he is the man; arrest him!" ⁴⁹Judas went directly to Jesus and said, "Greetings, Rabbi!" and he kissed him. ⁵⁰Jesus said to him, "Friend, do what you came to do." Then they laid hands on Jesus, and arrested him.

⁵¹One of those who were with Jesus drew his sword, and struck at the servant of the High Priest, cutting off his ear. ⁵²Then Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back in its place! For all who take hold of the sword will die by the sword. ⁵³Do you not know that I could call on my Father, and he would at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? ⁵⁴If Scripture says that these things must be, should Scripture not be fulfilled?"

⁵⁵At that hour, Jesus said to the crowd, "Why do you come to arrest me with swords and clubs, as if I were a robber? Day after day, I sat among you, teaching in the temple, yet, you did not arrest me. ⁵⁶But all this has happened in fulfillment of what the Prophets said." Then all his disciples deserted Jesus and fled.

Jesus before the Sanhedrin

(Mk 14:53; Lk 22:54)

⁵⁷Those who had arrested Jesus took him to the house of the High Priest Caiaphas, where the teachers of the law and the elders were assembled.

⁵⁸Peter followed Jesus at a distance, as far as the courtyard of the

• **26.47** See commentary on Mark 14:43. The kiss of Judas: this was the usual way a disciple greeted his master.

He drew his sword (v. 51). Peter, like other apostles who took part in resistance movements against Roman oppression, brought swords (Lk 22:49).

For all who take hold of the sword (v. 52). This sentence does not condemn soldiers and policemen in a world of violence, but Jesus

asserts that weapons do not establish the kingdom of God, nor do they lead to life. Force leads to death (in one way or another) for those (and for the institutions) who use it, even where it is necessary.

• 57. We find two accusations against Jesus. The first: *I am able to destroy* (v. 61) is false in one sense, but it refers to the words Jesus had spoken about replacing the temple of Jerusalem

Gen 9:6; Rev 13:10

Jn 18:36

Lk 19:47; 21:37; Jn 18:20

Zec 13:7; Jn 18:32

Mk 14: 53-65; Lk 22: 54...71; Jn 18: 15...24

High Priest; he entered and sat with the guards, waiting to see the end.

⁵⁹The chief priests and the whole Supreme Council needed some false evidence against Jesus, so that they might put him to death. ⁶⁰But they were unable to find any, even though false witnesses came forward. ⁶¹At last, two men came forward and declared, "This man said, 'I am able to destroy the Temple of God and rebuild it in three days.'"

⁶²The High Priest stood up and asked Jesus, "What is the evidence against you? Have you no answer to the things they testify against you?"

⁶³But Jesus remained silent.

So the High Priest said to him, "In the name of the living God, I command you to tell us: Are you the Messiah, the Son of God?" ⁶⁴Jesus answered, "You have said it yourself. But I tell you: from now on, you will see *the Son of Man, seated at the right hand of God most powerful, and coming on the clouds of heaven.*"

⁶⁵Then the High Priest tore his clothes, saying, "He has blasphemed. What more evidence do we need? You have heard the blasphemy! ⁶⁶What is your decision?" They answered, "He

must die!" ⁶⁷Then they spat in his face and slapped him, while others hit him with their fists, ⁶⁸saying, "Messiah, prophesy! Who hit you?"

Peter disowns Jesus

(Mk 14:66; Lk 22:56)

• ⁶⁹Meanwhile, as Peter sat outside in the courtyard, a young servant-girl said to him, "You also were with Jesus of Galilee." ⁷⁰But he denied it before everyone, saying, "I do not know what you are talking about."

⁷¹Later, as Peter was going out through the gateway, another servant-girl saw him and said to the bystanders, "This man was with Jesus of Nazareth."

⁷²Peter again denied it with an oath, saying, "I do not know the man."

⁷³After a little while, those who were standing there approached Peter and said to him, "Surely you are one of the Galileans: your accent gives you away." ⁷⁴Peter began to justify himself with curses and oaths, protesting that he did not know Jesus. Just then, a cock crowed.

