

MATTHEW



INTRODUCTION

Who was Matthew, known also as Levi? We read in the Bible that he was a tax collector and that Jesus called him to be one of his apostles (Mt 9:9 and Mk 2:13). Yet we know for certain that the Gospel under his name was drawn up in its actual form towards the year 80 CE that is after his death. Could the author have been one of his disciples and used a first draft compiled by Matthew? (See Introduction to New Testament.) Most probably this Gospel was written in a Christian community of both Jews and Greeks, possibly at Antioch (see Acts 12:19 and 13). It was a time deeply marked by conflict between Jews and Christians, when the Jewish community – suffering terribly from the war with Rome that destroyed the nation – was reorganizing itself under the direction of the Pharisees. These latter had only recently decided to exclude all Jews who believed in Jesus and were members of a Christian community.

This Gospel intends to assure Christians that they have no reason to be troubled even if their own people reject them. The very fact that the Jewish community did not recognize its Messiah resulted in the loss of its right to speak and to decide about God's promises. Matthew refers to numerous texts in the Old Testament to prove that Christians are the true heirs of the people of the covenant.

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

Matthew was impressed by the fact that Jesus during his two or three years of ministry presented himself most often as a preacher, as a teacher of Scripture. He therefore insists on the words of Jesus, which are more numerous in his Gospel than in the others.

It does not surprise us then that Matthew builds his gospel around five “discourses,” in which he has put together the words of Jesus spoken on different occasions. These discourses are:

- The New Law: 5–7.
- Instructions to Missionaries: 10.
- Parables of the Kingdom: 13.
- Admonitions for the Christian community: 18.
- The Future of the Church: 23–25.

Lk
3:23 **The roots of Jesus**

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

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

Gen
38:29
1Chr
2:4
Ru
4:18 ³Judah was the father of Perez and Zerah (their mother was Tamar), Perez was the father of Hezron, and Hezron of Aram. ⁴Aram was the father of Aminadab, Aminadab of Nahshon, Nahshon of Salmon.

Ru
4:13 ⁵Salmon was the father of Boaz. His mother was Rahab. Boaz was the father of Obed. His mother was Ruth. Obed was the father of Jesse.

2S
12:24 ⁶Jesse was the father of David, the king. David was the father of Solomon. His mother had been Uriah's wife.

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

2K
24:12
2Chr
36:9,
20 ¹¹Josiah was the father of Jechoniah and his brothers at the time of the deportation to Babylon.

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

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

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

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

Jesus born of a virgin mother
(Lk 1:27)

• ¹⁸This is how Jesus Christ was born. Mary his mother had been given to Joseph in marriage but before they lived together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit.

¹⁹Then Joseph, her husband, made

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

• 18. The wording of verse 16 should be noted. Jesus is not the son of Joseph. The beginning of the paragraph intends to remind us that Jesus is both a legitimate son of David

plans to divorce her in all secrecy. He was an upright man, and in no way did he want to discredit her.

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

²² All this happened in order to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ²³ *The virgin will conceive and bear a son, and he will be called Emmanuel* which means: God-with-us. ²⁴ When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had told him to do and he took his wife to his home. ²⁵ So she gave birth to a son and he had not had marital relations with her. Joseph gave him the name of Jesus.

Wise men from the east

2 ¹ When Jesus was born in Bethlehem, in Judea, during the days of King Herod, wise men from the east arrived in Jerusalem. ² They asked, “Where is the newborn king of the

Jews? We saw the rising of his star in the east and have come to honor him.”

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

⁵ “In the town of Bethlehem in Judea,” they told him, “for this is what the prophet wrote: ⁶ *And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, you are by no means the least among the clans of Judah, for from you will come a leader, the one who is to shepherd my people Israel.*”

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

⁹ After the meeting with the king, they set out. The star that they had seen in the East went ahead of them

through Joseph and the Son of God conceived through the Holy Spirit by a virgin-mother.

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

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

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

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

Joseph made plans to divorce her secretly.

The Gospel is not precise as to his reasons for so doing. In any case it is unthinkable that people might have doubted Mary’s fidelity.

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

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

In this chapter then, Matthew uses these stories without the slightest problem about their authenticity. He uses them to show how Jesus lived in his own way what his people had under-

1:25
Lk
1:31
Acts
4:12

Is
7:14

Lk
1:31
2:1

Num
24:17

Jn
7:42

Mic
5:1
2S
5:2

and stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰The wise men were overjoyed on seeing the star again. ¹¹They went into the house and when they saw the child with Mary his mother, they knelt and worshiped him. They opened their bags and offered him their gifts of gold, incense and myrrh.

^{2:22} ¹²In a dream they were warned not to go back to Herod, so they returned to their home country by another way.

Escape to Egypt

^{1:20} ^{2:19} • ¹³After the wise men had left, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph and said, “Get up, take the child and his mother and flee to Egypt, and stay there until I tell you for Herod will soon be looking for the child in order to kill him.”

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

¹⁶When Herod found out that he had been tricked by the wise men, he was

furiously. He gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its neighborhood who were two years old or under. This was done in line with what he had learned from the wise men about the time when the star appeared.

