



Since the end of the first century or at the beginning of the second century after Christ, there were texts stating that the second Gospel was the work of Mark. He had accompanied Peter to Rome where he also met Paul and he faithfully put Peter's teaching into writing.

Any reader comparing this Gospel with those of Matthew and Luke will see immediately Mark does not say anything about the birth of Jesus and the years he spent in Nazareth. If we look carefully at the last paragraph of the Gospel (Mk 16:9-20), we will be surprised to see that Mark's early text concluded with the discovery of the empty tomb and it did not mention the appearances of the risen Jesus. In other words, Mark's Gospel seems to be stripped of its beginning and normal end.

However, this is not the case. Mark gave his work the same perimeters that the apostles had assigned to the first documents that determined the catechesis of the Church. Believers were not told all that they would have liked to know but they were given the essence of what Jesus had said and done (Acts 1:21-22).

The Gospel of Mark consists of two parts. Each one of them starts with a divine manifestation: in the first one, it is the word of God at Jesus' baptism by John and in the second one, it is the Transfiguration. The first part of the Gospel unfolds in Galilee, the province of Jesus and the second one takes us to Judea and Jerusalem, the heart of the Jewish nation. These two parts are like the two sides of the same adventure. The first part shows us the power and the newness of Jesus: the impact of his teachings on the crowds. Then disillusionment sets in and we have the second part. The crowds are no longer following as Jesus refuses to be what they wanted him to be. Finally, we have his death on the cross that seems to cancel his entire mission.

When Jesus died on the cross, the Roman officer admitted that the crucified one was truly the Son of God (Mk 15:39). And this is all that Mark says. It is now up to the evangelizer to give witness to the resurrection and proclaim Jesus Christ as savior, beginning with the scandal of the cross.

Mt 3:1-12;
Lk 3:1-17

1 • ¹This is the beginning of the Good News of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. ²It is written in the book of Isaiah, the prophet, “*I am sending my messenger ahead of you, to prepare your way.*” ³Let the people hear the voice calling in the desert: *Prepare the way of the Lord, level his paths.*”

Mt 11:10;
Lk 7:27;
Mal 3:1;
23:20

⁴So John began to baptize in the desert; he preached a baptism of repentance, for the forgiveness of sins.

Is 40:3

⁵All Judea and all the people from the city of Jerusalem went out to John to confess their sins, and to be baptized by him in the river Jordan.

Acts 13:24;
Is 1:16;
4:4;
Ezk 36:25

⁶John was clothed in camel’s hair and wore a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and honey. ⁷He preached to the people, saying, “After me comes one who is more powerful than I am; ⁸I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you in the Holy Spirit.”

Lk 3:2-5

⁹At that time, Jesus came from Nazareth, a town of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰And the moment he came up out of the

2K 1:8

Is 11:2;
Jn 1:26;
Acts 1:5

Mt 3:13-17;
Lk 3:21-22

Is 63:19;
Jn 1:32

water, heaven opened before him, and he saw the Spirit coming down on him like a dove. ¹¹And these words were heard from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved, the One I have chosen.”

12:6;
Ps 2:7;
Is 42:1

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

Mt 4:1-11;
Lk 4:1-13

Heb 2:18;
4:15;
Job 1:6

Jesus calls his first disciples

(Mt 4:12; Lk 4:14)

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

Mt 4:12-17;
Lk 4:14-15;
Jn 3:24

Gal 4:4;
Rom 1:1;
1Thes 1:5;
Col 1:5

¹⁶As Jesus was walking along the shore of Lake Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen.

Mt 4:18-22;
Lk 5:1-11;
Jn 1:40

¹⁷And Jesus said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.” ¹⁸At once, they abandoned their

1K 19:19-20

• **1.1** In verses 1 to 13, Mark gives us in three short presentations three important insights about Jesus’ salvation.

Verses 1-7. John the Baptist announces the coming of the One sent by God: this Jesus about whom the Gospel will speak to us has been announced, prepared by all the great witnesses of the Old Testament. In him and by him God’s salvation will be accomplished.

Verses 9-10. Jesus goes down into the Jordan to open the gates of the true Promised Land (see the Book of Joshua): he is the beloved Son of the Father on whom the Spirit rests. Jesus comes to reveal the mystery of God, the mystery of the love of God—Father, Son and Spirit.

Verses 11-13. Jesus is at peace with the wild animals as he is with the angels. In him and by him will be accomplished the reconciliation of all creation with its God. Such had to be the Messiah announced by Isaiah (Is 11).

• **14.** After this desert experience, Jesus returns to his home province, Galilee, and establishes himself in Capernaum. Jesus lives in the house of Simon, who already appears to be the leader of a group of fishermen, and among them Jesus finds his disciples.

God becomes human, Jesus shares the life of the people of his time, and like the prophets he teaches by what he says and does.

The time has come (v. 15). What does that mean? The time fixed by God has come to an end (Gal 4:4; Eph 1:10), the time of preparation has ended, and the manifestation of God announced by the prophets has already begun.

Change your ways and believe the Good News. God does not expect works on the part of human beings but calls them to faith. Be rid of all that hampers you, of all that prevents you from seeing and believe! Believe that it is he, and he alone who is able to save you!

At once, they abandoned their nets and followed him (v. 18), which means leaving their family and work they began to live with him. Like the masters of religion in his time, like the rabbis, Jesus instructed his first disciples, teaching them what they were to pass on to others in the Church.

Simon, Andrew, James and John. Jesus already knew them: he had met them where John the Baptist was preaching (Jn 1:35). The first nucleus of disciples is this natural group of lake fishermen of which Peter seemed to be the leader. They were most probably young men, ready

nets and followed him. ¹⁹ Jesus went a little farther on, and saw James and John, the sons of Zebedee; they were in their boat mending their nets. ²⁰ Immediately, Jesus called them and they followed him, leaving their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men.

Jesus teaches and drives out an evil spirit

(Mt 7:28; Lk 4:31)

• ²¹ They went into the town of Capernaum and Jesus taught in the synagogue on the Sabbath day. ²² The people were astonished at the way he taught, for he spoke as one having authority, and not like the teachers of the law.

• ²³ It happened that, a man with an evil spirit was in their synagogue,

²⁴ and he shouted, "What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are: you are the Holy One of God."

²⁵ Then Jesus faced him and said with authority, "Be silent, and come out of this man!" ²⁶ The evil spirit shook the man violently and, with a loud shriek, came out of him.

²⁷ All the people were astonished, and they wondered, "What is this? With what authority he preaches! He even gives orders to evil spirits and they obey him!" ²⁸ And Jesus' fame spread throughout all the country of Galilee.

Jesus heals many

(Mt 8:14; Lk 4:38)

• ²⁹ On leaving the synagogue, Jesus went to the home of Simon and

Jn 6:69;
Acts
3:14

Lk 4:41

Mt 8:
14-15;
Lk 4:
38-39;
Mk 9:2;
13:3

to make a commitment at a time and in a culture where people were freer than we are from the constraints of work.

They did not yet know what the Reign of God would mean but they trusted Jesus to guide them. This for them was the beginning of faith.

• 21. Mark has shown us how Jesus began his public life: he became part of a movement of conversion that had shaken everyone at the call of John the Baptist. It was then that Jesus began preaching and met his first disciples.

Mark will now give us a "day" in the life of Jesus. Through his words and actions a power that impresses every witness becomes manifest. At the beginning of his ministry, Jesus preaches in the synagogues. *The synagogue* is the Jewish house of prayer. People gather each Saturday for the chanting of the Psalms and the reading of the Scriptures. The one in charge preaches and invites others to join. This is where Jesus reveals himself. He is not like the teachers of the law who repeat, interpret, and give others' opinions. Jesus speaks on his own and he speaks *with authority*, "In truth, I tell you."

• 23. With the same authority Jesus *drives out demons*. This act also contains a message: Jesus delivers us from the influence of the Devil, who strives to destroy those created in the likeness of God.

This "Master of this world" (Jn 14:30) is present in all human business and culture to deceive human purposes and converts any progress into new slavery.

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

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

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

• 29. Peter's simple faith is manifested. Jesus enters the house, bringing with him peace and health. Jesus shows us how to visit the sick. What a natural thing to do when Mass ends—to go see the sick. The care and love of our Christian sisters and brothers attracts God's favors upon them.

That evening at sundown (v. 32). Let us not

Lk 4:
31-37;
Jn 2:12

Mt 7:28;
Jn 7:46

Andrew, with James and John. ³⁰As Simon's mother-in-law was sick in bed with fever, they immediately told him about her. ³¹Jesus went to her and, taking her by the hand, raised her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them. ³²That evening, at sundown, people brought to Jesus all the sick and those who had evil spirits; ³³the whole town was pressing around the door. ³⁴Jesus healed many who had various diseases, and drove out many demons; but he did not let them speak, for they knew who he was.

3:11;
5:7

Jesus' prayer at night

(Lk 4:42)

• ³⁵Very early in the morning, before daylight, Jesus went off to a lonely place where he prayed. ³⁶Simon and the others went out also, searching for him; ³⁷and when they found him, they said, "Everyone is looking for you." ³⁸Then Jesus answered, "Let us go to the nearby villages so that I may preach there too; for that is why I came."

Lk 4:
42-44;
Mk 6:46

Jn 18:37

³⁹So Jesus set out to preach in all the synagogues throughout Galilee; he also cast out demons.

3:7;
6:54;
Lk 6:17

Jesus cures a leper

(Mt 8:2; Lk 5:12)

• ⁴⁰A leper came to Jesus and begged him, "If you want to, you can make me clean." ⁴¹Moved with pity, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, "I do want to; be clean." ⁴²The leprosy left the man at once and he was made clean. ⁴³As Jesus sent the man away, he sternly warned him, ⁴⁴"Don't tell anyone about this, but go and show yourself to the priest; and for the cleansing, bring the offering ordered by Moses; in this way, you will give to them your testimony."

Mt 8:1-4;
Lk 5:
12-16;
Lev
13:45

⁴⁵However, as soon as the man went out, he began spreading the news everywhere, so that Jesus could no longer openly enter any town. But even though he stayed in the rural areas, people came to him from everywhere.

Lev
14:2-32

forget that it is the Sabbath, the weekly day of rest. For the Jews days are counted from the time of sunset and night precedes day as shown in Genesis 1:5. Everyone observes the Sabbath, just as Jesus does and there is such haste to bring the sick to him that they begin to do so in the evening as soon as the Sabbath is over.

• ³⁵The apostles knew God since childhood through the Scripture's teachings; perhaps they had not discovered God within their own lives but prayed to God as to a distant stranger. When they joined Jesus, they immediately understood that there was something extraordinary about him. They were especially taken with his apparent intimacy with God. The most extraordinary thing they noted in his manner and actions was his intimate and faithful union with his Father.

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

THE MARGINALIZED

• ⁴⁰Jesus leaves Capernaum to announce the Good News to the most isolated and ignored families in the whole country. There he finds the *lepers*. At that time leprosy was considered as a

contagious disease. Because of this, lepers had to live on the outskirts of the towns, far from the rest of the population. There was also a belief that leprosy was an affliction from God, and the Jewish religion declared lepers unclean.

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

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

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

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

Jesus forgives and cures a paralytic*(Mt 9:1; Lk 5:17)*

2 • ¹After some days, Jesus returned to Capernaum. As the news spread that he was in the house, ²so many people gathered, that there was no longer room even outside the door. While Jesus was preaching the word to them, ³some people brought to him a paralyzed man.

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

⁶Now, some teachers of the law, who were sitting there, wondered within themselves, ⁷"How can he speak

like this, insulting God? Who can forgive sins except God?"

⁸At once, Jesus knew in his spirit what they were thinking, and asked, "Why do you wonder? ⁹Is it easier to say to this paralyzed man, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise, take up your mat and walk?'" ¹⁰But now you shall know, that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins."

And he said to the paralytic, ¹¹"Stand up, take up your mat and go home."

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

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

• ¹³When Jesus went out again, beside the lake, a crowd came to him,

would he begin to reveal, first to his disciples, the mystery of his person.

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

• **2.1** With this miracle on the paralytic cured and forgiven, Jesus gives three answers at the same time: to the sick man, to his friends and to the Pharisees.

When Jesus saw the faith of these people (v. 5). These are the friends of the paralytic, and Jesus rewards their faith.

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

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

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

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

FORGIVENESS OF SINS

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

PUBLICANS

• 13. To enter the family of God, we must change some of our values. This conversion is not as conspicuous as participation in devotional practices but is much more valuable. First, we must liberate ourselves from prejudices by which we classify people. Let us stop dividing

Mt 9:1-8;
Lk 5:
17-26;
Mk 1:293:20;
Acts
4:29;
8:25

Lk 7:48

Ps
103:3;
Is 43:25Mt
12:25;
Jn 2:25

Mt 9:33

Mt 9:
9-13;
Lk 5:
27-32

and he taught them. ¹⁴As he walked along, he saw a tax collector sitting in his office. This was Levi, the son of Alphaeus. Jesus said to him, "Follow me!" And Levi got up and followed him.

¹⁵And it so happened that, when Jesus was eating in Levi's house, tax collectors and sinners sat with him and his disciples; there were a lot of them, and they used to follow Jesus.

¹⁶But Pharisees, men educated in the law, when they saw Jesus eating with sinners and tax collectors, said to his disciples, "Why does your master eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?"

¹⁷Jesus heard them, and answered, "Healthy people don't need a doctor, but sick people do. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

New wine, new skin

(Mt 9:14; Lk 5:33)

• ¹⁸One day, when the Pharisees and the disciples of John the Bap-

tist were fasting, some people asked Jesus, "Why is it, that both the Pharisees and the disciples of John fast, but yours do not?" ¹⁹Jesus answered, "How can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. ²⁰But the day will come, when the bridegroom will be taken from them, and on that day they will fast.

²¹No one sews a piece of new cloth on an old coat, because the new patch will shrink and tear away from the old cloth, making a worse tear. ²²And no one puts new wine into old wine skins, for the wine would burst the skins, and then both the wine and the skins would be lost. But new wine, new skins!"

(Mt 12:1; Lk 6:1)

• ²³One Sabbath he was walking through grain fields. As his disciples walked along with him, they began to pick the heads of grain and crush them

people into good or bad; those we can greet and those we cannot; those we can love and help and those we cannot. Let us learn that God does not hate the rich or the uneducated, those on the left or those on the right, for God's merciful plan sees to the salvation of all.

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

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

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

Levi is probably the apostle Matthew (Mt 9:9). In this case, like Simon, named Peter by Jesus, Levi would have been given the name of Matthew; in Hebrew *Mattai* means *gift of God*.

• 18. Many religious leaders sympathized with Jesus. How they would have liked that he

rekindle the faith of the nation! Jesus himself did not feel that his primary task was to reorganize worship and bring people to the synagogues.

The Pharisees were fasting. Fasting, a sign of repentance, supported their prayers that God come and liberate his people. God comes in the person of Jesus: joy and celebration are more appropriate than fasting. The prophets had announced the *wedding feast* of God with his people when he would come to visit us (Is 62:4-5). Because of this, in presenting himself as the bridegroom, Jesus identifies who he really is.

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

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

• 23. It was normal that passersby, when hungry, would pick fruit or wheat. The Pharisees

Mt 18:12;
Lk 15:1

Lk 7:34

Mt 9:10-11;
Jn 9:39

Mt 9:14-17;
Lk 5:33-39

Jn 3:29;
2Cor 11:2

Mt 12:1-8;
Lk 6:1-5

in their hands. ²⁴Then the Pharisees said to Jesus, "Look! They are doing what is forbidden on the Sabbath!"

²⁵And he said to them, "Have you never read what David did in his time of need; when he and his men were very hungry? ²⁶He went into the House of God, when Abiathar was High Priest, and ate; the bread of offering, which only the priests are allowed to eat, and he also gave some to the men who were with him." ²⁷Then Jesus said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. ²⁸So the Son of Man is master even of the Sabbath."

Cure of the man with a withered hand

(Lk 6:6; Mt 12:9; Lk 14:1)

Mt 12:
9-14;
Lk 6:
6-11;
14:1-6;
13:10-17

3 • ¹Again, Jesus entered the synagogue. A man, who had a paralyzed hand, was there; ²and some people watched Jesus: would he heal the man on the Sabbath? If he did, they could accuse him.

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

⁵Then Jesus looked around at them

were scandalized because Jesus' disciples did this on the Sabbath, a day when all work was prohibited.

The Sabbath was made for man. No law, no matter how holy it is, should be applied in a way that would oppress a person.

The Son of Man is master even of the Sabbath (v. 28). For the Jews, the observance of the Sabbath was the pillar of the Law established by God. Who did Jesus think he was?

• 3.1 HUMAN ADVANCEMENT AND THE SABBATH

Here, what Mark wants to emphasize is not the miracle Jesus performs, but his attitude vis-à-vis the Sabbath. This miracle confirms what he has just said in 2:28.