⁷⁵And Peter remembered the words of Jesus, "Before the cock crows, you will deny me three times." And going out, he wept bitterly.

with another religion centered in his own person (Jn 2:19) and that was indeed subversive. Nothing was more sacred to the Jews than the temple of Jerusalem, and to attack the temple was, at the same time, to threaten the position of the priests whose power was based on the fact that they alone could perform sacrificial rites in the temple. They also amassed wealth from offerings and taxes that the people paid to the temple. In defending the holy things, they were also protecting their own interests.

For the second accusation, which is the most important, see commentary on Mark 14:53.

Jesus remained silent (v. 63). Not out of contempt for those men, who were the religious authorities, but because he saw it was useless to argue with them. He remained silent and felt confident, as do those who put their cause in the hands of God.

You have said it yourself (v. 64). Perhaps this answer of Jesus should be translated: "You are the one saying it," which is to say that Jesus

did not agree with the terms used by Caiaphas. The expression "Son of God" signified the kings and saviors of Israel, and Jesus is the Son of God in a very different sense. Jesus identifies himself with the prophecy of Daniel 7:13, announcing a Savior, a Son of Man, who comes directly from God, from all eternity.

• 69. This denial by Peter is most amazing. His friend John is well known in the house of the high priest and Peter was introduced as his friend (Jn 18:16). The young girl knows very well who John is and does not say anything beyond an ironic word to Peter. Nobody is threatening him, least of all the men; instead they mock him for his provincial Galilean accent, the same as Jesus' accent! It was enough to make Peter lose his composure.

In placing this episode just after the witness of Jesus in the presence of the High Priest, the Gospel intends to contrast Peter's attitude with that of his Master.

27:40;
Jn 2:19;
Acts
6:14

Is 53:7

24:30;
Ps
110:1;
Dn 7:13

Num
14:6;
Ezra 9:3;
Jer
36:24;
Acts
14:14

Lev
24:16;
Jn 19:7

Mk 14:
66-72;
Lk 22:
56-62;
Jn 18:
17...27

26:34

Mk 15:1;
Lk 22:66;
23:1;
Mt 12:14

27 • ¹Early in the morning, all the chief priests and the elders of the people met together, to look for ways of putting Jesus to death. ² They had him bound, and delivered him to Pilate, the governor.

The death of Judas

27:24

Acts 1:18

• ³When Judas, the traitor, realized that Jesus had been condemned, he was filled with remorse, and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders, ⁴saying, “I have sinned by betraying an innocent man to death.” They answered, “What does it matter to us? That is your concern.” ⁵So, throwing down the money in the temple, he went away and hanged himself.

⁶The chief priests picked up the money and said, “This money cannot be put into the temple treasury, for it is the price of blood.” ⁷So they conferred together, and decided to buy the potter’s field with the money, and to make it a cemetery for foreigners. ⁸That is why, to this day, that place has been called Field of Blood.

Zec 11:12-13

⁹What the prophet Jeremiah said was fulfilled: *They took the thirty pieces of silver, the price which the Sons of Israel estimated as his value, and they gave them for the potter’s field, as the Lord commanded me.*

Jesus before Pilate

(Mk 15:1; Lk 23:2; Jn 18:28)

Mk 15:2-15;
Lk 23:2-5;
23:13-25;
Mt 2:2

¹¹ Jesus stood before the governor. Pilate asked him, “Are you the king

of the Jews?” Jesus answered, “You say so.”

¹²The chief priests and the elders of the people accused him, but he made no answer. ¹³Pilate said to him, “Do you hear all the charges they bring against you?” ¹⁴But he did not answer even one question, so that the governor wondered greatly. Jn 19:9

• ¹⁵At Passover, it was customary for the governor to release any prisoner the people asked for. ¹⁶Now, there was a well-known prisoner called Barabbas. ¹⁷When the people had gathered, Pilate asked them, “Whom do you want me to set free: Barabbas, or Jesus called the Messiah?” ¹⁸for he knew that Jesus had been handed over to him out of envy.

¹⁹While Pilate was sitting in court, his wife sent him this message, “Have nothing to do with that holy man. Because of him, I had a dream last night that disturbed me greatly.”