¹⁷In this way, what the prophet Jeremiah had said was fulfilled: ¹⁸*A cry is heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation: Rachel weeps for her children. She refuses to be comforted, for they are no more.*

Joseph and Mary return to Nazareth

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

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

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

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

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

• 13. In relating the story about the slaughter of innocent children and the flight into Egypt,

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

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

• 19. The return to Nazareth. Here we have the end of these stories that are intended to introduce us to the Gospel. They announce the mission of Christ: savior misjudged by his own, hounded by authority, he will turn towards the

Jdg 13:5
Is 11:1
53:2
Lk 2:39
Acts 2:22

•²³ There he settled in a town called Nazareth. In this way what was said by the prophets was fulfilled: *He shall be called a Nazorean.*

John the Baptist prepares the way
(Mk 1:1; Lk 3:1 Jn 1:19)

Mk 1:15
Is 40:3

3 •¹ In the course of time John the Baptist appeared in the desert of Judea and began to proclaim his message, ² “Change your ways, the Kingdom of heaven is now at hand!” ³ It was about him that the prophet Isaiah had spoken when he said, *A voice is shouting in the desert: prepare a way for the Lord; make his paths straight.*

⁴ John had a leather garment around his waist and wore a cloak of camel’s hair; his food was locusts and wild honey. ⁵ People came to him from Jerusalem, from all Judea and from the whole Jordan valley, ⁶ and they were baptized by him in the Jordan as they confessed their sins.

12:34
23:33
Lk 21:23

⁷ When he saw several Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he bap-

pagan nations. For Galilee was considered by the Jews of Judea as half-foreign and pagan (4:15). Jesus was to remain thirty years in this small village where he grew up and worked as a “carpenter” (Mk 6:3) while the world waited for salvation.

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

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

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

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

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

Jesus baptized by John
(Mk 1:9; Lk 3:2; Jn 1:29)

•¹³ At that time Jesus arrived from Galilee and came to John at the Jordan

which Jesus began teaching. Later on, Matthew and Luke wrote a little about Jesus’ childhood to help us understand the secret of his person.

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

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

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

• 13. In this baptism Jesus identifies himself

Rom 1:18
2:5
5:9
Eph 5:6
Col 3:6
Rev 6:16
Jn 8:33
Rom 4:12
7:8
7:19
Lk 13:7
Jn 15:6
Jn 1:26
Acts 1:5
11:16
13:24
19:4
11:3
Is 41:16
Jn 1:15,
33

to be baptized by him. ¹⁴But John tried to prevent him, and said, "How is it you come to me: I should be baptized by you!"

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

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

Jesus tempted in the wilderness

(Lk 4:1; Mk 1:12)

4 • ¹Then the Spirit led Jesus into the desert that he be put to the test by the devil. ²After spending forty days and nights without food, Jesus was hungry.

³Then the devil came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, order these stones to turn into bread." ⁴But Jesus answered, "Scripture says: *one does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.*"

⁵Then the devil took Jesus to the holy city, set him on the highest wall of the temple, and said to him, ⁶"If you are

the Son of God, throw yourself down, for scripture says, *God has given orders to his angels about you. Their hands will hold you up lest you hurt your foot against a stone.*" ⁷Jesus answered, "But scripture also says: *You shall not put to the test the Lord your God.*"

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

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

(Mk 1:14; Lk 4:14)

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

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

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

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

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

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

After spending forty days and nights with-

out food, Jesus was hungry. This duration of forty days (which symbolically represents the forty weeks a child remains in its mother's womb in preparation for a new birth) was already present in the life of Moses and Elijah: Ex 24:18; 1 K 19:8. This fast is for Jesus what the command to sacrifice his son had been for Abraham, and for Moses the rebellion of a thirsty people or the incident of the golden calf. In a moment of full lucidity, when Jesus felt physically exhausted and spiritually strengthened by his fast, the devil tried to convince him that it was impossible to carry out his mission with the means God had proposed.

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

Ps
91:11

Dt
6:16
1Cor
10:9

2:11
18:26
Dn
3:5
1Cor
14:25
Dt
6:13
Rev
4:10
22:8

Heb
2:18
4:15

27:40

Dt
8:3

Is
52:1

27:40

Is
8:23

Lk 1:79 ¹⁶ *The people who lived in darkness have seen a great light; on those who live in the land of the shadow of death, a light has shone.*

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

Lk 5:1 ¹⁸ As Jesus walked by the lake of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. ¹⁹ He said to them, “Come, follow me, and I will make you fish for people.”

²⁰ At once they left their nets and followed him.

Lk 13:47 ²¹ He went on from there and saw two other brothers, James, the son of Zebedee, and his brother John in a boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets. Jesus called them.

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

Mk 9:35 ²³ Jesus went around all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the King-

dom, and curing all kinds of sickness and disease among the people.

²⁴ The news about him spread through the whole of Syria, and the people brought all their sick to him, and all those who suffered: the possessed, the deranged, the paralyzed, and he healed them all. ²⁵ Large crowds followed him from Galilee and the Ten Cities, from Jerusalem, Judea, and from across the Jordan. Mk 6:55

The Beatitudes

(Lk 6:17)

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

² Then he spoke and began to teach them:

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

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

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

⁶ Fortunate are those who hunger Is 51:1 Sir 24:21

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

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

The angels came to serve him. After rejecting the temptations, Jesus finds total peace. His purity of heart opens up for him a spiritual world hidden from human eyes, a world as real as the material things and beings surrounding him. In this spiritual world, as Son of God he is king among the spirits who are servants of his Father (see commentary on Dn 12:6).