The Pharisees considered it lawful to work on the Sabbath if it was a question of saving someone in danger of death. Jesus is about to enlarge

with anger and deep sadness at their hardness of heart. And he said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was healed. ⁶As soon as the Pharisees left, they met with Herod's supporters, looking for a way to destroy Jesus.

(Mt 12:15; Lk 6:17)

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

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

The Twelve apostles

(Mt 10:1; Lk 6:12)

• ¹³Then Jesus went up into the hill country, and called those he wanted,

Mt 12:
15-16;
Lk 6:
17-19

Lk 34;
6:55;
Lk 9:2

Lk 4:41

Mt 10:
1-4;
Lk 6:
12-16;
Mk 6:7;
Lk 9:1

this ruling: for him, not to do good is to do evil, not to cure is to kill.

Some ask if Jesus was interested in the material advancement (well-being) of people or only in their spiritual progress. Actually, it is impossible to separate one from the other.

Jesus, apparently, did not speak of the economy nor the social order, but he did denounce our prejudices that prevent us from giving the world a true and just order.

People, then, have the capacity and the means to better their condition, but they use them poorly because they remain prisoners of principles or institutions that are considered sacred, and in order to preserve them they allow half the world to die.

• 13. THE TWELVE

It was on the mountain that Moses and Elijah met God: it was there that God gave them their

Mt 9:35; 10:9; Lk 10:1 and they came to him. ¹⁴He appointed Twelve to be with him, and he called them ‘apostles.’ He wanted to send them out to preach; ¹⁵and he gave them authority to drive out demons.

Mt 16:18; Jn 1:42; Lk 9:54 ¹⁶These are the Twelve: Simon, to whom he gave the name Peter; ¹⁷James, son of Zebedee, and John his brother, to whom he gave the name *Boanerges*, which means ‘men of thunder’; ¹⁸Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alpheus, Thaddeus, Simon the Cananean, ¹⁹and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed him.

The sin against the Spirit

(Mt 12:24; Lk 11:15)

2:2; 6:31; Jn 10:20; Mt 12:24-32; Lk 11:15-23; Mt 9:34 • ²⁰They went home. The crowd began to gather again and they couldn’t even have a meal. ²¹Knowing what was happening, his relatives came to take charge of him. “He is out of his mind,” they said. ²²Meanwhile, the teachers of the law, who had come from Jerusa-

lem, said, “He is in the power of Beelzebul: the chief of the demons helps him to drive out demons.”

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

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

³⁰This was their sin when they said, “He has an unclean spirit in him.”

mission (Ex 19; 1 K 19). It is on the mountain that Jesus calls those who will be in a special way associated with his own mission: they will be *with him*, they will proclaim the word and drive out demons.

Mark tells us here what the Church is: a community assembled by Jesus close to him, where people hear the word of God and are freed from the slavery of the demon.

On the one hand are the countless afflicted who seek relief, and on the other the group of the *Twelve* whom Jesus asks to be his co-builders in the kingdom of God.

What do we know of these Twelve who would become Jesus’ messengers, the foundations of the Church, the teachers of the faith? The nucleus of the group were fishermen and with them a tax collector, Matthew; a teacher of the law, Bartholomew; and some others of whom we only know that Jesus chose them from among the people.

He came in order to save all, but his work began with the poor. Jesus did not belong more to the poor than to the rich, but like all humans he had to locate himself within a specific environment and social class.

Being a son of an artisan, he grew up among simple, humble people. In addition, Jesus made an important decision when he was eighteen or twenty years old. He chose to remain a manual worker rather than to enter a school for teach-

ers of the law. These religious schools were open to all.

Jesus could have begun his preaching as a qualified teacher and would certainly have found his helpers among the sincere teachers of the law, priests or Pharisees. But no, he preferred to educate himself through the worker’s life with no other religious instruction than the teachings of the synagogue, with no other book than the book of life. Because of this, when the time came, he found his apostles among the common people, young men who were simple but reliable people.

• *20. He is in the power of Beelzebul (v. 22).* More than the healings, the exorcisms unsettled the Pharisees and the teachers of the law. They, the religious authorities, traveled from Jerusalem to see this Jesus for themselves. The Jews of Jesus’ time were obsessed with the belief that illness was a form of possession. Jesus does not concern himself with distinguishing between illness and possession. Actually, the Devil is behind all human misery. *Beelzebul*, the name of an ancient idol, was a Jewish term for the Devil.

No one can break into the house of a strong man (v. 27). That Strong one is the Devil and his house is the possessed person. “To plunder the house” is to take away the Devil’s power over his victim.

Is 49:24; 53:12

Lk 12:10; 1Tim 1:13

Jesus' true family*(Mt 12:46; Lk 8:19)*Mt 12:
46-50;
Lk 8:
19-21;
Mk 6:3;
Jn 2:12

• ³¹ Then his mother and his brothers came. As they stood outside, they sent someone to call him. ³² The crowd sitting around Jesus told him, "Your mother and your brothers are outside

asking for you." ³³ He replied, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" Lk 11:28

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

Every sin will be forgiven humankind (v. 28), even insults to God, however numerous and Matthew adds: "And the one who speaks against the Son of Man will be forgiven" (Mt 12:32).

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

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

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

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

- 31. See Mark 3:20.

Jesus lost his relatives but found his true brothers and sisters. When we commit ourselves to God's work, we discover new brothers and sisters and a mother, Mary, of whom the Gospel says, "Happy are you for having believed that God's promises would be fulfilled." Jesus does not say, "He is my father," for the Father is one and he is in Heaven.

THE BROTHERS OF JESUS

The Church never doubted that Mary was a virgin and that Jesus was her only Son, as he is the only Son of the Father (see commentary

on Lk 1:26). Why then does it speak of *Jesus' brothers and sisters*?

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

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

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

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

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

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

The sower

(Mt 13:1; Lk 8:4)

Mt 13: 1-9; Lk 8:4-5; Mk 2:13; Lk 5:1

4 • ¹Again, Jesus began to teach by the lake; but such a large crowd gathered about him, that he got into a boat and sat in it on the lake, while the crowd stood on the shore. ²He taught them many things through parables. In his teaching he said,

Mt 13:34

³“Listen! The sower went out to sow. ⁴As he sowed, some of the seed fell along a path; and the birds came and ate it up. ⁵Some of the seed fell on rocky ground, where it had little soil; it sprang up immediately, because it had no depth; ⁶but when the sun rose and burned it, it withered, because it had no roots. ⁷Other seed fell among thorn bushes; and the thorns grew and choked it; so it didn’t produce any grain. ⁸But some seed fell on good

soil, grew and increased and yielded grain; some seed produced thirty times as much, some sixty, and some one hundred times as much.” ⁹And Jesus added, “Listen then, if you have ears.”

7:16; Rev 2:7

• ¹⁰When the crowd went away, some who were around him with the Twelve asked about the parables.

Mt 13: 10-15; Lk 8: 9-10; 8:18

¹¹He answered them, “The mystery of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But for those outside, everything comes in parables, ¹²so, that, *the more they see, they don’t perceive; the more they hear, they don’t understand; otherwise they would be converted and pardoned.*”

Dn 2:18; Rom 16:25; Eph 1:9

Is 6:9-10; Jn 12:40; Acts 28:26

• ¹³Jesus said to them, “Don’t you understand this parable? How, then, will you understand any of the parables?”

Mt 13: 18-23; Lk 8: 11-15; Mk 8:17; 6:52; 7:18

• **4.1** See commentary on Matthew 13:1 and Luke 8:9.

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

The sower went out to sow (v. 3). There was impatience to harvest the fruits of such terrible suffering and of so much blood shed under Roman occupation, and for Jesus it was still sowing time! We have here the great paradox of the Gospel, which often causes us to stumble: the kingdom is there and with it we have all that God can give us in this world. However it remains that all we have is hope (Rom 9:24). After twenty centuries of Christianity, the kingdom resembles a field that has just been sown. Some of the grain *bear fruit and multiply* (v. 8). Those who have eyes to see cannot fail to see how many things are born of the Gospel and continue to be born where it is received. The kingdom is manifest in the life and example of the saints, known and unknown. The fact that Western culture may deny the Gospel does not prevent its being born of its dynamism. The Gospel is behind all that has been undertaken to give the world unity and peace.

All this is born of the word, but it must mature and take shape in the heart of righteous persons.

• **10.** *The mystery of the kingdom of God has been given to you* (v. 11). Jesus reminds the disciples who are there with him, receiving from him the word of God, that they owe it to God’s grace. God himself has chosen them to receive and transmit the proclamation of the kingdom. Instead of pausing to ponder over such generosity, we might take the phrase in its opposite sense and ask: Has God then wished that others neither see nor understand?

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

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

• **13.** See commentary on Matthew 13:18.

¹⁴What the sower is sowing is the word. ¹⁵Those along the path, where the seed fell, are people who hear the word, but as soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them.

¹⁶Other people receive the word like rocky ground. As soon as they hear the word, they accept it with joy. ¹⁷But they have no roots, so it lasts only a little while. No sooner does trouble or persecution come because of the word, than they fall.

¹⁸Others receive the seed, as seed among thorns. After they hear the word, ¹⁹they are caught up in the worries of this life, false hopes of riches and other desires. All these come in and choke the word, so that finally it produces nothing.

²⁰And there are others who receive the word as good soil. They hear the word, take it to heart and produce: some thirty, some sixty, and some one hundred times as much.”

How then will you understand any of the parables? The apostles themselves are incapable of understanding very simple things. Jesus puts us on guard against an over-simplistic vision: on one side the “disciples,” on the other those who are not! We have never fully understood the mystery of the kingdom, still less are we mastering it: the frontier between “disciples” and “outsiders” passes in the midst of us all: Jesus will remind us in the parable of the weeds.

In fact, many Christian communities never grasp the real meaning of the words of Jesus. Some, because they always choose the same Gospel verses to justify their own ideas, and do not really want to listen. Others, because they look for practical advice that they be more generous, more patient etc., and they do not see that Jesus wants to show them a vision of the world and Church much wider than their own.

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

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

Jesus speaks of *thirty* and *one hundred* fold. The word that is heeded transforms our life and

Parable of the lamp

(Mt 10:26; Lk 8:16)

• ²¹Jesus also said to them, “When the light comes, is it put under a basket or a bed? Surely it is put on a lamp stand. ²²Whatever is hidden will be disclosed, and whatever is kept secret will be brought to light. ²³Listen then, if you have ears!”

²⁴And he also said to them, “Pay attention to what you hear. In the measure you give, so shall you receive, and still more will be given to you. ²⁵For to the one who produces something, more will be given; and from him who does not produce anything, even what he has will be taken away from him.”

The seed growing by itself

• ²⁶Jesus also said, “In the kingdom of God it is like this: a man scatters seed upon the soil. ²⁷Whether he is asleep or awake, be it day or night, the seed sprouts and grows; he knows

strengthens our attempts to save the world. Who can tell what is possible for a free and liberated person?

• ²¹. *Listen then, if you have ears* (v. 23). Jesus warns us, “You waste your time if you only listen to me yet do not allow what you hear to bear fruit. The measure that you measure out will be the measure you receive. That is to say, if you begin to act according to what you have learned, you will receive from God new strength and new knowledge. If you do nothing, even your religious beliefs will be of no value to you, not even when you present yourself before God. You read my Gospel, but now challenge yourselves before you follow any further.”

Whatever is hidden (v. 22). The word works *secretly* within the heart but when we discover the transformation that is at work in our life, we readily proclaim Christ and make known to others the secret that has made us happy (Eph 2:4; Col 3:3; Phil 2:10).

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

Lk 8:
16-17;
Mt 5:13;
Lk 11:33;
Jn 12:35;
12:46

Mt 10:26;
Lk 12:2

Mt 7:2;
13:12;
Lk 6:38;
8:18

Jas 5:7

not how. ²⁸The soil produces of itself; first, the blade; then, the ear; then the full grain in the ear. ²⁹And when it is ripe for harvesting, they take the sickle for the cutting: the time for the harvest has come.”

Jl Mt 13:
Rev
31-32;
Lk 13:
18-19

The mustard seed

(Mt 13:31; Lk 13:18)

• ³⁰Jesus also said, “What is the kingdom of God like? To what shall we compare it? ³¹It is like a mustard seed which, when sown, is the smallest of all the seeds scattered upon the soil. ³²But once sown, it grows up and becomes the largest of the plants in the garden; and even grows branches so big, that the birds of the air can take shelter in its shade.”

Mt 13:
31-32;
Lk 13:
18-19

Dn 4:
9, 18

³³Jesus used many such stories, in order to proclaim the word to them in a way that they would be able to understand. ³⁴He would not teach them without parables; but privately, to his disciples, he explained every-thing.

Mt 13:
34-35

Jesus calms the storm

(Mt 8:18; Lk 8:22)

• ³⁵On that same day, when evening had come, Jesus said to them, “Let’s go across to the other side of the lake.” ³⁶So they left the crowd, and took him along in the boat he had been sitting in, and other boats set out with him. ³⁷Then a storm gathered and it began to blow a gale. The waves spilled over into the boat, so that it was soon filled with water. ³⁸Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion.

Mt 8:18;
8:23-25;
Lk 8:
22-25

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

1:25;
Ps 89:10;
93:3

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

SEEDS

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

- 30. See commentary on Matthew 13:31.

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

In Jewish mentality the sea is a daily reminder of primitive chaos, it is there the marine monsters move around, monsters which only God, for he is the all-powerful, can challenge: Leviathan and Rahab. In commanding the sea: *Quiet*

now! Be still! (v. 39). Just as he does with the demons (Mk 1:25) Jesus affirms his divine power over the forces of evil.

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

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

• 5.1 Jesus overcame the raging sea and disembarking on the pagan shore of the lake he confronts the demon. The text says three times that the possessed lived among the tombs, and mentions also three times the chains with which people had in vain tried to bind him. For a Jew to repeat something three times is to use the

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

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

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

¹¹Now a great herd of pigs was feeding on the hillside, ¹²and the evil spirits begged him, "Send us to the pigs, and let us go into them." ¹³So

Jesus let them go. The evil spirits came out of the man and went into the pigs; and immediately, the herd rushed down the cliff; and all were drowned in the lake. ¹⁴The herdsmen fled, and reported this in the town and in the countryside. So all the people came to see what had happened.

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

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

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

• ²¹Jesus then crossed to the other side of the lake; and while he was still on the shore, a large crowd gathered

superlative: it is to say that the possessed has partnership with death and with impurity to which it is attached (Num 19:11); but no one, absolutely no one is able to master him. Finally the possessed, like the servants of idols (1 K 18:28) slashed himself with stones till blood flowed. This adversary, however, bows low recognizing the superiority of Jesus, Son of God the Most High, who forces him to reveal his name. Here again the name is a symbol: *legion* which means that this man is possessed by a regiment of demons. Jesus will free this possessed man: the demon, author of every "impurity" is sent to his own kingdom. Pigs are in fact, in Jewish tradition, a type of impure animal, and the sea into which they cast themselves is the symbol of the empire of evil (see the calmed tempest).

The herd rushed down (v. 13) (see Mt 8:32

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

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

• 21. This woman was considered by the Jews as unclean because of her illness (Lev

Mt 8:
28-34;
Lk 8:
26-39

Is 65:4;
Bar 3:11

1:24;
1:34

Mt
12:45;
Lk 8:2

Mt 9:
18-26;
Lk 8:
40-56

around him. ²²Jairus, an official of the synagogue, came up and, seeing Jesus, threw himself at his feet; ²³and begged him earnestly, "My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may get well and live."

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

³⁰But Jesus was conscious that healing power had gone out from him, so he turned around in the crowd, and asked, "Who touched my clothes?" ³¹His disciples answered,

"You see how the people are crowding around you. Why do you ask who touched you?" ³²But he kept looking around to see who had done it. ³³Then the woman, aware of what had happened, came forward, trembling and afraid. She knelt before him, and told him the whole truth.

• ³⁴Then Jesus said to her, "Daughter, your faith has saved you. Go in peace and be free of this illness."

³⁵While Jesus was still speaking, some people arrived from the official's house to inform him, "Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the Master any further?" ³⁶But Jesus ignored what they said, and told the official, "Do not fear, just believe." ³⁷And he allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James.

• ³⁸When they arrived at the house, Jesus saw a great commotion, with people weeping and wailing loudly. ³⁹Jesus entered, and said to them, "Why all this commotion and

Mt 8:10;
Mk
10:52;
Lk 7:50

Mt
27:52;
1Cor
11:30;
15:6;
1Thes
4:13

3:10;
6:56;
Acts
5:15;
19:11

Lk 6:19

15:19). She would also make "unclean" anyone who touched her. Because of this, she was prohibited by the law from mingling with others but dared enter into the crowd, and touch Jesus' cloak.

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

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

• 34. FAITH AND MIRACLES

Who is responsible for a miracle? Does it come from the faith of the one who asks or from Christ who works the miracle? If the miracle depends solely on the faith of a person, then what is the difference between the faithful

one who asks God for a cure and the one who goes to any faith healer? In the latter, it would be enough to convince oneself; the one actually doing the healing would matter little.