²⁰ But the chief priests and the elders of the people stirred up the crowds, to ask for the release of Barabbas and the death of Jesus. ²¹When the governor asked them again, “Which of the two do you want me to set free?” they answered, “Barabbas!” ²²Pilate said to them, “And what shall I do with Jesus called the Messiah?” All answered, “Crucify him!” ²³Pilate asked, “Why? What evil has he done?” But they shouted louder, “Crucify him!” Acts 3:14
Acts 13:28

• **27.1** Why this second appearance of Jesus before the Supreme Council or Sanhedrin? It is difficult to find agreement on this point in the Gospels.

It would seem that during the night Jesus was presented to Annas, ex-high priest, (succeeded by five sons and son-in-law Caiaphas). He retained real authority among the great priestly families. The Sanhedrin was not complete: the seventy-one members could not be accommodated in the house of Caiaphas. Besides, the Council could not legally hold a session during the night; so it met in the morning.

For the enemies of Jesus this private interrogation was the most important, and that is why Matthew and Mark place there all that they know of the trial of Jesus (Mt 26:57-64).

• 3. Judas, as soon as he betrays Jesus, disappears from the scene and kills himself. Only Matthew tells about the death of Judas. The present version does not coincide with Acts 1:18, perhaps just a curious detail in Peter’s discourse.

• 15. According to very old texts of the Gospel of Matthew the name of the troublemaker

• ²⁴ Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, and that there could be a riot. He asked for water, washed his hands before the people, and said, "I am innocent of this man's blood. Do what you want!" ²⁵ And all the people answered, "His blood be on us and on our children!"

²⁶ Then Pilate set Barabbas free, but had Jesus scourged, and handed over to be crucified.

The way of the cross

(Mk 15:16; Lk 23:11)

• ²⁷ The Roman soldiers took Jesus into the palace of the governor and the whole troop gathered around him.

²⁸ They stripped him and dressed him in a purple cloak. ²⁹ Then, weaving a crown of thorns, they forced it onto his head, and placed a reed in his right hand. They knelt before Jesus and mocked him, saying, "Hail, king of the Jews!" ³⁰ They spat on him, took the reed from his hand and struck him on the head with it.

³¹ When they had finished mocking him, they pulled off the purple cloak and dressed him in his own clothes, and led him out to be crucified.

³² On the way they met a man from Cyrene called Simon, and forced him to carry the cross of Jesus. ³³ When they reached the place called Golgotha,

Is 50:6

Mk 15: 21-27; Lk 23: 26-34, 38; Jn 19: 17-24

was Jesus, his nickname being Barabbas. Pilate proposes to the people a choice between Jesus called Barabbas and Jesus called the Messiah.

• 24. *Pilate asked for water...* (v. 24). The Jews understood this gesture as a clear expression of his refusal to become the judge or accuser of Jesus (see Dt 21:6; Ps 26:6).

• 27. In the inner yard called the praetorium, the soldiers make fun of Jesus in full view of Pilate and all the people employed in the palace.

Weaving a crown of thorns, they forced it onto his head (v. 29). In all probability, local reed was woven in the form of a cap and entwined with long thorns.

The soldiers enjoy the game of the fallen king. In many cultures the king was a divine character and, at the same time, often became the victim responsible for all evil. Therefore, the game of the king was known in many places. One engraved tile that was a soldiers' game has been found in Jerusalem. On it is seen the journey of the king through many trials ending with his assassination.

The soldiers made this game a reality, without realizing how true it actually was. A triumphal Procession with Palms led to the arrest of Jesus, but the humiliation of Jesus prepared him to be the king, the Savior of all, as told in the story of Joseph (Gen 37-44), or more vividly described by the Prophet Isaiah (52:13).

Jesus is Savior, because he is the victim. He broke the mechanism of violence, because he suffered the greatest violence without becoming violent himself. In his humiliation, Jesus shows the greatness and the power of God. He took upon himself all the humiliations of the defenseless, the dejected, the victims on whom were heaped the mindless violence of people and

their leaders. Jesus bears the sin of the world, as announced by Isaiah. In the future, no one will be able to look at him without discovering their own wickedness, and mourning for him who was their victim (Zec 12:12). From this encounter with God, hated and killed, (and so different from the God worshiped in heaven) will gush waters of pardon and purification (Zec 13:1).