• **17. Change your ways.** The Greek word is oftentimes translated as “convert”, or “repent”. In 3:11 we put “change of heart”, which is the closest to the Greek word. This term can be understood in many ways. In the mouth of John the Baptist, “Be converted” means “turn away from your sins.” With Jesus, “conversion”

means a renewal of life from inside out. The Gospel will tell us that this renewal follows the discovery of God’s mercy and is the work of his Spirit within us (see commentary on Mk 1:14).

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

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

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

Fortunate! This first paragraph introduces the new people of God; to them the Law is given. Let

and thirst for justice, for they shall be satisfied.

18:23 Jas 2:13 ⁷Fortunate are the merciful, for they shall find mercy.

Ps 24:4 Ex 33:20 ⁸Fortunate are those with a pure heart, for they shall see God.

Pro 12:20 Ps 34:15 Jas 3:18 ⁹Fortunate are those who work for peace, they shall be called children of God.

¹⁰Fortunate are those who are per-

secuted for the cause of justice, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Heb 2:14 1P 3:14

¹¹Fortunate are you, when people insult you and persecute you and speak all kinds of evil against you because you are my followers. ¹²Be glad and joyful, for a great reward is kept for you in God. This is how this people persecuted the prophets who lived before you. Jas 1:2 10:22 Jas 5:10 1P 4:14

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

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

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

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

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

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

Those said to be "fortunate" are not so be-

cause of what they suffer: the expression would not ring true. They are fortunate because they are admitted to the Kingdom.

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

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

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

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

In the Beatitudes, the kingdom of God is at the same time the *land* of Palestine promised to the children of Abraham and the land where peace reigns for God is present there. Those who *hunger for justice* will be given both bread and the holiness of God, because in the Bible *justice* also signifies: being as God wishes us to be. Because of this Jesus tells us that we shall be *satisfied or consoled*. Our consolation on earth is to know and see that God loves us and cares for us and in spite of all, can overturn the situation of the oppressed. It is also to know that even when it seems he does not hear our prayer, our cross has meaning and purpose. Finally we must not forget that in our future life God will give

Salt and light

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

Lev 2:13
Mk 9:50
• ¹³You are the salt of the earth. But if salt has lost its strength, how can it be made salty again? It has become useless. It can only be thrown away and people will trample on it.

Lk 8:16
11:33
Jn 8:12
9:5
Phil 2:15
Jn 3:21
15:8
1Cor 10:31
• ¹⁴You are the light of the world. A city built on a mountain cannot be hidden. ¹⁵No one lights a lamp and covers it; instead it is put on a lampstand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶In the same way your light must shine before others, so that they may see the good you do and praise your Father in heaven.

More perfect law

Rom 3:31
• ¹⁷Do not think that I have come to

remove the Law and the Prophets. I have not come to remove but to fulfill them. ¹⁸I tell you this: as long as heaven and earth last, not the smallest letter or stroke of the Law will change until all is fulfilled.

Lk 16:17
21:33

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

Jas 2:10

²⁰I tell you, then, that if you are not righteous in a much broader way than the teachers of the Law and the Pharisees, you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven.

Rom 10:3
Phil 2:3

us more than we could ever hope for or merit. It is certain, however, that Matthew more than Luke, has reorientated the language of Jesus, inviting us to look higher than what is immediate.

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

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

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

You are the light: Jesus does not mean “You are the best in the world,” but “God has chosen you to be a minority and through you he will make himself known.” You will experience, (both you and the Church) much that you would perhaps prefer to avoid, but which will be for the world, a sign from God.

- 14. *Children of light*: Eph 5:8; 1 P 2:12; 1 Thes 5:4.
- 17. Here begins the presentation of the

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

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

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

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

In 5:19 Jesus is referring to the commandments.

In 5:20, *If you are not righteous in a better way*, Jesus refers to the spirit of the Law.

Just when he is about to teach a new way of understanding the Law of God, Jesus warns us against the temptation of the easy way. Many could misinterpret the words of Jesus and say: It would be better if religion were less demanding

Ex 20:13
Dt 5:17
Rom 13:9
Eph 4:26
Jas 1:19

•²¹ You have heard that it was said to our people in the past: *Do not commit murder; anyone who does kill will have to face trial.* ²² But now I tell you: whoever gets angry with a brother or sister will have to face trial. Whoever insults a brother or sister deserves to be brought before the council; whoever calls a brother or a sister “Fool” deserves to be thrown into the fire of hell.

Mk 11:5

²³ So, if you are about to offer your gift at the altar and you remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴ leave your gift there in front of the altar, go at once and make peace with him, and then come back and offer your gift to God.

Pro 17:14
Lk 12:58

²⁵ Don’t forget this: be reconciled with your opponent quickly when you

are together on the way to court. Otherwise he will turn you over to the judge, who will hand you over to the police, who will put you in jail. ²⁶ There you will stay, until you have paid the last penny.

•²⁷ You have heard that it was said: *Do not commit adultery.* ²⁸ But I tell you this: anyone who looks at a woman to lustfully has in fact already committed adultery with her in his heart.