These people coming to Jesus were, of course, very far from recognizing him as the Son of God, but they were convinced that God would give them some blessing through this prophet and holy man. This faith prepared them to receive healing in both body and spirit. How can God heal those who refuse to hope?

What stands out on this page is the power of Christ: *Jesus was conscious that healing power had gone out from him* (v. 30).

Your faith has saved you (v. 34). This can also be translated: Your faith has made you well. In fact, both meanings fit (like in 10:52). For this woman risked all and finally saw how much God loved her.

• 38. Here Jesus is confronted with the death of a girl who is called to live. Jairus was an official of the synagogue (v. 22), that is to say, one of those holding responsibility in the local Jewish community.

We too ask God to be healed, but we dare not ask for resurrection of the dead because we

weeping? The child is not dead, but asleep.”

⁴⁰They laughed at him. So Jesus sent them outside, and went with the child’s father and mother and his companions into the room, where the child lay. ⁴¹Taking her by the hand, he said to her, “*Talitha kumi!*” which means, “Little girl, get up!”

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

Is he not the carpenter?

(Mt 13:53; Lk 4:16)

6 • ¹Leaving that place, Jesus returned to his own country, and

his disciples followed him. ²When the Sabbath came, he began to teach in the synagogue, and most of those who heard him were astonished. But they said, “How did this come to him? What kind of wisdom has been given to him, that he also performs such miracles? ³Who is he but the carpenter, the Son of Mary, and the brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? His sisters, too, are they not here among us?” So they took offense at him.

⁴And Jesus said to them, “Prophets are despised only in their own country, among their relatives, and in their own family.” ⁵And he could work no miracles there, but only healed a few sick people, by laying his hands on them. ⁶Jesus himself was astounded at their unbelief.

consider death as something absolutely irreversible. Jesus wishes to show us that no “law of destiny” or nature can be an obstacle to God’s love.

People wailing loudly (v. 38). During Jesus’ time it was customary to hire professional mourners and musicians at a funeral. Today, at funerals, we also have long discourses and ceremonies to mask death, because it shakes and discomforts us and shatters our apparent peace. Jesus does not allow himself to be taken in by our illusions.

The child is not dead, but asleep (v. 39). Of course she is dead, and that is why the people mock him; but Jesus sends the noisy crowd outside, and takes with him the child’s father and mother. They are capable of understanding for they have come to him in a spirit of faith (v. 22).

Get up! (v. 41). From the first hour, the disciples of Jesus have used this vocabulary “sleep,” “rise” in speaking of death and resurrection. They believed that Jesus, Son of God, had, with his own resurrection, definitively defeated death (1 Cor 15). Polls reveal that today a great number of Christians no longer believe in the resurrection. One may ask if it is not the result of a religious education that has been based on moral considerations rather than on listening to the word of God.

• 6.1 THE WISDOM OF JESUS

The brothers and sisters of Jesus are his relatives and acquaintances of Nazareth: see commentary on Mark 3:31.

How did this come to him? (v. 2). Does this

mean that Jesus traveled to other countries in order to get magic powers? See the answer in the commentary on Matthew 2:23.

Because he always lived among them and never did anything extraordinary, they were astonished that, in such a short time, he became famous throughout Galilee. In fact they do not know him: most of the time people mistakenly believe they know their neighbors.

Prophets are despised only in their own country (v. 4). After living with him so long and treating him like anyone else, how could they suddenly show respect and have faith in him?

Who is he but the carpenter? (v. 3). The term the Gospel uses is craftsman. There is no further specification. Yet the first Christians of Palestine asserted that Jesus was a carpenter.

What kind of wisdom has been given to him? (v. 2). Many people say that because Christ was God he knew all things, but divine knowledge is nothing less than God himself. He knows all at once in an instant that never ends—this is eternity. On the other hand, humans think in ideas, and do not embrace all at the same time. That is why, from birth, Jesus had to learn from experience and discover. Yet he had a clear awareness that he was the Son, although at the beginning he did not have the words to think or express this.

Jesus received his human learning from Mary, Joseph, and his neighbors in Nazareth. He acquired his wisdom from the Scriptures and the culture of his people. Yet the Father gave him his Spirit to judge as God does and to recognize God in all things. For him (as for us now) what

Jesus sends out the Twelve*(Mt 10:1; Lk 9:1; 10:1)*

• Jesus then went around the villages, teaching. ⁷He called the Twelve to him, and began to send them out two by two, giving them authority over evil spirits. ⁸And he ordered them to take nothing for the journey, except a staff: no food, no bag, no money in their belts. ⁹They were to wear sandals and were not to take an extra tunic.

¹⁰And he added, "In whatever house you are welcomed, stay there until you leave the place. ¹¹If any place doesn't receive you, and the people refuse to listen to you, leave after shaking the dust off your feet. It will be a testimony against them."

¹²So they set out to proclaim that this was the time to repent. ¹³They drove out many demons and healed many sick people by anointing them.

John the Baptist beheaded*(Mt 14:1; Lk 9:7)*

• ¹⁴King Herod also heard about Jesus, because his name had become well-known. Some people said, "John

the Baptist has been raised from the dead, and that is why miraculous powers are at work in him." ¹⁵Others thought, "He is Elijah," and others, "He is a prophet like the prophets of times past." ¹⁶When Herod was told of this, he thought, "I had John beheaded; yet, he has risen from the dead!"

¹⁷For this is what had happened: Herod had ordered John to be arrested; and had had him bound and put in prison because of Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip. Herod had married her; ¹⁸and John had told him, "It is not right for you to live with your brother's wife." ¹⁹So Herodias held a grudge against John and wanted to kill him; but she could not, ²⁰because Herod respected John. He knew John to be an upright and holy man, and kept him safe. And he liked listening to him; although he became very disturbed whenever he heard him.

²¹Herodias had her chance on Herod's birthday, when he gave a dinner for all the senior government officials, military chiefs, and the leaders of Galilee. ²²On that occasion, the daughter

was important was not accumulating data and experiences but to be able to appreciate all that occurred. Jesus, inspired by the Spirit, felt all the realities of life in a different way: this was Wisdom.

• 6. THE MISSION

See commentary on Matthew 10:5; Luke 10:1; Matthew 28:16. Jesus begins a third stage of his ministry by organizing a mission throughout the province. Before, the apostles accompanied Jesus but now he *sends them* ahead of him.

Jesus is an educator. He not only teaches his followers, he has them share in his mission. His apostles must also proclaim their faith and perform healings as the Master does. By doing this, they put into practice what they have discovered of the kingdom of God. The disciples should be first to believe what they themselves proclaim: God makes himself present. Because of this, they must live day by day, trusting in the Father's Providence, not frightened but always conscious of God's mission and power.

Oil was used at the time as a remedy, but Jesus gives it a new meaning: the healings bring more than just well being, they are also the sign

of spiritual healing, the reconciliation of people with God.

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

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

King Herod respected John (v. 20), but he was prisoner of his milieu and of his vices. As king of Galilee, his misconduct constituted a public counter-witness.

All through the Scriptures we see prophets stressing the particular responsibility of those who wield power. If they have to lead the people, they must be, by the rectitude of their life, an example; John the Baptist could not speak of justice without reproaching Herod for his infidelity.

People said that John the Baptist has been raised from the dead (v. 14). They considered John a martyr and believed he would rise from

Mt 10:1;
10:9-14;
Lk 9:1-6;
10:1;
6:12;
Mt 5:1;
Mk 3:14

7:24

Mt 14:
3-12;
Lk 9:7;
3:19-20

1:7;
Lk 3:15

Lev
18:16

of Herodias came in and danced; and she delighted Herod and his guests. The king said to the girl, "Ask me for anything you want and I will give it to you."²³ And he went so far as to say with many oaths, "I will give you anything you ask, even half my kingdom."²⁴ She went out and said to her mother, "What shall I ask for?" The mother replied, "The head of John the Baptist."²⁵ The girl hurried to the king and made her request, "I want you to give me the head of John the Baptist, here and now, on a dish."

²⁶The king was very displeased, but he would not refuse in front of his guests because of his oaths.²⁷ So he sent one of the bodyguards, with orders to bring John's head. He went and beheaded John in prison;²⁸ then he brought the head on a dish and gave it to the girl. And the girl gave it to her mother.²⁹ When John's disciples heard of this, they came and took his body and buried it.

the dead to punish Herod. Some associated Jesus with John—Jesus performed miracles that John had not done. Others, less informed, thought Jesus was an apparition of John.

• 30. The apostles are exhausted. At the end of this journey they need to rest and take a deeper look at their experiences. Jesus teaches them and helps them reflect upon what they had seen and done.

Many people coming and going (v. 31). After the disciples had gone through the villages of Galilee many people wanted to know who had sent them, and the crowd approached Jesus.

He had compassion on them (v. 34). The Old Testament had shown the compassion of God as a Father, but now Jesus reveals this compassion in a different way. No one could fully understand the mercy of God until the Son came to share everything with us, making himself poor among the poor, able to feel with them instead of giving them his words and deeds of mercy from above.

This compassion of Jesus helps us understand that Christian commitment to the poor is not complete as long as the Church is not itself deeply rooted in the lower class of society.

They were like sheep without a shepherd (Num 27:17; Is 40:11; Ezk 34; Zec 11:4-17; 12:8). This refers to people who had not yet

Jesus, shepherd and prophet

• ³⁰The apostles returned and reported to Jesus all they had done and taught.³¹ Then he said to them, "Let us go off by ourselves into a remote place and have some rest." For there were so many people coming and going that the apostles had no time even to eat.³² And they went away in the boat to a secluded area by themselves.

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

³⁴As Jesus went ashore, he saw a large crowd, and he had compassion on them, for they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he began to teach them many things.

First miracle of the loaves

(Mt 14:13; Lk 9:10; Jn 6:1)

• ³⁵It was now getting late, so his disciples came to him and said, "This

found true community, and Jesus had pity on them. The prophet Ezekiel reproached the leaders of Israel for being bad pastors, but today he might reproach us for failing to be pastors and prophets in the midst of our world. Why should we so often wait for priests, religious or a few handpicked lay people to take the initiative of assembling new communities? Why are we so timid in proposing to "those who are outside" the light of faith that we have gratuitously received and allow them to discover in the group or community this richness?

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

Jesus saw that *they were burdened* with difficulties but would lift them up by giving them "signs of hope." In any situation there is something that we can do immediately to uplift ourselves; and even before any attempt of ours, God already gives us signs that he does not abandon us and that we must trust totally in him.

• 35. Scripture says that from the mouth of

is a lonely place and it is now late.
³⁶You should send the people away, and let them go to the farms and villages around here, to buy themselves something to eat.”

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

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

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

Jesus walks on the water

(Mt 14:22; Jn 6:16)

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

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

⁴⁹When they saw him walking on the lake, they thought it was a ghost and cried out; ⁵⁰for they all saw him and were terrified. But, at once, he called to them, “Courage! It is I; don’t be afraid!” ⁵¹Then Jesus got into the boat with them, and the wind died down. They were completely astonished, ⁵²for they had not really grasped the fact of the loaves; their minds were dull.

⁵³Having crossed the lake, they came ashore at Gennesaret, where

2K 4:42;
16;
Dt 8:3;
Ps 78:24;
Wis
16:20;
1Cor
10:3

18:21

Is 25:6;
55:1;
65:13

Mt 14:
22-23;
Jn 6:
15-21

1:35

Job 9:6;
Ps 77:20;
Sir 24:5

4:41;
Lk 5:9

4:13;
7:18

Mt 14:
34-36;
Mk 3:7;
Mt 4:
23-24

God comes bread, and the word that we need (Dt 8:3). By the act of giving bread, Jesus demonstrates that his words are God’s words. God gives bread to his people (Ex 16; Ps 72:16; Ps 81:17; Ps 132:15; 147:14).

What comes from the mouth of God (Dt 8:3; Wis 16:26; Mt 4:4). Seen in the light of the Old Testament, this narration identifies Jesus as the Shepherd foretold by the prophets.

They sat in fresh pastures (Ps 23), and *they ate till they were satisfied* (Ps 78:29). The crowd seated for a meal is the image of the Reign when Jesus will unite all of humanity in the fraternal banquet of God (Lk 14:15).

Raising his eyes to heaven (v. 41). By using this gesture, rather than a prayer that saints or prophets might have said on this occasion, Jesus expresses his personal relationship with the Father.

Jesus is the bread needed by humanity (Jn 6). God has set on this earth all that humanity needs for food and development, but if we

do not know how to listen to the word, we will not know how to solve the world’s most urgent problem, the distribution of the riches of the earth. Faith in God’s promises is the only force with which to fight against egoism and unequal privileges, and it will eventually obtain food, peace, and freedom for all.

Because of this, Jesus *had compassion for this crowd* whose leaders had little concern for them. Without bothering about food, this crowd sat listening to him while he conveyed to them the word of God that liberates people from blindness and emptiness. Then, being the Shepherd and the True Bread of Life, he gave them food and distributed it.

• ⁴⁵. *Jesus obliged them* to get into the boat. Why? John’s Gospel explains this (Jn 6:15). Because the people, enthused by the miracle, wanted to make him a king and liberator sent by God. Even the apostles were eager for this to happen.

they tied up the boat. ⁵⁴As soon as they landed, people recognized Jesus, ⁵⁵and ran to spread the news throughout the countryside. Wherever he was, they brought to him the sick lying on their mats; ⁵⁶and wherever he went, to villages, towns or farms, they laid the sick in the marketplace, and begged him to let them touch just the fringe of his cloak. And all who touched him were cured.

Mt 9:35

Mt 12:15;
Lk 6:17;
Mk 1:32;
Num
15:38

True cleanness

(Mt 15:10; Lk 6:39)

7 • ¹One day, the Pharisees gathered around Jesus, and with them were some teachers of the law who had just come from Jerusalem.

Mt
15:1-9

²They noticed that some of his disciples were eating their meal with unclean hands, that is, without washing them. ³Now the Pharisees, and in fact all the Jews, never eat without washing their hands, for they follow the tradition received from their ancestors. ⁴Nor do they eat anything, when they come from the market, without first washing themselves. And there are many other traditions they observe; for example, the ritual washing of cups, pots and plates.

Lk 11:38

⁵So the Pharisees and the teachers of the law asked him, “Why do your

disciples not follow the tradition of the elders, but eat with unclean hands?”

⁶Jesus answered, “You shallow people! How well Isaiah prophesied of you when he wrote: *This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.* ⁷*The worship they offer me is worthless, for what they teach are only human rules.* ⁸You even put aside the commandment of God to hold fast to human tradition.”

Is 29:13

⁹And Jesus commented, “You have a fine way of disregarding the commandments of God in order to enforce your own traditions! ¹⁰For example, Moses said: *Do your duty to your father and your mother*, and: *Whoever curses his father or his mother is to be put to death.* ¹¹But according to you, someone could say to his father or mother, ‘I already declared *Corban* (which means “offered to God”) what you could have expected from me.’ ¹²In this case, you no longer require him to do anything for his father or mother; ¹³and so you nullify the word of God through the tradition you have handed on. And you do many other things like that.”

20:12;
21:17;
Lev 20:9

• ¹⁴Jesus then called the people to him again and said to them, “Listen to me, all of you, and try to understand.

Mt 15:
10-20

• 7.1 THE TRADITION AND TRADITIONS

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

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

ditions of Catholics with the Tradition of the Church.

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

• 14. CLEAN AND UNCLEAN

An important practice of Judaism was to keep oneself clean: one could not participate in

¹⁵Nothing that enters a person from the outside can make that person unclean. It is what comes from within that makes a person unclean. ¹⁶Let everyone who has ears listen.”

¹⁷When Jesus got home and was away from the crowd, his disciples asked him about this saying, ¹⁸and he replied, “So even you are dull? Do you not see that whatever comes from outside cannot make a person unclean, ¹⁹since it enters not the heart but the stomach, and is finally passed out?”

Thus Jesus declared that all foods are clean.

²⁰And he went on, “What comes out of a person is what defiles him, ²¹for evil designs come out of the heart:

Acts 10:
11-15;
Gal 2:12;
Col 2:21;
Rom
14:14

worship without being in a state of ritual purity. This word “purity” did not have the same meaning we give it today. The clean person was one who was not contaminated even inadvertently by things prohibited by law. For example, pork and rabbit were considered unclean; they could not be eaten. A menstruating woman or a person with hemorrhoids were considered unclean for a certain number of days: no one could even touch them. A leper was considered unclean until cured. If a bug fell in oil, the oil was considered unclean, and would have to be thrown away.

If contaminated even by no fault of his own, the person had to purify himself, usually with water, sometimes paying for sacrifices.

At one time, these laws were useful in encouraging a hygienic life-style. They also protected the faith of the Jews who lived among people who did not know God. How could they guard their faith in the one God if they were to live with other nations, befriend them, and even imitate their ways? With so many religious practices to observe, the Jews had to live apart from those who did not share their faith and life-style.

Jesus removes off from these rites their sacred value: nothing is unclean in all God’s creation: touching the sick, a corpse or a bloodstained object does not offend God. God is not bothered if we eat this or that. Sin is always something *that comes from the heart* and not something we do unintentionally.