They offered him wine mixed with gall (v. 34). According to Mark, they gave him bitter-sweet wine, a drink of the soldiers, mixed with myrrh, to dull the pain. This drink had probably been prepared according to custom by the charitable women of Jerusalem, perhaps the same mentioned by Luke in 23:28. Matthew speaks of wine with bile (a detestable drink) to give us an inkling of all the bitterness that Jesus had to swallow, and also to recall Psalm 69:22.

They also crucified two thieves with him (v. 38). Perhaps they were, like Barabbas, nationalist terrorists opposed to the Romans. They could have been the companions of Barabbas, and their execution enhanced the favor done to Barabbas. If so, they would have to die along with Jesus instead of Barabbas. They could also have belonged to a group of bandits who assaulted and robbed pilgrims in the hills of Palestine.

This is Jesus, the King of the Jews (v. 37). For Pilate and the people in general, this expression signified a nationalist leader in the movement for liberation from the Roman yoke.

The Jews are the people of God and the Father arranged that they would be associated, in a very special way, with the salvation Christ brings. In fact, they were later subjected to many trials and persecutions. Many Jews have suffered like Jesus without believing in him, but confident in the promises of God and in the kingdom of Justice. Jesus is really their king.

Pss 69:22 which means the Skull, ³⁴ they offered him wine mixed with gall. He tasted it but would not drink it.

Pss 22:19 ³⁵ There they crucified him, and divided his clothes among themselves, casting lots to decide what each one should take. ³⁶ Then they sat down to guard him. ³⁷ The statement of his offense was displayed above his head, and it read, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews." ³⁸ They also crucified two thieves with him, one on his right hand and one on his left.

Lk 22:37; Is 53: 9, 12
Pss 22:8 ³⁹ The people passing by shook their heads and insulted him, ⁴⁰ saying, "Aha! You, who destroy the temple and in three days rebuild it, save yourself—if you are God's Son—and come down from the cross!"

⁴¹ In the same way the chief priests, the elders and the teachers of the law mocked him. ⁴² They said, "The man who saved others cannot save himself. Let the king of Israel come down from his cross and we will believe in him. ⁴³ He trusted in God; let God rescue him if God wants to, for he himself said, 'I am the Son of God.'"

⁴⁴ Even the thieves who were crucified with him insulted him.

Pss 22:9; Wis 2:1 8:20; Jn 5:18; 10:36; 19:7
Mk 15: 33-41; Lk 23: 44-49
⁴⁵ From midday, darkness fell over all the land until mid-afternoon. ⁴⁶ At about three o'clock, Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lamma sabbathani?" which means: My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? ⁴⁷ As soon as they heard this, some of the bystanders said, "He is calling for Elijah." ⁴⁸ And one of them ran, took a sponge and soaked it in vinegar and, putting it on a reed, gave it to him to drink. ⁴⁹ Others said, "Leave him

Lk 23:36; Jn 19:29; Pss 69:22

alone, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him."

⁵⁰ Then Jesus cried out again in a loud voice and gave up his spirit.

After the death of Jesus

• ⁵¹ At that very moment, the curtain of the temple Sanctuary was torn in two from top to bottom, the earth quaked, rocks were split, ⁵² tombs were opened, and many holy people who had died were raised to life. ⁵³ They came out of the tombs after the Resurrection of Jesus, entered the Holy City, and appeared to many.

⁵⁴ The captain and the soldiers who were guarding Jesus, having seen the earthquake and everything else that had happened, were terribly afraid, and said, "Truly, this was God's Son."

⁵⁵ There were also many women there, who watched from a distance; they had followed Jesus from Galilee and had seen to his needs. ⁵⁶ Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of Zebedee's sons.

The burial

(Mk 15:42; Lk 23:50; Jn 19:38)

⁵⁷ When it was evening, there came a wealthy man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who was also a disciple of Jesus. ⁵⁸ He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus, and the governor ordered that the body be given to him. ⁵⁹ So Joseph took the body of Jesus, wrapped it in a clean linen sheet, ⁶⁰ and laid it in his own new tomb, that he had cut in the rock.