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

Ex 20:14
Sir 9:5

18:8
Mk 9:43

and easier to practice! Because of this, Jesus points out that anyone who does not intend to fulfill the entire Law will not enter the Kingdom; nor will those who have ready excuses for their laziness: these commandments are not so important! To those who obey the Law, Jesus shows the spirit of the Law. For such as these the Gospel is not a comfortable road, but the call to a more perfect life.

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

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

Jesus does not question the demands of the Bible, nor is he satisfied with a mere commentary; the law of Christ is a call for purification of heart, that is, of our intentions and our desires. It is a fresh enlightenment born of a new experience of God. When we turn towards the Father (and that is the great innovation: the imitation of God the Father: 5:48), we discover how imperfect are the human criteria of morality. Therefore, let us not call sin only that which is seen or condemned as such by people. Indeed my sins are all the bad thoughts that I keep inside and that produce evil fruits when the opportunity comes. See also Mt 12:34.

Until you have paid the last penny (v. 26).

Repairing the damage means more than just returning the money I have illegally taken. I must also question why I am so weak that I am carried away by any desire.

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

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

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

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

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

Is it only a matter of sacrificing what could drag us to “major fault and sin”? The word of Jesus

19:7 •³¹ It was also said: *anyone who divorces his wife must give her a written notice of divorce.*³² But what I tell you is this: If a man divorces his wife except in the case of unlawful union, he causes her to commit adultery. And the man who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

Oaths

Ex •³³ You have also heard that people were told in the past: *Do not break your oath; an oath sworn to the Lord must be kept.*³⁴ But I tell you this: do not take oaths. Do not swear by the heavens, for they are God's throne,³⁵ nor by the earth, because it is his footstool, nor by Jerusalem because it is the city of the great king.³⁶ Do not even swear by your head, because you cannot make a single hair white or black.³⁷ Say *yes*

when you mean *yes* and say *no* when you mean *no*. Anything else you say comes from the devil.

Love of enemies

(Lk 6:29)

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

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

goes far beyond. As much as we complain about the misery and meaninglessness of our life, we conserve it at any cost with the hope of still enjoying this world. What if real sin were to avoid any risk and self-sacrifice when God is calling?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Many invoke the name of God on any occasion. Is it because they truly know him and have him in mind? If we use his name casually, it is because we do not experience the weight of his presence. What a lack of respect to call on God

to testify to our sincerity when we do not even recognize all that is false and unclean within us!

All the rest comes from the devil, and even the preoccupation of defending and justifying oneself in the eyes of others. See also Mt 23:16; James 5:12.

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

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

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

If someone forces you to go one mile. Jesus speaks to farmers who are humiliated and oppressed by foreign armies. Many times they are obliged to carry the burden of the soldiers. Their usual reaction is resigned submission concealing hatred and desire for revenge. Would they be capable of responding to such a counsel? It is certain that had they practiced it, they might have saved their nation from destruction.

• 43. *Love your neighbor.* Here we come to the last of the opposites between the Old Law

Ex 21:24
Lev 24:20
Dt 19:21
Jn 18:22
1Cor 6:7
Lk 6:30
Lev 19:18
Job 31:29
Acts 7:60
Rom 12:20

Ex 23:4
Pro 25:21
Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ so that you may be children of your Father in Heaven. For he makes his sun rise on both the wicked and the good, and he gives rain to both the just and the unjust.

⁴⁶ If you love those who love you, what is special about that? Do not even tax collectors do as much? ⁴⁷ And if you are friendly only to your friends, what is so exceptional about that? Do not even the pagans do as much? ⁴⁸ For your part you shall be righteous and perfect in the way your heavenly Father is righteous and perfect.

Lev 19:2
Dt 18:23
Jas 1:4
1P 1:16

Doing good for God alone

6 ¹ Be careful not to make a show of your righteousness before people. If you do so, you do not gain anything from your Father in heaven. ² When you give something to the poor, do not have it trumpeted before you, as do those who want to be seen in the synagogues and in the streets in order to be praised by the people. I assure you, they have been already paid in full.

23:5
Lk 16:14
Jn 5:44
Am 4:5

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

Ps 139:2

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

6:16
2K 4:33
Dn 6:11

• Our Father...

(Lk 11:1; Mk 11:25)

⁷ When you pray, do not use a lot of words, as the pagans do, for they hold that the more they say, the more chance they have of being heard. ⁸ Do not be like them. Your Father knows what you need, even before you ask him.

Ecl 5:1

6:32
Lk 12:30

⁹ This, then, is how you should pray:

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

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

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

Love your enemies: Mk 12:31; Lk 10:27; Rom 13:9; Gal 5:14; Rom 12:20; Lk 23:34; Acts 7:60; Rom 12:14; Eph 5:1.

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

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

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

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

Ezk 36:23
Jn 17:6
26:39
Pro 30:8
18:21

Our Father in heaven,
holy be your name,
10 your kingdom come
and your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.

11 Give us today our daily bread.
12 Forgive us our debts
just as we have forgiven those who
are in debt to us.

26:41
Jn 17:15
Mk 11:25
Eph 4:32
Col 3:13
Sir 28:1
Is 58:5
23:5

13 Do not bring us to the test
but deliver us from the evil one.
14 If you forgive others their wrongs,
your Father in heaven will also forgive
yours. 15 If you do not forgive others, then
your Father will not forgive you either.