It is true that Scripture teaches these concepts of purity and impurity, but these laws were written many centuries ago and not everything Scripture says is valid for all times. Through the teachings of the Scriptures God educated his nation, but the laws he gave them from the beginning, when they were barbaric and unedu-

theft, murder, ²²adultery, jealousy, greed, maliciousness, deceit, indecency, slander, pride and folly. ²³All these evil things come from within and make a person unclean.”

The faith of the Syrophenician (Mt 15:21)

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

Mt 15:
21-28;
1K 17:
8-24

cated, are no longer necessary for a community which has a solid religious foundation.

It is quite legitimate for Christians to adopt a vegetarian way of life, that Christian communities consider abstinence from alcohol and tobacco as a witness to help addicts. But let us not say that this is part of our faith nor let us judge those who do not agree with us. That would otherwise undermine the transcendence of Christian salvation that goes beyond any question of “eating and drinking” (Rom 14:17).

• 24. THE PAGANS

The authorities come into conflict with Jesus. He must depart and wander along the border of Galilee, where he is less watched and can easily flee. This incident occurs near Tyre, a province occupied by the Syrians and Phoenicians.

The Jews were never able to understand their election by God as his chosen people without looking down on other nations. Being bearers of the true faith obliged them to avoid contamination with other religions, but actually this increased their inability to understand all that was foreign.

For them the world was divided in two: there were “the people” (Jewish) and “the nations”: all the others. Apparently God ignored these others, unless it was to let them feel the weight of his justice. Their minds were totally closed to the question we ask ourselves today: how does God deal with and save all those who have not heard his word? So it was that the *Phoenicians* (v. 26), (also called Greeks because they spoke Greek rather than Hebrew) lived near but were very distant from the Jews.

Although Jesus came to save all, his Father desired that he not go beyond his own country.

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

Healing a deaf and dumb man

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

Mt 15:
29-31;
Mk 8:
22-26

³³ Jesus took him apart from the crowd, put his fingers into the man’s ears, and touched his tongue with spittle. ³⁴ Then, looking up to heaven, he said with a deep sigh, “*Ephphata!*” that is, “Be opened!”

³⁵ And immediately, his ears were opened, his tongue was loosened, and he began to speak clearly. ³⁶ Jesus ordered them not to tell anyone about it; but the more he insisted, the more they proclaimed it. ³⁷ The people were completely astonished and said, “He has done all things well; he makes the deaf hear and the dumb speak.”

Is 35:5

Second miracle of the loaves

(Mt 15:32)

8 • ¹ Soon afterward, Jesus was in the midst of another large crowd, that obviously had nothing to eat. So he called his disciples and said to them, ² “I feel sorry for these people,

Mt 15:
32-39;
Lk 9:
10-17;
Mk 6:
30-44

Nevertheless, on certain occasions he encountered pagans, and more than once admired their simplicity and faith.

The Gospel has not kept all that Jesus said and did, but we see nothing there that could be a call to “change one’s religion” nor a threat for those who take a road other than that of Christianity. Jesus leaves them on the path along which the Father leads them and invites them to thank the one and only God and shows them how near the Father is to them through his Son.

The Jews usually looked down on pagans with marked contempt: they were *the sons*, the pagans were *the dogs*. Jesus answered the afflicted woman repeating this well-known scornful saying. He said this to test the woman’s faith: would she insist when it appeared that even God would reject her?

• 31. *They asked Jesus to lay his hand upon him* (v. 32). This was a way of invoking divine power but Jesus did not have to ask. By his gesture he showed that he had within himself, within his human person, all the health and welfare that we need, and he communicated this to the sick one.

Jesus groaned (see 8:12). Why? Because the man before him is an impressive symbol of those who have eyes and ears but neither see nor hear. The people bring him the deaf-mute, and ask him to heal him, but they themselves remain deaf.

Jesus ordered them not to tell anyone (v. 36). How far Jesus is from the organizers of a “Miracle Crusade”! An unexpected miracle may help us discover the loving presence of God, but as soon as we begin to wait for them, we turn away from the Gospel. The Devil knows this and so tempted Jesus in the desert (Mt 4:6): See the warnings of Deuteronomy to people anxious to see miracles (Dt 13). Faith leans on the word of God, not on miracles (Jn 4:48).

• 8.1 This second account of the multiplication of loaves is not a repetition of the first account. It is obvious that oral transmission of these two events leads to shape them according to the same pattern, but they have different meaning.

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

Later Jesus journeys to the boundaries of Galilee, where most of the population are pagans. They also want to hear Jesus. There, on the other side of the shore, the eastern part, Jesus offers them bread as a farewell meal after they

because they have been with me for three days and now have nothing to eat. ³If I send them to their homes hungry, they will faint on the way; some of them have come a long way."

⁴His disciples replied, "Where, in a deserted place like this, could we get enough bread to feed these people?" ⁵He asked them, "How many loaves have you?" And they answered, "Seven."

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

⁸The people ate and were satisfied, and they picked up the broken pieces left over, seven baskets full. ⁹Now those who had eaten were about four thousand in number. Jesus sent them away, ¹⁰and immediately got into the boat with his disciples, and went to the region of Dalmanutha.

Why do they demand a sign?

(Mt 16:1; Lk 12:54)

• ¹¹The Pharisees came and started to argue with Jesus. Hoping to embarrass him, they asked for some heavenly sign. ¹²Then his spirit was moved. He gave a deep sigh and said, "Why do the people of this present time ask for a sign? Truly, I say to you, no sign shall be given to this people." ¹³Then he left them, got into

Mt 16:
-4;
Lk 12:54

Mt 12:
38-40;
Jn 6:30;
Is 7:11;
Num
14:11

followed him for two days through the desert land.

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

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

These differences underline the will of Mark to take into account the real situation of the Church at the time he wrote: having been born in Jewish milieu, it was developing among Greek nations. This is why, for the first multiplication the evangelists say, "Jesus pronounced a blessing", and in the second, "Jesus gave thanks". Because the first was the word used for Eucharist among Jewish Christian communities, and the latter was used in Greek speaking churches.

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

The miracle of the multiplication of the loaves (or the two multiplications of loaves) holds an

important place in the synoptic Gospels because it points out Jesus as the Messiah: see commentary on Matthew 15:29; Luke 9:12; John 6.

- 11. See commentary on Matthew 16:1.

THE PHARISEES

The Pharisees do not see the fruits of Jesus' teaching. They do not see the thousands of anonymous disciples who are rediscovering hope and who are gradually transformed. They do not see that God had visited the poor. Jesus is going to clash more and more with this powerful group, the most respected in Jewish society and a question comes to our mind: if Jesus came today, wouldn't he shock many people who think they are the pillars of the Church?

In fact, the reproach that Jesus addresses to the Pharisees is often found in those who turn to respected religious institutions. First, we start with a desire for moral perfection that is unconsciously linked to our need to be acknowledged by society. We are aware of our own responsibility. This is a good thing and it was at the heart of Phariseism. This may be a starting point. But as time goes by, we fail to realize that we have become more attached to our own virtues than to God: love would have steeped us in humility.

Fully convinced of their own merits (their "righteousness," Lk 18:9), the Pharisees seek a type of sanctity based on rules, alms and services and in return for their merits, they expect God to treat them in a special way. We are a long way from grace and from the Gospel since we can only encounter God if we accept our weaknesses and God's forgiveness. Then, we truly and humbly

the boat again, and went to the other side of the lake.

Mt 16:5-12; Lk 12:1
1Cor 5:6 • ¹⁴The disciples had forgotten to bring more bread, and had only one loaf with them in the boat. ¹⁵Then

Jesus warned them, “Keep your eyes open, and beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and the yeast of Herod.” ¹⁶And they said to one another, “He saw that we have no bread.”

4:13 ¹⁷Aware of this, Jesus asked them, “Why are you talking about the loaves you are short of? Do you not see or understand? Are your minds closed?

Jer 5:21; Ezk 12:2 ¹⁸Have you eyes that don’t see and ears that don’t hear? And do you not remember

6:35-44 ¹⁹when I broke the five loaves among five thousand? How many baskets full of leftovers did you collect?” They answered, “Twelve.”

8:1-9 ²⁰“And having distributed seven loaves to the four thousand, how many wicker

baskets of leftovers did you collect?” They answered, “Seven.” ²¹Then Jesus said to them, “Do you still not understand?”

Cure of the blind man at Bethsaida

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

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

love God and we feel we are the brothers and sisters of the poorest and of sinners.

Our belonging to a real or alleged elite brings us to cultivate our own image, therefore appearances, as we are more removed from the world of “sinners” and ordinary people (as if by chance, Pharisee means separated). This more “select” milieu offers a chance to every ambition and from then on, as Jesus says, hypocrisy rules.

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

Jesus says: *Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees* (v. 15), meaning their teaching (Mt 16:12). The Pharisees saw Jesus as a popular worker-wonder who threatened their authority as a religious and popular leader of the people. Since the disciples had forgotten to bring more bread, they missed Jesus’ point about the leaven of the Pharisees. Jesus fears that his disciples, because of being common people, would let themselves be impressed by the knowledge and fame of the Pharisees, and he warns them that these people build religion on the wrong basis.

Jesus agreed with the Pharisees on the general way of understanding the Scriptures, but not the spirit of many among them. As “master” he chose a way opposed to theirs. Instead of a teaching that comes from above he became part of a natural group of quite simple people and

formed them through action. He made them reflect on what they saw, on what they did, and above all on what God was doing among them as they worked with him.

• 22. When a person, blind from birth, regains his sight, it takes time for him to gradually focus on objects and to understand what his new eyes see. Jesus again laid his hands on this blind man’s eyes.

The same is true in the spiritual realm. Jesus does not let us see everything at once, but conversion is realized bit by bit.

Do not return to the village (v. 26). If so, all the people would go looking for Jesus to see him and touch him and clamor for a miracle. Jesus came instead for an authentic encounter with people.

• 27. CHRIST—THE SON OF MAN

Here the Gospel already foretells the tragic end. For the first time, the apostles take account of who their Master is.

You are the Messiah (v. 29). Christ is a Greek word that means the Messiah in Hebrew. They both mean: *the anointed or consecrated one*. This term designated the long-awaited Savior. The apostles discover that Jesus is the Messiah, the Liberator, but he teaches them *that the Son of Man (the Human One) has to suffer many things* (v. 31).

Why does Jesus call himself the Son of Man?

Peter's profession of faith*(Mt 16:13; Lk 9:18; Jn 6:69)*

• ²⁷ Jesus set out with his disciples for the villages around Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked them, "Who do people say I am?" ²⁸ And they told him, "Some say, you are John the Baptist; others say, you are Elijah or one of the prophets."

Then Jesus asked them, ²⁹ "But you, who do you say I am?" Peter answered, "You are the Messiah." ³⁰ And he ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

³¹ Jesus then began to teach them that the Son of Man had to suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law. He would be killed, and after three days rise again. ³² Jesus said all this quite openly, so that Peter took him aside and began to protest strongly. ³³ But Jesus, turning around, and looking at his disciples, rebuked

Peter, saying, "Get behind me, Satan! You are thinking not as God does, but as people do."

Take up your cross*(Mt 16:24; Lk 9:23)*

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

³⁶ What good is it, to gain the whole world, while destroying your soul? ³⁷ There is nothing more precious than your soul. ³⁸ I tell you, if anyone is ashamed of me and of my words, among this adulterous and sinful people, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him, when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

For two reasons: first, because one page in Scripture speaks of the Son of Man who gloriously comes from God to judge all people and to rule all the nations (Dn 7:13). Second, because Jesus is the perfect Human and bears the destiny of humanity.

Jesus *had to suffer* (v. 31), because this is the fate of sinners. He had to suffer and be rejected by the authorities, because this is the destiny of those who proclaim the truth. He had to freely go to his death because self-sacrifice is the only means for the salvation of the world.

- 34. It is necessary to lose oneself:
 - to lose oneself like Abraham, who in his old age went to strange lands;
 - to lose oneself like Moses, who agreed to be the leader of an irresponsible people;
 - to lose oneself like Mary, who entered a path wherein no one could understand or help her;
 - to rid oneself of this temporary existence so as to be reborn of God, like Ignatius the martyr. Condemned to be eaten by lions, he said, "I am the wheat of God; may I be ground by the teeth of wild animals to be converted into the pure bread of Christ. My passions are crucified in me; there is no carnal fire that can burn me; a fountain has sprouted in me that murmurs and speaks from within: come to the Father."

Take up your cross (v. 34). Jesus tells us that to follow him is to follow the same path that took

him to the cross. To reach maturity it is necessary to renounce our life; in other words, we must risk ourselves for something noble instead of being concerned about our own future; we must find a life-style that will help us excel in the way of love; and we must accept that our life may be a failure according to others' way of thinking (Lk 17:33; Jn 12:23-25).

Taking up our cross by accepting freely the sacrifices that the Father sends each day, we receive from that moment something even more marvelous than what was sacrificed: inner freedom and more profound happiness (Mk 10:30).

Think of what Jesus says: *from me, for me*, and not: *from God, for God*. For God has come in the person of Jesus to knock on our door and to propose to us very specific commitments.

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

- 9.1 The transfiguration of Jesus is the mid-point of Mark's Gospel.

This manifestation is in fact one of the most important in the New Testament. In the liturgy

Mt 16:
13-20;
Lk 9:
18-21;
Jn 6:
68-69

4:22;
9:9

Mt 16:
21-23;
Lk 9:22

Mt 16:
24-28;
Lk 9:
23-27;
14:26

13:15;
Lk 9:24

3:28;
Lk 12:1;
12:51;
21:14;
Ps 49:8;
Mt 10:33;
2Tim
2:12

The transfiguration of Jesus

(Mt 17:1; Lk 9:28)

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

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

⁵Then Peter spoke and said to Jesus, “Master, it is good that we are here; let us make three tents, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” ⁶For he did not know what to say: they were overcome with awe. ⁷But a cloud formed, covering them in a shadow, and from the cloud came a voice, “This is my Son, the Beloved:

listen to him!” ⁸And suddenly, as they looked around, they no longer saw anyone except Jesus with them.

⁹As they came down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one what they had seen, until the Son of Man had risen from the dead. ¹⁰So they kept this to themselves, although they discussed with one another what ‘to rise from the dead’ could mean.

The question about Elijah

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

of oriental Churches, the feast of the Transfiguration holds a place of supreme importance.

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

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

Jesus had just announced his passion and his death: the day had come when the Father confirmed his end that was very near (Lk 9:31) and gave him a foretaste of his resurrection. Moses and Elijah were the witnesses, they who, in a certain way, escaped the corruption of death (Dt 34:6; 2 K 2:11).

A cloud formed covering them in a shadow (v. 7). The cloud mentioned here is that which, in several episodes of the Scriptures, both indicates and hides the mysterious presence of God (Ex 19 and 1 K 8:10).

Listen to him! (v. 7). The apostles have been accompanying Jesus for more than a year, with misunderstanding increasing between him and the religious authorities of the people of God. For them a question could arise: Is not Jesus

mistaken? Are not the certitudes of God’s people on the side of the priests and scribes?

The Father himself intervenes, just as he had done in the past for John the Baptist: *Listen to him!* “Listen to him for he is the Word made flesh” (Jn 1:14; Heb 1:1). He is the Prophet, and all the others speak only for him (Dt 18:17).

When Jesus worked miracles for the sick, and over the forces of nature, he showed that the present order of the world is not permanent. Now the curtains are partially opened: would that the apostles understood that the Son of Man, as Jesus calls himself, is close to his resurrection. In a little while his fellow citizens will hang him on a cross. In a little while, too, the Father will give him the glory that awaits him. The shining cloud, the dazzling white clothes are external signs that indicate something of the mystery of Jesus: the day he rises from among the dead, his human nature will be transformed and extended by divine Energies, so that he may fill everything in everyone.

• 11. On going down the mountain, the apostles feel uneasy, “Why did Moses and Elijah speak of the imminent death of Jesus?” They cling to their illusions, finding support in the Scriptures which said that Elijah had to return to earth to prepare the way before the Messiah would come, so that he should not encounter any opposition (Mal 3:1 and 4:23).

Mt 17:
1-9;
Lk 9:
28-36;
Mk
13:30;
Rom 1:4

2Cor
3:18;
Mt 28:3;
Rev 3:4

40:35;
Dt 18:15;
Acts
3:22

1:34;
8:30

Mt 17:
10-13;
Mal 3:23;
Sir
48:10;
Mt 11:14;
Jn 1:21

Is 52:14

Mt
21:32;
Lk 16:12

The boy with an evil spirit

• ¹⁴When they came to the place where they had left the disciples, they saw many people around them and some teachers of the law arguing with them. ¹⁵When the people saw Jesus, they were astonished and ran to greet him.

¹⁶He asked, "What are you arguing about with them?" ¹⁷A man answered him from the crowd, "Master, I brought my son to you, for he has a spirit, deaf and mute. ¹⁸Whenever the spirit seizes him, it throws him down and he foams at the mouth, grinds his teeth and becomes stiff all over. I asked your disciples to drive the spirit out, but they could not."