26:33

1P 3:19

Rev 11:13

Lk 8:2; Mt 13:55; 20:20

Mk 15: 42-47; Lk 23: 50-55; Jn 19: 38-42

Dt 21: 22-23

Acts 13:29

In Latin, the letters I.N.R.I. (that we read on crucifixes) are the initial letters of Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.

• 51. This paragraph declares in apocalyptic style that the death of Jesus marked the comple-

tion of definitive salvation. Some apparitions of dead persons were interpreted as a sign of fulfillment of the prophecies of Daniel (12:2) referring to the Day of Salvation. The open tombs signify that the Risen Christ conquers the kingdom of the dead.

Then he rolled a huge stone across the entrance to the tomb and left. ⁶¹Mary Magdalene and the other Mary remained, sitting there in front of the tomb.

Jn 19:25

The guards at the tomb

⁶²On the following day, which is after the day of preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate ⁶³and said to him, "Sir, we remember that when that impostor was still alive, he said, 'After three days I will rise again.' ⁶⁴Therefore, have his tomb secured until the third day, lest his disciples come and steal the body, and say to the people: He is risen from the dead. That would be a deception worse than the first." ⁶⁵Pilate answered them, "You have soldiers, go and take all the necessary precautions." ⁶⁶So they went to the tomb and secured it, sealing the stone, placing the tomb under guard.

12:40;
16:21

Jesus appears to the women

(Mk 16:1; Lk 24:1; Jn 20:1)

28 • ¹After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went

Mk 16:
1-8;
Lk 24:
1-10;
Jn 20:1

to visit the tomb. ²Suddenly there was a violent earthquake: an angel of the Lord descending from heaven, came to the stone, rolled it from the entrance of the tomb, and sat on it. ³His appearance was like lightning and his garment white as snow. ⁴When they saw the angel, the guards were struck with terror.

17:2;
Acts
1:10

⁵The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. ⁶He is not here, for he is risen as he said. Come, see the place where they laid him; ⁷then go at once and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead, and is going before you to Galilee. You will see him there. This is my message for you."

26:32;
Mk
14:28;
Jn 21:1

⁸In fear, yet with great joy, the women left the tomb and ran to tell the news to his disciples.

⁹Suddenly, Jesus met them on the way and said, "Rejoice!" The women approached him, embraced his feet and worshiped him. ¹⁰But Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid! Go and tell my brothers to set out for Galilee; there, they will see me."

• 28.1 THE RISEN CHURCH

On the apparitions of the risen Jesus, see the commentary on Luke 24:1.

This first paragraph is still in apocalyptic style, with its resplendent angel and another earthquake. The Gospel refuses to describe a triumphal departure of Jesus, as his readers would have preferred. The risen Jesus is only seen by those who believe: the women who look for him will see him, the soldiers and rulers who do not seek him will not understand.

The evangelist mentions the names of Mary of Magdala and the other Mary, the mother of James and of Joseph (Mt 27:55), two of the "brothers of Jesus" (Mt 13:55), his closest cousins. (She is a relative of Mary, the mother of Jesus, Jn 19:25).

Suddenly, Jesus met them on the way (v. 9). It is obvious that Matthew is combining two different events; one, the discovery of the empty tomb, and the other, which happened later on, the apparition of Jesus to Mary Magdalene alone as related in John 20:11-18.

Set out for Galilee (v. 10). Why did Jesus say this date if he was going to appear later that same day in Jerusalem? (Lk 24:13-42). It is not clear. Probably the evangelists combined several apparitions to simplify their narration. Anyway, time was needed for the apostles to believe in the Resurrection and understand something about it. After the two apparitions in Jerusalem, in which Jesus tried to convince them that he was not a phantom or a spirit, they would have to return to their provinces and environments, far away from the city that had caused them such trauma, in order to ponder what they had experienced. In Galilee, Jesus will manifest himself differently, making them understand that he is already glorified, that his existence is earthly no more.