• 16 When you fast, do not put on a
miserable face as do the hypocrites.
They put on a gloomy face, so people

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

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

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

For us the limitless sky by day and by night is the image of a wonderful world where God is everything. In calling on our Father in Heaven, we do not mean that he is far or near, above or below or inside. We only intend to raise our spirits to Him. We recognize that our words are not worthy, that our concerns are selfish and limited, when we compare them with the breadth of His thoughts and the generosity of His love. That we can address him and call him Father is not something natural, but a very special privilege. "My Father," says Jesus; also: "Your Father." For he is the only one, and we are adopted children, by the mercy of God who allowed us to be *born again* (Jn 3:1).

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

Holy be your name! May your Name be known and proclaimed Holy! May your splendor and generosity be seen in those who become your children. May your perfection be recognized through their good works (5:16). May your presence and your riches be welcomed by those who keep your word, according to John 14:23.

The Father only wants to pour out his holiness and happiness on the children he has chosen and loved. He wants to seal us with his Name so that, day and night, we will be united with him, like the Father and the Son are united by the Holy Spirit.

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

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

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

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

We ask the Father for *the bread* he has promised to those who listen to his word. Mod-

can see they are fasting. I tell you this: they have been paid in full already. ¹⁷When you fast, wash your face and make yourself look cheerful, ¹⁸because you are not fasting for appearances or for people, but for your Father who sees beyond appearances. And your Father, who sees what is kept secret will reward you.

(Lk 11:34; 12:13)

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

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

Sir
29:11
Jas
5:2
19:21
Col
3:1

Pro
20:27
Lk
11:34

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

What should we say? The bread “we need” or our “daily” bread or sustenance? The original text uses a difficult word that has different meanings. Many have understood that the children of God feel the need of much more than what is asked for the body and that the eucharist was already meant as it is in the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves.

The Our Father speaks of *debts* that we must forgive (6:12). In 6:14, we read *wrongs*. Jesus considers debts and wrongs as the same thing. When we forgive someone who asks for forgiveness, we are not doing that person a favor, nor do we deserve any credit for doing it; we actually free ourselves from some rancor or hatred that is poisoning us. Inasmuch as we stick to our rights, we hold fast to this world. God wants to forgive us and bring us closer to him, but how can he if we remain anchored to the things of this world?

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

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

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

See another shorter text in Luke 11:1.

- 16. Here Jesus neither justifies nor con-

demns fasting. He himself fasted: 4:2; 9:15; 17:21. Fasting is unworthy when done to obtain human approval rather than God’s.

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

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

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

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

Store up with God Gospel says “in Heaven”, and we know that Heaven is one of the names of God.

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

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

•²² The lamp of the body is the eye; if your eyes are sound, your whole body will be in the light. ²³If your eyes are diseased your whole body will be in darkness. Then, if your light has become darkness, how dark will be the darkest part of you!

Set your heart on the kingdom

(Lk 12:23; 16:13)

Ps 62:11 •²⁴ No one can serve two masters; for he will either hate one and love the other, or he will be loyal to the first and look down on the second. You cannot at the same time serve God and money.

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

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

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

³¹Do not worry and say: What are we going to eat? What are we going to drink? Or: what shall we wear? ³²The pagans busy themselves with such things; but your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. ³³Set your heart first on the kingdom and justice of God and all these things will also be given to you. ³⁴Do not worry about tomorrow for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Don't be a judge

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

7 • ¹Do not judge and you will not be judged. ²In the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and the measure you use for others will be used for you. ³Why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye and not see

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1K 10

6:7 Lk 12:30

Wis 1:1

Is 51:11

Ex 16:4

1Cor 4:5

Rom 2:1 14:4

the plank in your own eye? ⁴How can you say to your brother: ‘Come, let me take the speck from your eye,’ as long as that plank is in your own? ⁵Hypocrite, take first the plank out of your own eye, then you will see clear enough to take the speck out of your brother’s eye.

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

• ⁷Ask and you will receive; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened. ⁸For everyone who asks, receives; whoever seeks, finds; and the door will be opened to him who knocks.

⁹Would any of you give a stone to your son when he asks for bread? ¹⁰Or give him a snake, when he asks for a fish?

¹¹As bad as you are, you know how to give good things to your children. How much more, then, will your Father in

heaven give good things to those who ask him!

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

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

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

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

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

¹⁸A good tree cannot produce bad fruit

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

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

Do not judge. See Rom 2:1; 14:4; 1 Cor 5:12; James 4:11.

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

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

• 13. *Enter through the narrow gate.* Maybe someone was asking Jesus: “Who will be

saved?” (Mt 19:25). In no instance did Jesus say whether those who would share in eternal life would be many or few. He did say many times that very few *would be chosen from among the many called*. That means that among the many people privileged to meet him, very few would experience the Gospel’s riches and bring forth fruit in themselves and for others. The *chosen* or approved are those who persevere and strive for perfect freedom.