¹⁹Jesus replied, "You faithless people! How long must I be with you? How long must I put up with you? Bring him to me." ²⁰And they brought the boy to him.

As soon as the spirit saw Jesus, it shook and convulsed the boy, who fell on the ground and began rolling about, foaming at the mouth. ²¹Then Jesus asked the father, "How long

has this been happening to him?" He replied, "From childhood. ²²And it has often thrown him into the fire and into the water to destroy him. If you can do anything, have pity on us and help us."

²³Jesus said to him, "Why do you say, 'If you can?'" All things are possible for one who believes." ²⁴Immediately, the father of the boy cried out, "I do believe, but help the little faith I have."

²⁵Jesus saw that the crowd was increasing rapidly, so he ordered the evil spirit, "Dumb and deaf spirit, I command you: Leave the boy and never enter him again." ²⁶The evil spirit shook and convulsed the boy and with a terrible shriek came out. The boy lay like a corpse and people said, "He is dead." ²⁷But Jesus took him by the hand and raised him; and the boy stood up.

²⁸After Jesus had gone indoors, his disciples asked him privately, "Why couldn't we drive out the spirit?" ²⁹And he answered, "Only prayer can drive out this kind, nothing else."

Mt 17:
14-21;
Lk 9:
37-42

Mt
21:21;
Mk
11:22
Lk 17:5

1:26

Jesus asserts again what he had said many times: he has to be rejected. Not all that is written in Scripture is to be understood literally. Elijah was not to return personally from heaven, but rather John the Baptist had already come as the new Elijah (Lk 1:16).

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

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

Only prayer can drive out this kind (v. 29).

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

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

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

Jesus shows us in these pages the way to expel the demon, because the evil spirit multiplies obstacles to discourage us, as soon as he knows

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

• ³⁰ After leaving that place, they made their way through Galilee; but Jesus did not want people to know where he was ³¹ because he was teaching his disciples. And he told them, “The Son of Man will be delivered into the hands of men. They will kill him, but three days after he has been killed, he will rise.” ³² The disciples, however, did not understand these words and they were afraid to ask him what he meant.

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

• ³³ They came to Capernaum and, once inside the house, Jesus asked them, “What were you discussing on the way?” ³⁴ But they did not answer,

because they had been arguing about who was the greatest.

• ³⁵ Then he sat down, called the Twelve and said to them, “If someone wants to be first, let him be last of all and servant of all.” ³⁶ Then he took a little child, placed him in their midst, and putting his arms around him he said to them, ³⁷ “Whoever welcomes a child such as this in my name, welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me, welcomes not me, but the One who sent me.”

• ³⁸ John said to him, “Master, we saw someone who drove out demons by calling upon your name, and we tried to forbid him, because he does not belong to our group.” ³⁹ Jesus answered, “Do not forbid him, for no one who works a miracle in my name

we have decided to follow Christ (Mt 12:43; 13:19).

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

SERVANTS

• 33. The apostles return to Capernaum, the center of their missionary expeditions, and most probably stay in the house of Simon Peter.

They have preached the kingdom of God, performing miraculous cures, and have expelled demons. They still lack the most important quality of all: to be humble.

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

• 35. The last sentence of Jesus is as important as the first: *Whoever welcomes a child such as this in my name* (v. 27)... The dignity of the human person stems from this identification with Christ.

THE DIGNITY OF THE HUMAN PERSON

God does not wait for us to be baptized before he recognizes his Son in us. He created us “in Christ.” This means that he created each of us so that we bear the likeness of his Son: see what Paul says in Ephesians.

Of course, it is something much greater when God calls us to believe and chooses us to share in the mission and life of his Church.

The Church has always taught the surpassing dignity of the human person and, in the end, convinced the world. More than anyone else, the martyrs taught us the superior value of the human person over any interest or collective bonds. It is impossible to separate this dignity of the human person from our relationship with the Father. Those who do not share in this belief cannot easily explain their commitment to human rights.

The greatest gift of God to humans is not that we can think and love, but that we can say to God: “You are my Father,” and that God looks at us thinking, “You are my son/daughter.”

• 38. SEPARATE CHURCHES

While Jesus prepares his apostles, whom he wants to leave in charge of his Church, others preach the Gospel and expel demons. In the same way nowadays, outside the Catholic Church, the Church of the apostles, others of diverse Christian denominations do apostolic work.

This evangelization outside the Church, at times against the Church, offers a challenge. If others evangelize, it is perhaps because the

Mt 17:
22-23;
Lk 9:
43-4510:35-
45;
Mt 20:
20-28;
Lk 22:
24-25Mt
10:40;
Jn 13:20Lk 9:
49-50Mt
18:1-5;
Lk 9:
46-48;
Mk
10:43;
Lk 10:16Acts
3:16;
1Cor
12:3;
Lk 6:43;
Mt 7:16

Mt 12:30; Lk 9:50; 11:23
 can soon after speak evil of me. ⁴⁰For whoever is not against us is for us.

Mt 10:42
⁴¹If anyone gives you a drink of water because you belong to Christ and bear his name, truly, I say to you, he will not go without reward.

If your eye causes you to sin
 (5:13; Mt 18:6; Lk 17:1)

Mt 18: 6-9; Lk 17: 1-2
 • ⁴²If anyone should cause one of these little ones who believe in me to stumble and sin, it would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a great millstone around his neck.

Mt 5:27; 1Cor 3:23
⁴³If your hand makes you fall into sin, cut it off! It is better for you to enter life without a hand, than with two hands to go to hell, to the fire that never goes out. ⁴⁵And if your foot makes you fall into sin, cut it off! It is better for you to enter life without a foot, than with both feet to be thrown into hell. ⁴⁷And if your eye makes you

fall into sin, tear it out! It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, than, keeping both eyes, to be thrown into hell, ⁴⁸where the worms that eat them never die, and the fire never goes out. ⁴⁹The fire itself will preserve them.

Is 66:24

⁵⁰Salt is a good thing; but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves and be at peace with one another.”

Mt 5:13; Lk 14:34; Col 4:6; Rom 12:18

Divorce

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

10 • ¹Jesus then left that place and went to the province of Judea, beyond the Jordan River. Once more, crowds gathered around him and, once more, he taught them, as he always did. ²Some (Pharisees came and) put him to the test with this question: “Is it right for a husband to divorce his wife?” ³He replied, “What

Mt 19:1-9

Church does not reach a great number of people: God wants others to do what we do not. The proliferation of separate churches is for the Catholic Church a call to reform.

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

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

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

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

Several things seem to us out of place in these churches: the miracle used as an instrument of propaganda, the pressures on the sick, the threatening with punishments from God... Many enclose themselves in their cults, far from

the “world,” making ecumenism impossible, that is the dialogue and common seeking with other Christians.

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

• 42. See commentary on Matthew 18:6. *To be thrown into Gehenna*, says Jesus (v. 45). This word was used to designate hell.

To enter life... to enter the kingdom; this is one and the same thing. The kingdom of God is not a place where God will put us; it is a life that invades us; it is a person’s meeting with self, the total realization of a person’s potential; the perfect union with God through which the sons and daughters are transformed into the likeness of the Father.

Have salt in yourselves (v. 50). This concludes the speech after the discussion with the apostles (v. 34). Of course we should make ourselves servants of others (v. 35). That does not mean that we should be oppressed persons. The salt signifies the creativity and the talents of each one. Let us be persons fully alive, even if it includes disagreements, but always concerned about maintaining loving relations and mutual respect.

• 10.1 MATRIMONY. See notes on Matthew 19:6.

Is it right for a husband...? (v. 2) Matthew is

Dt 24:1 law did Moses give you?”⁴ They answered, “Moses allowed us to write a certificate of dismissal in order to divorce.”

Gen 1:27
Gen 2:24
5 Then Jesus said to them, “Moses wrote this law for you, because you have hearts of stone. 6 But in the beginning of creation *God made them male and female*; 7 and because of this, *man has to leave father and mother and be joined to his wife*; 8 and *the two shall become one body*. So, they are no longer two, but one body. 9 Therefore, let no one separate what God has joined.”

Mt 5:32; Lk 16:18; 1Cor 7:10
10 When they were indoors at home, the disciples again asked him about this,¹¹ and he told them, “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another, commits adultery against his wife;

¹² and the woman who divorces her husband and marries another, also commits adultery.”

Let the children come to me
(Mt 19:13; Lk 18:15)

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

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

¹⁶ Then he took the children in his arms and, laying his hands on them, blessed them.

Mt 19:13-15;
Lk 18:16; 15-17;
9:47-48

Mt 18:3;
Mk 9:33-39;
10:43

surely more exact when he adds “for any reason he wants,” for everyone agreed that a wife could be sent away, but reasons justifying a divorce were discussed. Mark goes straight to the point: marriage is an irreversible commitment.

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

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

Jesus compares the ideal and the practice. This ideal, however, is not something that one admires without taking it seriously. Where Genesis says: *the two shall become one body*, Jesus adds: *they are no longer two but one body* (v. 8). Over and above any discussion, the unity of the couple is “the” reality in the eyes of God.

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

brought about the couple only come later: they are reflections of God’s eternal project in creation and in history.

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

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

• 13. Jesus, despite having no children of his own, opens to everyone the richness of his heart. He marvels at the mystery of life that begins full of hope, and discovers the likeness of the Father in every unknown child. How could Jesus, who asks us to have hope, forget that the children are also our hope?

Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child. We must be like children in order to enter the kingdom of God. We must forget our wisdom and self-sufficiency, and the bitterness of past experience in order to receive God’s gifts and words in wonder and simplicity.

Jesus and the rich man*(Mt 19:16; Lk 18:18)*Mt 19:
16-22;
Lk 18:
18-23

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

20:12-
16

¹⁸ Jesus answered, “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. ¹⁹ You know the commandments: Do not kill; do not commit adultery; do not steal; do not bear false witness; do not cheat; honor your father and mother.” ²⁰ The man replied, “I have obeyed all these commandments since my childhood.”

Mt 6:20;
Lk 12:33

²¹ Then Jesus looked steadily at him and loved him; and he said, “For you,

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

How hard for the rich to discover the kingdom!

• ²³ Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!” ²⁴ The disciples were shocked at these words, but Jesus insisted, “Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵ It is easier for a camel to go through the

Mt 19:
23-26;
Lk 18:
24-27;
Mk 4:19

• 17. He who comes to Jesus is a young man, according to Matthew (19:16). Luke calls him an important man (18:18).

With deliberation Jesus asks him: *Why do you call me good?* (v. 18). As if Jesus is saying: “Do you not see that you are thirsty for God and that you will find him if you live with me?” See commentary on Matthew 19:16.

This man asks Jesus the way that leads to *eternal life*; but Jesus does not have any new commandment to teach. In the Old Testament everything had already been said about what a person should do to win eternal life: by observing the commandments of justice and compassion. Now Jesus proposes to him a new way and a new experience of liberty, through becoming his follower and imitator.

Sell what you have (v. 21). Happiness does not consist in leaving all one has, but in being free of it all in order to submit oneself to Christ.

• 23. Jesus does not say that the rich person will not be saved, but that he will not *enter the kingdom of God*, which consists in sharing from then on the uncertainties, happiness and liberty of Christ.

In the Old Testament, wealth was never condemned provided that it was shared. Moreover, it was considered as a sign that a person knew how to direct his life well and that God had blessed him. As long as a person does not know how to be free of urgent material problems and to master in some way the goods of this world, something is lacking in his human existence.

To those who already enjoy “being” and “having,” however, Jesus proposes that they leave all and follow him as a condition for entering the kingdom: this means experiencing already in this life the presence of God the Father.

Who are the rich ones? Those who have money or those who do not take the risk of sharing what they have? Here Jesus is not condemning some evil ones; he does not distinguish between good and bad rich. Jesus speaks of *the rich* in the common sense of this word (*those who have riches*) and asserts that their situation prevents them from experiencing the kingdom of God from inside. In speaking thus, Jesus discredits those who would want to bless the rich provided they are “spiritually poor.”

It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle (v. 25). People have imagined all kinds of other interpretations: the camel may only mean a filament of camel hair; or the eye of the needle might signify a fairly low door of Jerusalem (which in fact never existed...). The main purpose being to correct the categorical words of Jesus. They would like to make him say: it is difficult, very difficult for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God, but not impossible. Let us leave aside all these interpretations: the apostles clearly understood the comparison, Jesus said: “Yes, it is impossible.”

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

eye of the needle than for one who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.”

²⁶They were more astonished than ever and wondered, “Who, then, can be saved?” ²⁷Jesus looked steadily at them and said, “For human beings it is impossible, but not for God; all things are possible with God.”

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

• ²⁸Peter spoke up and said, “We have given up everything to follow you.” ²⁹Jesus answered, “Truly, there is no one who has left house, or brothers or sisters, or father or mother, or children, or lands, for my sake, and for the gospel, ³⁰who will not receive his reward. I say to you: even in the midst of persecution, he will receive a hundred times as many houses, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, and lands in the present time; and, in the world to come, eternal life. ³¹Do pay attention: many who now are the first will be last, and the last, first.”

³²They were on the road going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead. The Twelve were anxious,

and those who followed were afraid. Once more Jesus took the Twelve aside to tell them what was to happen to him. ³³“You see we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be given over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death, and hand him over to the foreigners, ³⁴who will make fun of him, spit on him, scourge him, and kill him; but three days later he will rise.”

James and John ask for the first places
(Mt 20:20; Lk 22:24)

• ³⁵James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to Jesus and said to him, “Master, we want you to grant us what we are going to ask of you.” ³⁶And he said, “What do you want me to do for you?” ³⁷They answered, “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, when you come in your glory.”

³⁸But Jesus said to them, “You don’t know what you are asking. Can you drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized in the way I am baptized?” ³⁹They answered, “We can.”

• 28. *There is no one who has left house* (v. 29)... These words of Jesus that we find again in Matthew 19:29 and Luke 18:29 have been given here a notable addition: *with persecution*. Once the Gospel had been preached the Church began to suffer persecution: From the Year 34, then again in 41 and 62 in Jerusalem, in 64 in Rome with the great persecution ordered by the emperor Nero. During these persecutions Christians experienced the bonds that united them, often stronger than family relationships. Hunted, obliged to hide, they found hundreds of brothers and sisters ready with houses to give them refuge. Jesus does not only speak of reward in the next life. Already in this world, in the midst of persecution, those who sacrifice themselves for the kingdom will find friendship, joy and human fulfillment far greater than anything they could have hoped for.

• 35. Jesus feels full of courage and confidence, as he himself walks ahead of them to Jerusalem, where his punishment awaits him. Prompted by James’ and John’s request, he tries to convince his followers that success in his

kingdom does not consist in prestige and power, but in following the way of Jesus, their leader.

LEADERS—TO SERVE

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

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

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

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

If the saint wants to be at the top of his people, first he has to learn how to talk with humility.

Mt 19:
27-30;
Lk 18:
28-30

Mt 19:30;
20:16;
Lk 13:30

Mt 20:
17-19;
Lk 18:
31-33;
Jn 11:
7-8;
11:16

Mt 20:
20-23

10:51

14:36;
Ps 75:3;
Is 51:17

Acts
12:2;
Lk 12:50

And Jesus told them, “The cup that I drink, you will drink; and you will be baptized in the way that I am baptized; ⁴⁰but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant. It has been prepared for others.”

⁴¹On hearing this, the other ten were angry with James and John. ⁴²Jesus then called them to him and said, “As you know, the so-called rulers of the nations behave like tyrants, and those in authority oppress the people. ⁴³But it shall not be so among you; whoever would be great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴and whoever would be first among you shall make himself slave of all. ⁴⁵Think of the Son of Man, who has not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life to redeem many.”

Mt 20: 24-28; Lk 22: 24-27

9:35; Lk 9:48

Is 53:11; 1Tim 2:5

The blind man of Jericho

(Mt 20:29; Lk 18:35)

Mt 20: 29-34; Lk 18: 35-43

• ⁴⁶They came to Jericho. As Jesus was leaving Jericho with his disciples and a large crowd, a blind beggar, Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, was sitting by the roadside. ⁴⁷On hearing that it was Jesus of Nazareth passing by, he began to call out, “Son of David, Jesus, have mercy on me!” ⁴⁸Many people scolded him and told him to keep quiet, but he shouted all the louder, “Son of David, have mercy on me!”

⁴⁹Jesus stopped and said, “Call him.” So they called the blind man, saying, “Take heart! Get up, he is calling you!” ⁵⁰He immediately threw aside his cloak, jumped up and went to Jesus.

⁵¹Then Jesus asked him, “What do you want me to do for you?” The blind man said, “Master, let me see again!” ⁵²And Jesus said to him, “Go your way, your faith has made you well.” And, immediately, he could see, and he followed Jesus along the road.