A woman, Mary Magdalene, conveys the message, in order to indicate that, in the Church, not everything will come from the authorities. God communicates with whomever he wishes, giving prophetic messages to simple people and to women.

The resurrection of Christ is the pivotal point

¹¹As the women proceeded on their way, some of the guards went into the city, and reported to the chief priests all that had happened. ¹²The chief priests met with the elders, and decided to give the soldiers a large sum of money, ¹³with this order, "Say that his disciples came by night while you were asleep, and stole the body of Jesus. ¹⁴If Pilate comes to know of this, we will explain the situation and keep you out of trouble." ¹⁵The soldiers accepted the money and did as they were told. This story has circulated among the Jews until this day.

Jesus sends the apostles

• ¹⁶As for the eleven disciples, they went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. ¹⁷When they saw Jesus, they bowed before him, although some doubted.

¹⁸"All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations. Baptize them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teach them to observe all that I have commanded you. I am with you always, even to the end of the world."

11:27;
Jn 3:35;
13:3;
17:2;
Eph
1:20

Acts 1:8

3:12;
Jos 1:5;
Jn 14:
18-21;
Mt
13:40;
24:3

of the Gospel; yet Matthew reports it briefly. Why? Because when Matthew wrote his Gospel, the Resurrection was considered too great an event to put into writing; rather, it should be proclaimed and witnessed to by the Spirit at work in the Christian communities.

Are we in a different situation? The Church that talks of the Risen Christ should never be a powerful Church but a Risen Church. If the Church finds itself in a situation where there is no apparent hope of salvation, yet it is revived by the power of God; if in each generation the Church seems doomed to die because of its ancient structures, its worldly ways or the persecution it undergoes, yet it is nevertheless given new energies and new apostles by the Lord, then the Church is a witness that the Lord has risen and has given her the power to rise.

• **16. EVANGELIZATION—THE TRINITY**

Jesus sent his apostles to evangelize the world.

The last apparition is related in a very simple way: no sudden appearance, no fear—no physical demonstration of the reality of Jesus. What is important are the words of Jesus Master.

Although some doubted (v. 17). With this, Matthew sums up the last apparitions of Jesus. Not all the disciples of Jesus (the Eleven and the rest) believed so quickly in the resurrection of Jesus.

Make disciples of all nations (v. 19). Jesus, following the example of Jewish teachers of his time, gathered around him a group of disciples who lived with him. The teacher knew his disciples and the disciples knew the teacher by sharing everyday life. The same holds true today: evangelization implies interpersonal sharing.

To evangelize means to help someone ponder his former experiences until he can recognize in the person of Christ, in his death and resurrection, the truth that lights up his own life.

Those who believe will be baptized in the one

Name of *the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit* (v. 19), the Three Persons Christ taught us about. Of course, he named them separately because the Father is not the Son and the Son is not the Holy Spirit; in spite of that, the Three are the same God. Upon entering the Church, the baptized will enter into communion with the Father, with the Son and with the Holy Spirit. The Church is, before anything else, communion.

See Acts 19:5 regarding baptism in *the Name of the Lord Jesus*.

Teach them to observe all that I have commanded you (v. 20). These instructions of Jesus have first place in Matthew's Gospel; they are in the five discourses and we are to do the will of the Father just as Jesus has revealed it.

I am with you always (v. 20). Here we find again the certitude which the name Emmanuel already expressed in 1:23: Jesus is God-with-us until the end of time. The first generation Christians thought that Christ would not delay in returning but at the time the Gospel was written, they already understood that history would continue; the nation of Israel rejected the salvation offered to her and only a minority believed. Jesus was now committing himself to his apostles and to his Church and now began to build the Church of his apostles.

The Catholic Church is different from Protestant or Evangelical churches, because it was founded by the apostles of Jesus. Only she feels obliged to remain united around the successors of the apostles, the bishops; this unity and continuity are at times hard to maintain, especially in situations where it would seem easier to form a new reformed community alongside her. Obedience to the will of the Father is the means by which he purifies and strengthens our faith. Jesus is and remains "Lord" regarding the destiny of "his" Church.