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

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

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

1Cor
5:12
Jas
4:11

Mk
4:24
Jn
8:7

18:19
Lk
11:9
Mk
11:24
Jn
14:14

15:7
16:23
Jas
1:5,
17
1Jn
3:22
5:14

Rom
13:8

Acts
14:22

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

Mt
10:16
Jn
10:12
Acts
20:29

Sir
27:6
Jas
3:12

and a rotten tree cannot bear good fruit.
 19 Any tree that does not bear good fruit
 is cut down and thrown in the fire. 20 So
 you will know them by their fruit.

Wise and foolish builders
 (Lk 6:46; 13:26; Mk 1:22)

• 21 Not everyone who says to me:
 Lord! Lord! will enter the kingdom of
 heaven, but the one who does the will of
 my heavenly Father. 22 Many will say to
 me on that day, “Lord, Lord, did we not
 speak in your name? Did we not cast
 out devils and perform many miracles
 in your name?” 23 Then I will tell them
 openly: I have never known you; *away
 from me, you evil people!*
 24 “So, then, anyone who hears these
 words of mine and acts accordingly is
 like a wise man, who built his house on
 rock. 25 The rain poured, the rivers
 flooded, and the wind blew and struck
 that house, but it did not collapse be-
 cause it was built on rock. 26 But any-
 one who hears these words of mine and
 does not act accordingly, is like a fool
 who built his house on sand. 27 The rain
 poured, the rivers flooded, and the wind
 blew and struck that house; it col-

lapsed, and what a terrible fall that
 was!”

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

Cure of a leper
 (Mk 1:40; Lk 5:12)

8 • 1 When Jesus came down from
 the mountain, large crowds fol-
 lowed him.

2 Then a leper came forward. He
 knelt before him and said, “Sir, if you
 want to, you can make me clean.”

3 Jesus stretched out his hand, touched
 him, and said, “I want to, be clean
 again.” At that very moment the man
 was cleansed from his leprosy. 4 Then
 Jesus said to him, “See that you do not
 tell anyone, but go to the priest, have
 yourself declared clean, and offer the
 gift that Moses ordered as proof of it.”

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

• 5 When Jesus entered Capernaum,
 an army captain approached him to

death in all domains and smothers in so many the
 ability to believe and hope.

Do you ever pick grapes from thornbushes?
 Jesus invites us to look at the facts before
 coming to conclusions. We find it hard to care-
 fully observe the reality in which we live. We
 prefer to discuss and debate about ideas rather
 than to analyze particular situations. Jesus, ac-
 customed to manual labor, distrusts ideas and
 theories.

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

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

Anyone who hears these words of mine (v.
 24). Jesus means those who listen to his words
 and are converted: they believe themselves al-
 ready saved. If they do not use their initial
 enthusiasm to build their lives on solid founda-
 tions, such as scriptural meditation, generosity,

resistance to evil inclinations, sharing in the
 Christian community – then everything will
 tumble down later.

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

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

Then, the faith of the centurion, a Roman
 officer (8:5). Jesus speaks of the Jews who will be
 excluded from the kingdom of God. That may
 also be the case of the new heirs of the Kingdom
 who are the Christians of the West.

• 5. See commentary on Luke 7:1.
The heirs of the Kingdom (v. 12). These
 words are intended to express the Jewish term
 used by Jesus: the sons of the Kingdom, that is:

Lk
 7:1

Mk
 1:40
 Lk
 5:12

9:30
 12:16
 Mk
 7:36
 Lev
 14:2
 Lk
 17:14

ask his help, ⁶“Sir, my servant lies sick at home. He is paralyzed and suffers terribly.” ⁷Jesus said to him, “I will come and heal him.”

^{Lk 5:8} ⁸The captain answered, “I am not worthy to have you under my roof. Just give an order and my boy will be healed. ⁹For I myself, a junior officer, ^{Ps 107:20} give orders to my soldiers. And if I say to one: ‘Go,’ he goes, and if I say to another: ‘Come,’ he comes, and to my servant: ‘Do this,’ he does it.”

¹⁰When Jesus heard this he was astonished and said to those who were following him, “I tell you, I have not found such faith in Israel. ^{Lk 13:29} ¹¹I say to you, many will come from east and west and sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob at the feast in the kingdom of heaven; ^{Lk 13:28} ¹²but the heirs of the kingdom will be thrown out into the darkness; there they will wail and grind their teeth.”

^{9:29} ¹³Then Jesus said to the captain, ^{15:28} ^{Jn 4:50} “Go home now. As you believed, so let it be.” And at that moment his servant was healed.

¹⁴Jesus went to Peter’s house and found Peter’s mother-in-law in bed with fever. ^{Mk 9:27} ¹⁵He took her by the hand and the fever left her; she got up and began to wait on him. ^{Acts 3:7}

¹⁶Towards evening they brought to Jesus many possessed by evil spirits, and with a word he drove out the spirits. He also healed all who were sick. ¹⁷In doing this he fulfilled what was said by the prophet Isaiah: *He bore our infirmities and took on himself our diseases.* ^{Is 53:4} ^{Jn 1:29}

¹⁸When he saw the crowd press

around him, Jesus gave orders to cross to the other shore. ^{Mk 4:35} ¹⁹A teacher of the Law approached him and said, “Master, I will follow you wherever you go.” ²⁰Jesus said to him, “Foxes have holes and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.”