Lk 7:50

The triumphant entry into Jerusalem

(Mt 21:1; Lk 19:28; Jn 12:12)

11 • ¹When they drew near to Jerusalem and arrived at Bethphage and Bethany, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples with these instructions, ²“Go to the village ahead of you and, as you enter it, you will find there a colt tied up that no one has ridden. Untie it and bring it here. ³If anyone says to you, ‘What are you doing?’ give this answer, ‘The Lord needs it, but he will send it back immediately.’”

Mt 21: 1-11; Lk 19: 28-38; Jn 12: 12-16; Mk 14:26; Zec 9:9

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

• **11.1** See notes on Matthew 21:1.

THE SAVIOR

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

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

Jesus was sent by God to all people, but above

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

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

Is 62:11 ⁷They brought the colt to Jesus, threw their cloaks on its back, and Jesus sat upon it. ⁸Many people also spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread leafy branches from the fields. ⁹Then the people who walked ahead, and those who followed behind Jesus, began to shout, "*Hosannah! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!*" ¹⁰Blessed is the kingdom of our father David, which comes! *Hosannah* in the highest!"

Ps 118:
25-26

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

Jesus curses the barren fig tree

(Mt 21:18; Lk 13:6)

Mt 21:
18-19

Lk 13:6;
Jer 8:13;
Hos
9:16;
Mic 7:1

• ¹²The next day, when they were leaving Bethany, he felt hungry. ¹³In the distance, he noticed a fig tree covered with leaves; so he went to see if he could find anything on it. When he reached it, he found nothing but

leaves, for it was not the season for figs. ¹⁴Then Jesus said to the fig tree, "May no one ever eat your fruit!" And his disciples heard these words.

Jesus clears the temple

(Mt 21:10; Lk 19:45; Jn 2:14)

• ¹⁵When they reached Jerusalem, Jesus went to the temple, and began to drive away all the people he saw buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the stools of those who sold pigeons. ¹⁶And he would not let anyone carry anything through the temple area.

Mt 21:
12-17;
Lk 19:
45-46;
Jn 2:
14-16

¹⁷Jesus then taught the people, "Does not God say in the Scriptures: *My house will be called a House of Prayer for all the nations?* But you have turned it into a *den of thieves*."

Zec
14:21

Is 56:7;
Jer 7:11

¹⁸The chief priests and the teachers of the law heard of this; and they tried to find a way to destroy him. They were afraid of him, because all the people were astonished by his teaching.

3:6;
14:1

all he came as Savior of the Jewish people. He came precisely when this people needed to be saved, because things were not working out well for them. The prophets had announced a conciliatory king who would visit the people on a donkey, as peaceful people did, not on a horse as the generals of that time did. That was why Jesus wanted to enter Jerusalem this way. Jerusalem was a big city. Though the enthusiasm of the Galileans shook the city, it did not conquer it.

The Jews did not expect their Savior to be so meek. Throughout their history, God had saved them from oppression, hunger, and the irresponsibility of their famous leaders. This time he came in person, to show them the real path to salvation through pardon and non-violence, but they did not recognize him. The people of Galilee, who spontaneously mounted a triumphant entrance for Jesus and hoped for a political announcement from him, would later deny him.

- 12. See notes on Matthew 21:18.

THE TEMPLE

• 15. The temple of Jerusalem was, for the Jews, the only temple of the only God. In each

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

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

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

My house will be called a House of Prayer for all the nations (v. 17). The courtyards where the vendors stood were precisely those

Lk 21:37 ¹⁹When evening came, Jesus left the city.

The power of faith

(Mt 21:20)

Mt 21: 20-22 • ²⁰Early next morning, as they walked along the road, the disciples saw the fig tree withered to its roots. ²¹Peter then said to him, “Master, look! The fig tree you cursed has withered.”

9:19; Lk 17:5 ²²And Jesus replied, “Have faith in God. ²³Truly, I say to you, if you say to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and cast into the sea,’ and have no doubt in your heart, but believe that what you say will happen, it will be done for you. ²⁴Therefore, I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it shall be done for you. ²⁵And when you stand to pray, if you have anything against anyone, forgive, ²⁶so that your heav-

Mt 5:23; 6:15; Eph4:32; Col3:13; 1P 3:7

intended for the foreigners. “Purify the temple” for Jesus is to give it back its true identity and also to allow the pagans to find in these courts a privileged place for meeting God.

See also John 2:14.

THE POWER OF FAITH

• 20. *If you have no doubt in your heart but believe* (v. 23). See the same in James 1:6. Jesus refers in a more precise way to “the faith that performs miracles” (see 1 Cor 13:2). Jesus does not say that this faith will be given to everybody and at every moment. It is a charism or gift of God that he gives to whomever he wishes (1 Cor 12:9). It is an interior certainty that God wants to perform a miracle, so that one dares act and command in his name.

At the same time, this promise of Jesus applies to all our prayer. Of course we should not think that God will always work the miracles we ask of him. When a sick person tries to convince himself that he will be cured, it is possible that consequently he does get better more quickly, but this mental exercise or hope does not necessarily mean faith. If I convince myself that God will make me the winner of a lottery, he is under no obligation to think that my becoming richer will make me a better person.

Actually he who humbly loves God understands in the midst of his trials that God wants to lift him up. That is why he asks with faith, knowing that God wants to listen to him.

It is hard for us to ask big things, because if

only Father may also forgive your sins.”

By what authority do you act?

(Mt 21:23; Lk 20:1)

• ²⁷They were once again in Jerusalem. As Jesus was walking in the temple, the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders came to him ²⁸and asked, “What authority do you have to act like this? Who gave you authority to do the things you do?”

²⁹Jesus said to them, “I will ask you a question, only one, and if you give me an answer, then I will tell you what authority I have to act like this. ³⁰Was John’s preaching and baptism a work of God, or was it merely something human? Answer me.”

³¹And they kept arguing among themselves, “If we answer that it was a work of God, he will say, ‘Why then did you not believe him?’” ³²But

Mt 21: 23-27; Lk 20: 1-8

God refuses to give them to us, how will we still believe in him? Surely it is very fine to ask of God only “his grace,” his inner strength, but many do so not because of their esteem for the interior life but because they fear they will see nothing coming as an answer to their prayer. Who dares to ask for rain or drought as Elijah did and as the poor still do, those whose prayers God hears?

Whatever you ask in prayer (v. 24). Jesus invites us to ask with faith and perseverance, until God assures us that our prayer has been heard or else helps us understand that what we asked for was not good for us, nor was it the will of God.

• 27. **THE OPPORTUNIST PRIESTS**

Jesus did not ask any authorization to teach in the temple, or to drive out the vendors. He acted freely as prophets do. Since the priests were the ones in charge of maintaining the true faith, it was normal for them to check whether Jesus was a real prophet or not. But were they really concerned about truth? Were they ready to recognize that Jesus had come from God? Apparently they only thought to defend what was acceptable to them and, before even listening to Jesus, held him to be subversive.

That is why Jesus asked them about John the Baptist. Because John the Baptist’s preaching had been the most important happening in the previous two years, the priests should have taken a stand with regard to John. They had

Mt 14:5 neither could they answer before the people that the baptism of John was merely something human, for everyone regarded John as a prophet.³³ So they answered Jesus, “We don’t know,” and Jesus said to them, “Neither will I tell you what authority I have to act as I do.”

Parable of the tenants

(Mt 21:33; Lk 20:9)

Mt 21:
33-46;
Lk 20:
9-19;
Is 5:1-2

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

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

Mt 3:17

sent him to the tenants, for he said, ‘They will respect my son.’

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

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

Ps 118:
22-23;
Acts
4:11;
1P 2:7

¹²They wanted to arrest him, for they realized that Jesus meant this parable for them, but they were afraid of the crowd; so they left him and went away.

Mt
22:15;
Mk
12:13;
Lk 20:20

Paying taxes to Caesar

(Mt 22:15; Lk 20:20)

• ¹³They sent to Jesus some Pharisees with members of Herod’s party, with the purpose of trapping him by his own words. ¹⁴They came and said to Jesus, “Master, we know that you

Mt 22:
15-22;
Lk 20:
20-26

not done so nor were they ready for that. How could they make demands of Jesus if they spoke out only when it suited them?

Jesus’ attitude obliges religious leaders of all times to see if they deserve to have others respect their declarations and condemnations.

• 12.1 THE CHOSEN ONES OF GOD

In this comparison, the vine represents the kingdom of God. The Jews were God’s people and they came to consider that their own interests were those of God. He had to help them against others. They had confidence that they would be saved and were not concerned about the fate of others who did not recognize God.

God entrusted his kingdom to them; in other words, he guided them throughout the long span of their history, so that they would be an example to others. They were to communicate their experience to others so that all would develop justice, a spirit of responsibility, a sense of community; these were *the fruit* God wanted to harvest.

God sent prophets to remind them of their

debt: they were scarcely heard. Finally, the only-Son of God become human appears and the same thing will happen. He will be *thrown out of the vineyard*, in other words, rejected by his own people. Which is why the kingdom of God will be *given to others*, to those believers converted from other nations and gathered in the Church of Christ.

Here ends the parable. It could equally be applied to the Church today if it becomes a religion of one social class, or similar to the other religions, or if we do not find in the Church more obedience to God, more commitment to values that will save the world. What would happen to Christian groups and their leaders if they began to feel they were the owners of the kingdom and its promises?

• 13. POLITICS AND RELIGION—CAESAR

The trap is as follows: they ask about the tax that the Jews are obliged to pay to Caesar, emperor of Rome, for the Jews have been colonized by the Romans and are under their rule.

The Pharisees and partisans of Herod, who

are truthful; you are not influenced by anyone, and your answers do not vary according to who is listening to you, but you truly teach God's way. Tell us, is it against the law to pay taxes to Caesar? Should we pay them or not?"

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

And they were greatly astonished.

The resurrection

(Mt 22:23; Lk 20:27)

- ¹⁸ The Sadducees also came to Jesus. Since they claim that there is

no resurrection, they questioned him in this way, ¹⁹ "Master, in the Scriptures Moses gave us this law: If anyone dies and leaves a wife but no children, his brother must take the woman, and, with her, have a baby, who will be considered the child of his deceased brother. ²⁰ Now, there were seven brothers. The first married a wife, but he died without leaving any children. ²¹ The second took the wife, and he also died, leaving no children. The same thing happened to the third. ²² In fact, all seven brothers died, leaving no children. Last of all, the woman died. ²³ Now, in the resurrection, to which of them will she be wife? For all seven brothers had her as wife."

²⁴ Jesus replied, "Is this not the reason you are mistaken, that you do not understand the Scriptures or

Dt 25:5-6

Rom 13:7

Mt 22: 23-33;
Lk 20: 27-40;
Acts 23:8

are political enemies, join together. The Pharisees oppose Roman domination; the partisans of Herod, on the other hand, accept it. If Jesus says they are to pay, the Pharisees will discredit him before the people. If he says no, the partisans of Herod will have him arrested by the Romans.

Jesus does not condemn Roman imperialism, nor does he justify it. Is it because the problems of justice and peace are not "spiritual things" and do not concern him?

These problems, of course, are important and biblical history reveals that God wants liberty for every person and for nations the possibility to develop culture and national life: that is enough to justify the political commitment of Christians.

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

For the Pharisees, to pay taxes to Caesar, a foreign ruler and pagan, was like denying God, the true Lord of Israel. They identified the Jewish National Party with the cause of God. This carried grave consequences, since they thought that to serve God they must crush those of the opposition party. Since faith asks of us total obedience, people who confuse political militan-

cy with faith begin to justify, little by little, everything their party does, even its lies and crimes.

The Caesar of Rome was not God, although he pretended to be. He had imposed his authority on them and the use of Roman coins, but could not demand the obedience of conscience that was due only to God. Neither was he "the enemy of God," as the Pharisees thought, and to serve the kingdom of God it was not necessary to refuse him taxes and civil obedience.

What is Caesar's can be understood: "what belongs to Caesar." Rather it means: "the kind of things which fall under his rule." With his answer "to Caesar what belongs to him, to God..." Jesus separates religion and politics in cultures—Jewish and Roman alike—where politics always looked for religious justification. From now on, religion should not be manipulated for political purposes, nor should religion confuse its political opponents with the enemies of the kingdom.

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

the power of God? ²⁵When they rise from the dead, men and women do not marry, but are like the angels in heaven.

³⁶ ²⁶Now, about the resurrection of the dead, have you never had thoughts about the burning bush in the book of Moses? God said to Moses: *I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.* ²⁷He is the God, not of the dead, but of the living. You are totally wrong.”

The greatest commandment

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

³⁷ ²⁸A teacher of the law had been listening to this discussion and admired how Jesus answered them. So he came up and asked him, “Which commandment is the first of all?”

³⁸ ²⁹Jesus answered, “The first is: *Hear, Israel! The Lord, our God, is One Lord;*

³⁰and you shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength.” ³¹And after this comes a second commandment: *You shall love your neighbor as yourself.* There is no commandment greater than these two.”

³²The teacher of the law said to him, “Well spoken, Master; you are right when you say that he is one, and there is no other besides him.”

³³To love him with all our heart, with all our understanding and with all our strength, and to love our neighbor as ourselves is more important than any burnt offering or sacrifice.”

³⁴Jesus approved this answer and said, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” And after that, no one dared to ask him any more questions.

THE RESURRECTION

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

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

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

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

ever looks at the tree or plant knows well the source of this life that she admires. It is today impossible for us to imagine what we shall become, in the totality of our human being, after this transfiguration to which God calls us. When it has taken place we shall understand the vital link between what we shall be then and what we are today.

With this, we understand the double reproach of Jesus to the Sadducees:

You do not understand the power of God (v. 24). They only imagine a caricature of the resurrection.

You do not understand the Scriptures. Very few books of the Hebrew Bible speak of the Resurrection, but all of them refer to a living God who makes us his friends.

I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob (v. 26). If God committed himself to them, could he be indifferent to their death and let them disappear forever, while he enjoys himself in his glory?

• 28. TO LOVE GOD

You shall love the Lord, your God (v. 30). This first commandment is not among the Ten Commandments of Moses, which only speak of “serving God.” We do read it in Deuteronomy 6:4.

To love God is not a commandment like others, because the commandments show specific actions that should be undertaken or avoided, i.e., you shall rest on the day of the Lord, or you

Whose Son is the Christ?*(Mt 22:41; Lk 20:41; Mt 23:6)*Mt 22:
41-46;
Lk 20:
41-44

Ps110:1

Lk
19:48;
21:38

³⁵ As Jesus was teaching in the temple, he said, "The teachers of the law say that the Messiah is the Son of David. How can that be? ³⁶ For David, himself, inspired by the Holy Spirit, declared: *The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet!'* ³⁷ If David, himself, calls him Lord, in what way can he be his Son?"

Many people came to Jesus, and listened to him gladly.

Mt 23:
1-3;
Lk 20:
45-46;
Mt 9:27;
20:26;
Mk10:43;
Lk11:39;
Mt 23:6;
Lk11:43

• ³⁸ As he was teaching, he also said to them, "Beware of those teachers of the law, who enjoy walking around in long robes and being greeted in the marketplace; ³⁹ and who like

shall not commit adultery. On the other hand, when it comes to loving God there is no limit.

The commandments of the Scriptures (especially the Ten Commandments of Moses) merely express in a clear manner the demands of our conscience. It should not be necessary to tell us not to steal, and not to slander others. Nevertheless, it is necessary to teach this to children and to unscrupulous persons. Paul says, "The law was not intended for the good, but for those who do evil" (1 Tim 1:9).

It is the reason why the love of God is not presented in the New Testament as a commandment, but as the fruit of the Spirit that God gives to his sons and daughters: Romans 8, 15 and 22. God is the first to be loved (Mt 6:9-10; 1 Jn 4:17) most specially in the person of his Son: 2 Corinthians 5:16; 1 Peter 1:8. There is no authentic love of neighbor without the love of God: 1 John 5:2.

You shall love the Lord, with all your heart (v. 30). You shall love him more than you love your loved ones. You shall long for him, you shall forget yourself so that, in everything, you search for what he wants most from you.

You shall love the Lord, with all your mind. You shall devote the best of your intelligence to knowing him. Looking into your own life, you shall understand how much he has guided you. You shall try to understand how the kingdom of God is coming through world and daily events. Praying and reading the Scriptures regularly, you shall ask God to give you his own Spirit so that you may understand him better.

You shall love the Lord, with all your strength. Since you are very weak in this, you shall ask for his help and strive to unite with the

to occupy reserved seats in the synagogues; and the first places at feasts. ⁴⁰ They even devour the widow's and the orphan's goods, while making a show of long prayers. How severe a sentence they will receive!"

The widow's offering*(Lk 21:1)*

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

Lk
21:1-4;
2K
12:10;
Jn 8:20

⁴³ Then, Jesus called his disciples and said to them, "Truly I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all those who gave offerings. ⁴⁴ For all of

true servants of God, using the means that the Church makes available to you.

The commandment to love your neighbor as you love yourself comes second, because it cannot be understood or fulfilled without love of God. For God asks for more than solidarity with one's neighbor, or concern for those who are suffering. We should make an effort to look at our brothers and sisters in the same way that the Father does. We should give them what the Father wants for them. Among so many good things we could do for our neighbor, we should select those that the Holy Spirit inspires us to do. All this requires that we first know and love God.