²¹Another disciple said to him, ^{2Cor 8:9} ^{1 K 19:20} “Lord, let me go and bury my father first.” ²²But Jesus answered him, “Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead.”

Jesus calms the storm

(*Mk 4:35; Lk 8:22*)

²³Jesus got into the boat and his disciples followed him. ²⁴Without warning a fierce storm hit the lake, with waves sweeping the boat. But Jesus was asleep.

²⁵They woke him and cried, “Lord save us! We are lost!” ²⁶But Jesus answered, “Why are you so afraid, you of little faith?” Then he stood up and ordered the wind and sea; and it became completely calm. ^{6:30} ^{8:10}

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

The demoniacs and the pigs

(*Mk 5:1; Lk 8:26*)

²⁸When Jesus reached Gadara on the other side, he was met by two demoniacs who came out from the tombs. They were so fierce that no one dared to pass that way. ²⁹Suddenly they shouted, “What do you want with us, you, Son of God? Have you come to torture us before the time?” ^{Lk 4:34} ^{Acts 16:17}

³⁰At some distance away there was

those who belong, or: those who side with, are associated with the Kingdom. Because all of Jewish life was aimed at inheriting the kingdom promised to them.

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

Jesus does not belittle the practices, but it is

faith that he *admires* and praises; see Matthew 9:2; 9:22; 9:28.

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

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

a large herd of pigs feeding. ³¹ So the demons begged him, “If you drive us out, send us into that herd of pigs.” ³² Jesus ordered them, “Go.” So they left and went into the pigs. The whole herd rushed down the cliff into the lake and drowned.

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

Jesus cures a paralytic

(Mk 2:1; Lk 5:17)

9 ¹ Jesus got back into the boat, crossed the lake again, and came to his hometown. ² Here they brought a paralyzed man to him, lying on a bed. Jesus saw their faith and said to the paralytic, “Courage, my son! Your sins are forgiven.” ³ Then some teachers of the Law said to themselves, “This man insults God.” ⁴ Jesus was aware of what they were thinking, and said, “Why have you such evil thoughts? ⁵ Which is easier to say: ‘Your sins are forgiven’ or ‘Stand up and walk’? ⁶ You must know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.” He then said to the paralyzed man, “Stand up! Take your stretcher and go home.” ⁷ The man got up, and went home.

8:6
Acts
9:33

Lk
7:48

Jn
10:33

Dn
7:10
Jn
5:27

Acts
9:33

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

Jesus calls Matthew

(Mk 2:13; Lk 5:27)

⁹ As Jesus moved on from there, he saw a man named Matthew at his seat in the custom-house, and he said to him, “Follow me.” And Matthew got up and followed him. ¹⁰ Now it happened, while Jesus was at table in Matthew’s house, many tax collectors and other sinners joined Jesus and his disciples. ¹¹ When the Pharisees saw this they said to his disciples, “Why is it that your master eats with those sinners and tax collectors?”

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

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

1Tim
1:15

12:7
Hos
6:6

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

11:18
Lk
18:12

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

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

Rom
7:6
2Cor
5:17

- **9.1** See commentary on Mk 2:1; Lk 5:17.

They praised God for giving such power to human beings (v. 8). This formula is rather clumsy. The crowd is astonished to see how God’s saving power is manifest among people, and through a man, Jesus. Matthew has no wish to separate the Church from Christ: every Christian community received the gifts of God for healing and reconciliation. It is known that the ministers of the Church have special authority to pardon, but the grace of God also flows in many other very different channels. (1 Cor 5:3-5; 2

Cor 2:5-11). When we establish relations of mercy and trust, and accept fraternal correction humbly, when there is mutual forgiveness between spouses, Christ is the one who forgives and pardons, and what is forgiven among us on earth, is forgiven in heaven (Mt 18:18).

- 9. See commentary on Mark 2:13.
- 18. See commentary on Mark 5:21. *She touched the edge of his cloak* (v. 20). As a good Jew, Jesus had fringes on his cloak (Num 15:38; Mt 23:5).

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

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

8:3
Mk
6:5
8:23
Lk
13:13

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

Lev
15:25

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

Acts
19:12

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

Acts
3:16

Jn
11:11

Mk
1:34

• ²⁷ As Jesus moved on from there,

20:29

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

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

20:34
8:13
5:28

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

Mk
7:36

12:22

Mk
7:32
9:17
Lk
11:14
Mk
2:12

• ³⁵ Jesus went around all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom, and he cured every

4:23

• 27. *Two blind men followed him shouting.* In what manner, if they were blind? Stumbling and being carried by others perhaps. When you sin, shout to the Lord and keep on looking for Christ.

• 35. With this paragraph that briefly summarizes the ministry of Jesus in Galilee, Matthew intends to show that indeed the kingdom of God is there: evil has been given a fatal blow.

He was moved with pity, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. See Num 27:17; Ezk 34:5; Zec 10:3; Jn 4:35; Mk 6:34; and Lk 10:2.

HEALINGS

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

Jesus ought to heal sick persons and, even in our days, the Christian community should give signs of what they preach. They must cure today’s world of its sicknesses. The gifts of healing are not limited to healing bodily ills and

the devil is responsible for more than individual maladies.