• ³⁸. The teachers of the law were not bad persons. They became teachers of religion because they were interested in religion, but as soon as the teacher stops trying to be a saint, he is only a weak person. The very respect that people show teachers leads them to overlook in themselves many wrongs that in anybody else would be severely censured.

• ⁴¹. The poor widow was the only one from among so many worshippers who made retribution to God as he deserves. She was the personification of those uncountable poor, who have practically nothing but somehow find a way to give part of the little they have. The humble person is capable of sacrificing part of his paid time to study or participate in common activities in order to help his companions. The small salary he loses is worth much more than the big salary that wealthy people are not willing to lose. God calls on the poor before anybody else, because only the poor give all that they have to live on.

them gave from their plenty; but she gave from her poverty, and put in everything she had, her very living.”

Jesus speaks of the end

(Mt 24:1; Lk 21:5; 19:41; 17:23)

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

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

⁵Then Jesus began to tell them, “Don’t let anyone mislead you. ⁶Many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am he,’ and they will deceive many people.

⁷When you hear of wars and threats of war, don’t be troubled; this must

occur, but the end is not yet. ⁸Nation will fight nation and kingdom will oppose kingdom. There will be earthquakes everywhere and famines, too. And these will be like the first pains of childbirth. ⁹Be on your guard, for you will be arrested and taken to court. You will be beaten in synagogues; and you will stand before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them. ¹⁰For the preaching of the gospel to all nations has to come first.

¹¹So, when you are arrested and brought to trial, don’t worry about what you are to say; for you shall say what will be given to you in that hour. It is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit.

¹²Brother will betray brother, even to death, and the father his child. Children will turn against their parents and have them put to death. ¹³You will be hated by all for my name’s sake, but whoever holds out to the end will be saved.

• 13.1 THE END OF THE WORLD

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

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

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

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

enced by other civilizations: something dies and something is born.

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

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

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

Mt 24:
1-14;
Lk 21:
5-19

1:29

Lk 17:23;
Rev 2:20;
12:9;
1Jn 1:8

Is 13:8;
Hos
13:13

Mt 10:
17-22;
Lk 12:7;
Acts
26:11

Mt
26:13;
Rom
11:25

Acts
4:8;
5:32;
7:55

Mic 7:6

Jn
15:18;
1P 4:14

Last days of Jerusalem

¹⁴ So, when you see the *desolating abomination* set in the place where it should not be (may the reader understand!), then let those in Judea flee to the mountains. ¹⁵ If you are on the housetop, don't come down to take anything with you. ¹⁶ If you are in the field, don't turn back to fetch your cloak. ¹⁷ How hard it will be then for pregnant women and mothers with babies at the breast! ¹⁸ Pray, that it may not happen in winter. ¹⁹ For this will be a time of distress, such as was never known, from the beginning, when God created the world, until now; and is never to be known again. ²⁰ So, that, if the Lord had not shortened that time, no one would survive; but he decided to shorten it, for the sake of those whom he has chosen.

²¹ And if anyone says to you at that time, 'Look, here is the Messiah! Look, he is there!'—do not believe it. ²² For false messiahs and false prophets will arise and perform signs and wonders in order to deceive even God's chosen people, if that were possible. ²³ Be on your guard then; I have told you everything ahead of time.

The coming of the Son of Man

(Mt 24:29; Lk 21:25)

• ²⁴ Later on in those days, after that disastrous time, *the sun will grow dark, the moon will not give its light, the stars will fall out of the sky, and the whole universe will be shaken.* ²⁶ Then people will see the *Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory.* ²⁷ And he will send the angels to gather his chosen people from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the sky.

²⁸ Learn a lesson from the fig tree: as soon as its branches become tender and it begins to sprout leaves, you know that summer is near. ²⁹ In the same way, when you see these things happening, know that the time is near, even at the door. ³⁰ Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all this has happened. ³¹ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

• ³² But, regarding that day and that hour, no one knows when it will come, not even the angels, not even the Son, but only the Father.

Mt 24:
15-25;
Lk 21:
20-24;
Dn
11:31;
12:11;
1Mac
1:54

Dn 12:1

Dt 13:2;
2Thes
2:9;
Rev
13:13

Mt 24:
29-31;
Lk 21:
25-27

Is 13:10;
Ezk 32:7;
Rev 6:12

Dn 7:
13-14

Mt 5:17;
Lk 16:7

1Thes
5:1;
Acts 1:7

• ²⁴ *Later on...* (v. 24). After announcing the end of the Jewish world, Jesus speaks of an even more important event: the end of the world or, better still, its transformation.

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

He will send the angels (v. 27). This is also a common image in Jewish books that spoke of God's judgment. Likewise, *the trumpet* referred to in Matthew 24:31 and 1 Thessalonians 4:16 should not be understood literally.

Learn a lesson (v. 28). Jesus comes back to the destruction of Jerusalem.

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

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

Not even the angels, not even the Son, but only the Father. Some are confused by this. Does this not mean that Jesus is not God as the Father is? They must remember that when Jesus speaks of the Father and the Son, he speaks of himself with his human consciousness in relation to the Father. God's infinite knowledge cannot be encompassed by the human mind of Jesus. See notes on Luke 3:21 and Mark 6:1.

God the Father can communicate to Jesus certain prophecies but he cannot tell him, for example: "the end of the world will take place on the 12th of July of the year 2049" because the date is not fixed; it depends on how we make the kingdom of God mature through our efforts and prayers (2 P 3:14).

Modern science shows that time does not

Mt 24:42; 25:13-15; Lk 19:12-13; Mt 24:37-41; Lk 12:38, 40

• ³³ Be alert and watch, for you don't know when the time will come.

Mt 25:31

³⁴ When a man goes abroad and leaves his home, he puts his servants in charge, giving to each one some responsibility; and he orders the doorkeeper to stay awake. ³⁵ So stay awake, for you don't know when the Lord of the house will come, in the evening or at midnight, when the cock crows or before dawn. ³⁶ If he comes suddenly, do not let him catch you asleep.

Mt 25:14; Lk 12:35

³⁷ And what I say to you, I say to all: Stay awake!"

Conspiracy against Jesus

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

14 • ¹ It was now two days before the feast of the Passover and Unleavened Bread. The chief priests and the teachers of the law were looking for a way to arrest Jesus on a false charge, and put him to death; ² but they said, "Not during the Festival, for there might be trouble among the people."

Mt 26:1-5; Lk 22:1-2; Jn 11:47-53; Dt 16:1; 12:1-14

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

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

HOW CHRIST COMES: CHRISTIAN COMMITMENT

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

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

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

He also comes in our day-to-day living. The prophets have said time and again that the events that bring renewal and growth in values also bring the Lord. At times, he comes in his resurrection, through happy events that bring life and joy, and more justice and hope for the poor. At other times, he comes through his passion and death.

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

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

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

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

• 14.1 EASTER, THE PASSOVER

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

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

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

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

Jesus anointed at Bethany

(Mt 26:6; Jn 12:1)

Mt 26:
6-13;
Jn 12:
1-8;
Lk 7:
36-50

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

Dt 15:11

⁶ But Jesus said, "Let her alone; why are you troubling her? What she has just done for me is a very charitable work. ⁷ At any time you can help the poor, for you always have them with you; but you will not have me forever. ⁸ This woman did what she had to do: she anointed my body for burial, before I die. ⁹ Truly, I say to you, wherever the Good News is proclaimed, and this will be throughout

13:10

the world, what she has done will be told in praise of her."

Mt 26:
14-16;
Lk 22:
3-6;
Jn 6:
64...71;
13:11

¹⁰ Then Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve, went off to the chief priests, in order to betray Jesus to them.

¹¹ On hearing him, they were excited and promised to give him money. So Judas started planning the best way to hand Jesus over to them.

The Lord's Supper

(Mt 26:17; Lk 22:7; 1 Cor 11:23; Jn 13)

• ¹² On the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, the day when the Passover Lamb was killed, the disciples asked him, "Where would you have us go to prepare the Passover meal for you?"

Mt 26:
17-19;
Lk 22:
7-13;
Jn 13

¹³ So Jesus sent two of his disciples with these instructions, "Go into the city, and there, a man will come to you carrying a jar of water. Follow him to the house he enters and say to the owner, ¹⁴ 'The Master says, Where is the room where I may eat the Passover meal with my disciples?'

1S
10:2-5

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

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

• 3. See John 12:1 and the notes on Luke 7:36.

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

What she has just done for me is a very charitable work (v. 6). The Jews numbered burying the dead among the "charitable works." Jesus sees in the gesture of Mary a sign, an announcement of his imminent death. Nothing

should be lost of Jesus' numbered hours among us. It was far more important to pay attention to and accompany him in these last moments than to be performing charitable deeds for the poor (something similar in Mark 2:19-20 regarding those who are prisoners to their structured fasts and prayers).

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

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

• 12. **THE NEW COVENANT**

During the Passover supper Jesus wanted to clarify the meaning of his imminent Passion. He was headed toward a death which he freely accepted, a death that would save the world. What would "his" salvation be? It would bring human history to its fulfillment: people and races needed to mature, to confront one

¹⁵Then he will show you a large room upstairs, already arranged and furnished. There, you will prepare for us.”

¹⁶The disciples went off. When they reached the city, they found everything just as Jesus had told them; and they prepared the Passover meal.

¹⁷When it was evening, Jesus arrived with the Twelve. ¹⁸While they were at table eating, Jesus said, “Truly, I tell you, one of you will betray me, *one who shares my meal.*” ¹⁹They were deeply distressed at hearing this and asked him, one after the other, “You don’t mean me, do you?” ²⁰And Jesus answered, “It is one of you Twelve, one who dips his bread in the dish with me. ²¹The Son of Man is going as the Scriptures say he will. But alas for that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed; better for him if he had never been born.”

²²While they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed it and broke it, and gave it to them. And he said,

another and finally to be united in one body. The world would pass through a thousand crises and deaths in order to come to the resurrection. Within such a history God could spread and distribute the riches of his Spirit and bring to holiness his elect. Jesus had presented a message that should guide humanity, but a people of God was also needed, a yeast, a minority who would feel committed to God’s work, and to whom God would commit himself.

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

On the eve of his death, Jesus remembered the first Covenant on Sinai, when the blood of sacrificial animals was spilled (Ex 24:8). He would soon spill his blood *for many*, that is, for a multitude (Is 53:11). These *many* were first the “remnant” of Israel, these are those who would recognize the Savior and believe in him, entering the Church, and with them all those who

“Take this. It is my body.” ²³Then he took a cup; and after he had given thanks, he passed it to them and they all drank from it. ²⁴And he said, “This is my blood, the blood of the Covenant, poured out for many. ²⁵Truly, I say to you, I will not taste the fruit of the vine again, until that day when I drink the new wine in the kingdom of God.”

Peter’s denial foretold

(Mt 26:30; Lk 22:34; Jn 13:37)

²⁶After singing psalms of praise, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

²⁷And Jesus said to them, “All of you will be dismayed and fall away; for the Scripture says: *I will strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered.* ²⁸But after I am raised, I will go to Galilee ahead of you.”

²⁹Then Peter said to him, “Even though all the others fall away, I will not.” ³⁰And Jesus replied, “Truly I say to you, today, this very night, before

would be integrated coming from other nations. So Jesus purifies through his death those who will be his own people in the world.

Whenever we celebrate the Eucharist (or Mass), we renew this Covenant. Jesus is among us as we remember his sacrifice. He becomes our spiritual bread and consecrates us to his Father so that we may participate more and more in his work of salvation.

Jesus’ last supper was the first Christian liturgy. Unlike the solemn temple ceremonies, the liturgical service of primary importance in the life of the Church would be a communal meal in which Jesus offers himself as the bread of life.

I will not taste the fruit of the vine again (v. 25). The Eucharist not only reenacts Jesus’ death but also announces the day when Christ, with all humanity reunited in him, would celebrate at the Banquet in the kingdom.

To understand the meaning of the Lord’s Supper, it is necessary to read Jesus’ farewell speeches to his apostles, which John situates on this very night of Holy Thursday (Jn 14–17). Jesus came not only to preach but also to spread his Spirit among his believers. In the future he would be present and empower them in a special way whenever they would gather to celebrate the Holy Supper. John explains this in John 6 and Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:17.

See notes on Matthew 26:26.

24:8;
Heb
9:20;
Is 53:12
Is 25:6;
Lk 14:15

Mt 26:
30-35;
Lk 22:34;
22:31-34;
Ps 115:
118

Zec 13:7

1:14;
16:7

Mt 26:
20-25;
Lk 22:14;
22:21-23

Ps 41:10

Mt 26:
26-29;
Lk 22:
15-20;
1Cor 11:
23-25

the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times.”³¹ But Peter insisted, “Though I have to die with you, I will never deny you.” And all of them said the same.

Gethsemane

(Lk 22:40; Jn 18:1)

•³² They came to a place which is called Gethsemane; and Jesus said to his disciples, “Sit here while I pray.”

³³ But he took Peter, James and John along with him, and, becoming filled with fear and distress, ³⁴ he said to them, “My soul is full of sorrow, even to death. Remain here and stay awake.”

³⁵ Then he went a little further on and fell to the ground, praying that, if possible, this hour might pass him by. Jesus said, ³⁶ “Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Take this cup away from me. Yet, not what I want, but what you want.”

³⁷ Then he came and found them asleep; and he said to Peter, “Simon, are you sleeping? Couldn’t you stay awake for one hour?” ³⁸ Stay awake and pray, all of you, so that you may not

slip into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the body is weak. ³⁹ And, going away, he prayed, saying the same words. ⁴⁰ When he came back to the disciples, he found them asleep again. They could not keep their eyes open; and they did not know what to say to him.

⁴¹ When he came back the third time, he said to them, “Are you still sleeping and resting? It is all over, the time has come: the Son of Man is now given into the hands of sinners. ⁴² Get up, let us go! Look: the one who betrays me is approaching.”

The arrest

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

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

⁴⁵ So, when he came, he went directly to Jesus, and said, “Master!

Mt 26: 47-56; Lk 22: 47-53; Jn 18: 2-11

Mt 26: 36-46; Lk 22: 40-45

5:37; 9:2; 13:3; Jn 12:27

Gal 4:6; Mt 6:10; Jn 5:30; 6:38

• 32. *THE SILENCE OF GOD*

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

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

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

How mysterious is the *agony* of the Son of God (agony means struggle): he who will give countless martyrs the inner strength to face their tortures fearlessly, allows himself to experience the very

extreme of human weakness. This sacrifice is for us. Even filled with fear or a sense of weakness, we shall not doubt: he will make us firm.

Let us look at Jesus our Savior, who had no faults or need to be purified. Yet he came to know humiliations, sufferings and even the silence of God to reach the maturity he still lacked in order to become a human being, the head of humanity (Heb 2:10).

• 43. *JUDAS*

Judas was one of the Twelve. After a night of prayer (Lk 6:12), how could Jesus have chosen the one who would betray him? When Judas followed Jesus, he waited, like the rest of the apostles, for a liberator in the ordinary sense. The others, as they came to know Jesus better, gradually changed their ambitions, but Judas did not. Judas betrayed Jesus to take revenge against a Master who had disappointed him. Though Judas was among Jesus’ closest group, he could not return the Master’s affection for him and finally returned hatred for love, falling into an abyss of evil.

Master!” and kissed him. ⁴⁶Then they seized Jesus and arrested him. ⁴⁷One of the bystanders drew his sword and struck out at the High Priest’s servant, cutting off his ear.

⁴⁸Jesus turned to them and said, “So, you have set out against a robber! Did you need swords and clubs to arrest me? ⁴⁹Day after day, I was among you, teaching in the temple, and you did not arrest me. But let the Scriptures be fulfilled.” ⁵⁰Then they all deserted him and fled.

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

• ⁵³They led Jesus to the High Priest; and all the chief priests assembled, with the elders and the teachers of the law. ⁵⁴Peter had followed him at a distance; and went right into the courtyard of the High Priest, where he

sat with the guards, warming himself at the fire.

⁵⁵Now the chief priests and the whole Council tried to find some evidence against Jesus so that they might put him to death; but they were unable to find anything. ⁵⁶Even though many came up to speak falsely against him, their evidence did not agree. ⁵⁷At last, some stood up and gave this false witness: ⁵⁸“We heard him say, ‘I will destroy this temple made by human hands, and, in three days, I will build another, not made by human hands.’” ⁵⁹But even so, their evidence did not agree.

• ⁶⁰The High Priest then stood up in the midst of them and asked Jesus, “Have you no answer at all? What about this evidence against you?” ⁶¹But Jesus was silent and made no reply.

The High Priest put a second question to him, “Are you the Christ, the

Perhaps the other apostles contributed as well to Judas’ failure. Judas, like Levi-Matthew, joined a team in which the majority were fishermen from Galilee. Had they tried hard enough to integrate him into their group?

• 53. THE TRIAL OF JESUS

Jesus appeared before two courts. First before the Sanhedrin, or the Supreme Council of the Jews, where he was accused of blasphemy. Later he was brought before the Roman governor Pilate and accused of being a political agitator.

The reason for this double process was that the Jews, under Roman rule, had lost the power to issue the death sentence. So, after judging Jesus according to their law, that is, the laws of the Scriptures they asked Pontius Pilate to implement the death penalty. To impress and convince Pilate, they fabricated new charges.

It is very difficult to say whether Jesus’ trial was dealt with in a legal way or not. It was similar to many other trials, in which the authorities can twist the law and condemn their opponents without resorting to obvious fraud.

• 60. THE SENTENCE OF JESUS

The priests could not sentence Jesus to death for minor violations of the law. That is why they had to find something more important; it is

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

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

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

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

Jesus was condemned in the name of God. He did not rebel against the unjust sentence imposed by the religious leaders of his people

Lk 19:47

Zec 13:7; Jn 16:32

Mt 26: 57-68; Lk 22:54; 22:63-71; Jn 18: 15...18

13:2; Jn 2:19; Acts 6:14

Is 50:6

13:26;
Ps
110:1;
Dn 7:13;
1Thes
4:17

Son of the Blessed One?” ⁶²Then Jesus answered, “I am, and you will see *the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Most Powerful, and coming with the clouds of heaven around him.*” ⁶³Then the High Priest, tearing his garments to show his horror, said, “What more evidence do we need? ⁶⁴You have just heard his blasphemous words. What is your decision?” They all condemned Jesus, saying, “He must die.”

⁶⁵Some of them began to spit on Jesus; and, blindfolding him, they struck him and said, “Play the prophet!” And the guards set upon him with blows.

Peter disowns Jesus

(Mt 26:69; Jn 18:15)

Mt 26:
69-75;
Lk 22:
55-62;
Jn 18:
15-18;
18:25-27

• ⁶⁶While Peter was below, in the courtyard, a servant-girl of the High Priest came by. ⁶⁷Noticing Peter beside the fire, she looked straight at him and said, “You also were with Jesus, the Nazarene.” ⁶⁸But he denied it, “I don’t know or understand what you are talking about.” And he went out through the gateway, and a cock crowed.

⁶⁹The servant-girl saw him there and told the bystanders, “This man is one of them.” ⁷⁰But Peter denied it again. After a little while, those standing nearby said to Peter, “Of course

you are one of them; you are a Galilean, aren’t you?” ⁷¹And Peter began to justify himself with curses and oaths, “I don’t know the man you are talking about.”

⁷²Just then a cock crowed a second time, and Peter remembered what Jesus had said to him, “Before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times.” And he broke down and wept.

Jesus before Pilate

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

15 ¹Early in the morning, the chief priests, the elders and the teachers of the law (that is, the whole Council or Sanhedrin) had their plan ready. They put Jesus in chains, led him away and handed him over to Pilate.

Mt 27:
1-2;
27:11-26;
Lk 22:66;
23:1-5;
23:13-25;
Jn 18:
28-40;
19:4-16

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

14:61

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

who were the legal, though unworthy, representatives of God. This was his perfect obedience to the Father.

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

It was an understandable reaction for them to flee from the scene of Jesus’ arrest. Their flee-

ing, however, shook to the foundations all the faith they had after living day by day with Jesus for the past two years. It was more than fear that caused Peter to deny Jesus; in fact, he did not yet know who Jesus really was.

The denial of Peter is a real and serious fall, although God forgives the sin the instant Peter’s gaze meets Jesus and Peter repents (Lk 22:61). This failure however, will compel him, to the end of his life, not to rely on himself alone. Peter, Rock and responsible for the Universal Church, would remain ever conscious of his personal weakness and never find peace until he followed Jesus by giving up his life for him (Jn 21:19).

• 15.6 Why did the crowd choose Barabbas? Because the way to liberation that Jesus

who had committed murder in the uprising. ⁸When the crowd went up to ask Pilate the usual favor, ⁹he said to them, "Do you want me to set free the King of the Jews?" ¹⁰for he realized that the chief priests had handed Jesus over to him out of envy. ¹¹But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to ask, instead, for the release of Barabbas. ¹²Pilate replied, "And what shall I do with the man you call King of the Jews?" ¹³The crowd shouted back, "Crucify him!" ¹⁴Pilate asked, "What evil has he done?" But they shouted the louder, "Crucify him!"

Jesus crowned with thorns

(Mt 27:27; Jn 19:1)

• ¹⁵As Pilate wanted to please the people, he freed Barabbas; and, having had Jesus flogged, Pilate handed him over to be crucified.

¹⁶The soldiers took him inside the courtyard, known as the *praetorium*, and called the rest of their companions. ¹⁷They clothed him in a purple

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

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

The crucifixion

The soldiers led him out of the city to crucify him. ²¹On the way, they met Simon of Cyrene, father of Alexander and Rufus, who was coming in from the country; and forced him to carry the cross of Jesus.

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

Acts
3:14;
13:28

Mt 27:
32-33;
Lk 23:26;
Jn 19:17

Mt 27:
33-34;
Lk 23:
33-34;
Jn 19:
18-24

Pro 31:6

Ps
22:19

Mt 27:
27-31;
Jn 19:
1-3

proposes requires time, a sense of responsibility and sacrifice. On the contrary, Barabbas is the example of irresponsible violence that satisfies our desire for vengeance.

Here, the Gospel does not claim to make all the Jews of Jesus' time responsible for his death. The Gospel bears witness to one fact: the entire people, not just their leaders, had already rejected Jesus as they were soon to reject Christian preaching (Rom 10:19).

One of the first things that the Spirit taught the apostles was that this rejection, so scandalous for Jewish believers, was part of God's plan (Acts 4:18; Rom 11:25-32). It was already pre-figured in the story of Joseph: "Don't grieve and reproach yourselves for selling me, because God has sent me before you to save your lives" (Gen 45:5).

Jesus is the victim for the sin of the world (1 Jn 4:10). For him, there were a thousand ways of being a victim and of giving his life for those he loved but the rejection of the Messiah by his own people gave a new meaning to his sacrifice. The rejection of Jesus by his people continued the past history of this people of God who had refused so many times to follow the way of salvation that God was offering them. God had said: "They have rejected me as their king" (1 S

8:8). Now God sends his own Son and the community delivers him to pagans.

John is inviting us to ask ourselves if God could come in our midst without being rejected by us (Jn 1:15). And Paul shows us that the death on the cross of the God-Man was part of God's paradoxical wisdom that we have such a hard time to accept (1 Cor 1:17-24).

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

A convicted man with his arms nailed to the cross would suffocate. To make breathing possible, he would shift his weight from his feet to his arms, thus increasing the unbearable pain caused by the nails in the feet and the wrists. As soon as he no longer had enough strength to do this, he would suffocate and die. The bitter wine offered was a drink commonly used by Roman soldiers. Although myrrh lessens pain, Jesus rejected what would have reduced his pain.

²⁵It was about nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified him. ²⁶The statement of his offense was displayed above his head, and it read, "The King of the Jews." ²⁷They also crucified two robbers with him, one on his right and one on his left. ²⁸And the Scripture was fulfilled which says: And with lawless ones he was numbered.

Is 53:12

Mt 27: 39-44;
Lk 23: 35-37;
Mk 14:58;
Ps 22: 8-9;
Job 16:4

²⁹People passing by laughed at him, shook their heads and jeered, "Aha! So, you are able to tear down the temple and build it up in three days? ³⁰Save yourself now, and come down from the cross!"

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

The death of Jesus

(Mt 27:45; Lk 23:44; Jn 19:28)

Mt 27: 45-54;
Lk 23: 44-47;
Jn 19: 28-30;
Am 8:9

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

Ps 22:2

³⁷But Jesus uttered a loud cry and gave up his spirit. ³⁸And immediately, the curtain that enclosed the temple Sanctuary was torn in two, from top to bottom.

Lk 23:46

Heb 6:19;
9:3

³⁹The captain, who was standing in front of him, saw how Jesus died and heard the cry he gave; and he

• 33. RECONCILIATION

Eloi, Eloi, lamma sabachthani? (v. 34). These are the opening words of Psalm 22 that begins with a cry of anguish and ends with certainty of victory. This psalm makes constant reference to the passion of Jesus.

Jesus' shout at the moment of death presents a mystery, for a crucified man ordinarily would die from exhaustion and suffocation and be unable to cry out in this manner. No one could take life away from Jesus; it was in his own power, and he surrendered his life when he chose to do so. Those near him were taken aback: was it a shout of defeat or of victory?

The death of a person is sometimes cause for division in a family. At other times a death leads to reconciliation. The cross Jesus died on was made of two wooden beams, a vertical one pointed towards the skies, and the other horizontal, stretched out between heaven and earth. Jesus reconciles all people with God and with each other.

Those who see in Jesus' death God's greatest manifestation of love for humanity become reconciled with God. They are no longer controlled by their fear of God and come to understand that we are not subject to blind fate, but are always in God's loving care (Rom 5).

The curtain which enclosed the temple

Sanctuary was torn in two (v. 38). God no longer remains in that place where no mortal could enter. God left the awe-inspiring temple shrine and is now present to all of us through his wounded Son—wounded, not only by sin, but also by the compassion he feels for us.

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

Truly, this man was the Son of God (v. 39). Assuredly, the Roman captain proclaimed that Jesus was a *just man* (Lk 23:47), that is, an outstanding man. Mark intentionally places on the lips of the captain the words "Son of God," because this pagan officer represents the pagan nations who would recognize the Son of God in this crucified man.

On several occasions Jesus insisted that he not be proclaimed Son of God (Mk 1:44). He did this because no one can know who God is or what being Son of God means (Mt 11:27),

said, “Truly, this man was the Son of God.”

Mt 27:
55-56;
Lk 23:49;
Jn 19:25;
Mk 6:3;
16:1;
Lk 8:1-3

⁴⁰There were also some women watching from a distance; among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome, ⁴¹who had followed Jesus when he was in Galilee and saw to his needs. There were also others who had come up with him to Jerusalem.

The burial

Mt 27:
57-61;
Lk 23:
50-55;
Jn 19:
38-42

• ⁴²It was now evening, and, as it was Preparation Day, that is the day before the Sabbath, ⁴³Joseph of Arimathea boldly went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Joseph was a respected member of the Council, who was, himself, waiting for the kingdom of God.

Dt 21:
22-2

⁴⁴Pilate was surprised that Jesus should have died so soon; so he summoned the captain and inquired if Jesus was already dead. ⁴⁵After hearing the captain, he let Joseph have the body.

⁴⁶Joseph took it down and wrapped it in the linen sheet he had bought. He laid the body in a tomb that had been cut out of the rock, and rolled a stone

across the entrance to the tomb. ⁴⁷Now Mary of Magdala and Mary the mother of Joses took note of where the body had been laid.

He has been raised, he is not here

(Mt 28; Lk 24; Jn 20)

16 • ¹When the Sabbath was over, Mary of Magdala, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go and anoint the body. ²And very early in the morning, on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they came to the tomb.

Mt 28:
1-8;
Lk 24:
1-12;
Jn 20:
1-10;
Mk 14:8

³They were saying to one another, “Who will roll back the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?” ⁴But, as they looked up, they noticed that the stone had already been rolled away. It was a very big stone.

Jn 11:38

⁵As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man in a white robe seated on the right, and they were amazed. ⁶But he said to them, “Don’t be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified; he has been raised and is not here. This is, however, the place where they laid him. ⁷Now go, and tell his disciples

Acts
1:10;
Rev 7:9

Acts
2:23;
3:15;
4:10

until he has known how Jesus died and come to believe in his resurrection. See Romans 3:24.

• 42. Joseph of Arimathea hastened to claim and bury the body of Jesus, because the Jewish law demanded burial before nightfall of the bodies of convicted people (Dt 21:22), and even more so on a day which preceded an important feast. The tomb selected had been cut from rock on a hillside. The entrance was very low and sealed with a big round stone, similar to that used in a mill. See commentary on John 19:41.

Like the seed that is buried in the soil, the body of Jesus was buried so that new life could flourish (Rom 6:3-5). See commentary on Matthew 27:52.

• 16.1 JESUS HAS BEEN RAISED FROM THE DEAD

Jesus’ history comes to an end with the discovery of the empty tomb. In the last pages of the Gospel we find a brief account of the most

important apparitions of Jesus after his death. He is no longer the earthly Jesus but the resurrected one, born again of the Father and never to die again, as Psalm 2 says: “You are my son. This day I have begotten you.”

Jesus has risen. The Gospel narrates events that took place after his death and mentions the names of those who saw the resurrected Jesus. Can we believe them? We would like more details to support our faith, but if even thousands of interviews with eyewitnesses were published, with pictures in full color to support the statements, there would always be room for doubt. We do not see him, we cannot find him. Where is he?

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

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

and Peter: Jesus is going ahead of you to Galilee; you will see him there, just as he told you.”⁸ The women went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them. And they were so afraid that they said nothing to anyone.

Another conclusion of Mark's gospel

•⁹ After Jesus rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary of Magdala, from whom he had driven out seven demons.¹⁰ She went and reported the news to his followers, who were now mourning and weeping.¹¹ But when they heard that

he lived, and had been seen by her, they would not believe it.

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

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

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

Lk 24:
13-35

Lk 24:
36-49;
Jn 20:
19-23;
1Cor
15:5

Mt 28:
18-20

Jn 20:
11-18

Finally, who will believe? Those whose own experience has prepared them to accept the most fundamental truth: the living God loves people and restores them to life. Some persons are predisposed to believe because they have experienced that God himself walks with them in their trials and gives them hope when everything seems lost. Because of this, they recognize in Christ the ideal human being and understand that he had to suffer before reaching his glory. They have learned the ways of God and that is why they believe the witnesses of the resurrected Christ.

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

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

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

The one who refuses to believe will be condemned (v. 16). There seems to be a threat and its erroneous interpretation was going to have countless consequences. Even if, in the past, we have read into this a condemnation to hell, this is not the meaning of the text.

The one who refuses to believe is one of those to whom the message has been presented, someone who has also seen and received signs that are eloquent enough for that person to be able to recognize the hand of God. People in these situations will be condemned, that is to say, when they give an account of their good and bad deeds, they will receive “a” condemnation even if they have been victims of many influences. On that day, they will have to admit that they have been at fault, perhaps even seriously. On the other hand, those who believe and are baptized are saved, that is to say, they enjoy the gifts that God gives us through his Son Jesus: they have been profoundly renewed and their lives have taken another direction. They are going to participate in the mission of God's people in history, a mysterious and magnificent work without which human beings would be condemned to lose themselves in every sense of the word.

THE NAME OF JESUS

On the day of his resurrection, Jesus' human nature begins to participate fully in divine glory (Rom 1:4). Jesus now asks us to believe in his name, that is, in the divine power he has just received and that works through him.

The name is a word that has little or no meaning for us. For the Jews it meant the active presence of God. This term allowed them to speak of God's mysterious presence in the world without disregarding his greatness. Scripture does not say that God walked with the Hebrews toward the promised land (for God does not walk); instead it says that his name or his Face (Ex

Acts
2:38;
16:31

Good News to all creation. ¹⁶The one who believes and is baptized will be saved; the one who refuses to believe will be condemned. ¹⁷Signs like these will accompany those who have believed: in my name they will cast out demons and speak new languages; ¹⁸they will pick up snakes, and if they drink anything poisonous, they will be unharmed; they will lay their

Lk 10:17;
9:10;
Acts 2:4;
8:7;
14:3;
19:6;
1Co
14:2
Acts
28:3

hands on the sick, and they will be healed.”

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

Lk 24:
50-53;
Acts
1:4-14

33:14) was among them. God’s presence could not be confined within his temple, but Scripture says that his name dwelt in this temple, from whence he blessed all the activities of his people (1 K 8:27).

The name, thus, means divine presence or power. Paul says that the resurrected Jesus has received this name that outshines any other (Phil 2:9). God the Father has given it to him and Jesus, who has received it, is not less than him, since whatever belongs to his Father is now his as well. Jesus does not receive glory as one receives a title or an honor (as already proclaimed in Is 9:5), for divine glory can be granted only to God. If he receives a divine title, it is because he actually received divinity from the Father in the beginning—divinity is his very being.

Thus, Jesus is as much God as the Father, but he is so in a different way, by receiving everything from God who possesses all. That is why it is written that his name is the Son (Heb 1:4). When we speak to the Father in the name of

Jesus, this means much more than bolstering ourselves with his merits (Heb 5:9) or making use of his valuable intercession (Heb 7:25). We present ourselves as sons and daughters, knowing that God embraces us with the same paternal love he has for his own Beloved One (Eph 1:6).

From then on our Lord Jesus Christ, with divine power, begins little by little to direct human history and the personal path of each one of us to himself. The apostles were sent into the world to heal and sanctify it. The miracles and healings are not ends in themselves; they are only signs and means. The goal of evangelization is that all creation may be gathered around the person of the Son-of-God-become-human, through the power of his Spirit.

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

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