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

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

Of course, each Christian community prays to God and the Spirit brings forth the charisms and ministers and pastors that are needed. Here Jesus asks us to pray for workers in the mission field: they are and always will be too few, especially those who evangelize and build the Church among the poor.

14:14 sickness and disease. ³⁶When he
 15:32 saw the crowds he was moved with pity,
 1K
 22:17 for they were harassed and helpless
 Lk like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷Then
 10:2 he said to his disciples, "The harvest is
 abundant but the workers are only few.
 Jn ³⁸Ask the master of the harvest to send
 4:35 workers to gather his harvest."

The twelve apostles

(Mk 3:13; Lk 6:12)

Mk **10** ¹Then he called his twelve dis-
 6:7 ciples to him and gave them au-
 Lk 9:1 thority over the unclean spirits to drive
 9:35 them out and to heal every disease and
 Mk sickness.
 1:34

Jn ²These are the names of the twelve
 1:35, apostles: first Simon, called Peter, and
 40, his brother Andrew; ³James, the son of
 43 Zebedee, and his brother John; Philip
 Acts 1:13 and Bartholomew, Thomas and Mat-
 thew, the tax collector; James, the son
 26:25 of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; ⁴Simon,
 27:3 the Canaanite, and Judas Iscariot, the
 Jn man who would betray him.
 6:64

Jesus sends out the first missionaries

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

⁵Jesus sent these twelve on mis- Lk
 sion with the instruction: "Do not visit 9:53
 Jn
 4:9 pagan territory and do not enter a Sa-
 Acts maritan town. ⁶Go instead to the lost
 8:5 sheep of the people of Israel.

⁷Go and proclaim this message: The Jer
 kingdom of heaven is near. ⁸Heal the 50:6
 4:17 sick, bring the dead back to life,
 Lk cleanse the lepers, and drive out de-
 10:9 mons. You received this as a gift, so
 Is 55:1 give it as a gift. ⁹Do not carry any gold,
 Acts silver or copper in your purses. ¹⁰Do
 8:20 not carry a traveler's bag, or an extra
 Lk shirt, or sandals, or walking-stick:
 10:4 workers deserve their living.
 Num 18:31
 1Cor 9:14

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

¹²As you enter the house, wish it
 peace. ¹³If the people in the house de-
 serve it, your peace will be on them; if
 they do not deserve it, your blessing
 will come back to you.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Apostles means "sent" and "mission" also

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

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

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

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

Whoever welcomes you (v. 40). To reject the

Lk 14 And if you are not welcomed and
10:10 your words are not listened to, leave
Acts 13:51 that house or that town and shake the
18:6 dust off your feet. 15 I assure you, it will
11:24 go easier for the people of Sodom and
Gen 19 Gomorrah on the day of judgment than
Lk 10:12 it will for the people of that town.

2P
2:6
Jud 7
You will be persecuted
(Lk 12:11; Mk 13:9; 8:38)

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

• 19 But when you are arrested, do
not worry about what you are to say
and how you are to say it; when the
hour comes, you will be given what you
are to say. 20 For it is not you who will
speak; but it will be the Spirit of your
Father in you.

21 Brother will hand over brother to
death, and a father his child; children
will turn against parents and have them
put to death. 22 Everyone will hate you
because of me, but whoever stands
firm to the end will be saved.

• 23 When they persecute you in one
town, flee to the next. For sure, you will
not have gone through all the towns of
Israel before the Son of Man comes.

24 A student is not above his teacher,
or a slave above his master. 25 A stu

messengers is to ignore the call of the Father and
to lose the greatest opportunity of one's life.

• 16. THE MARTYRS

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

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

Maybe we must recognize that martyrdom is a
grace and is not given to everyone. Many would
be ready to give their life for Christ, but con-
fronted with situations of violence or corruption,
they do not see the necessity to expose a scandal

and so submit in order to avoid the worst.
Others, on the contrary, understand that God is
asking them to witness (18) to the Good News
that is opposite to what is imposed. In so doing
they face the repression by which Society de-
fends itself. Revelation affirms that the murder of
witnesses advances Salvation History.

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

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

Do not worry. The witnesses of Jesus do not
work on their own, and the more they are
identified with Jesus in persecution and in
prison, the more they are assisted by the Spirit.
By worrying while preparing their legal case,
they would hinder the freedom of the Spirit and
also lose the peace that the Spirit grants the
persecuted.

• 23. *You will not have gone through....*
Possibly this sentence would have been better
placed in the first part of the speech, which is
about the mission in Galilee. But it may refer also
to Christians of Jewish origins who were perse

Ex
4:10
Jn
15:26
Acts
4:8

Mi
7:6

24:9,
13

16:28
24:27
25:31
26:64
Mk
13:26

Lk
6:40
Jn
13:16
15:20
12:24

dent should be glad to become like his teacher, and the slave like his master. If the head of the family has been called Beelzebul, how much more the members of the family! So, do not be afraid of them.

Mk 4:22
Lk 8:17
26 There is nothing covered that will not be uncovered, and nothing hidden that will not be made known. 27 What I am telling you in the dark, you must speak in the light. What you hear in private, proclaim from the housetops.

1P 3:14
Rev 2:10
28 Do not be afraid of those who kill the body, but have no power to kill the soul. Rather be afraid of him who can destroy both body and soul in hell.

Jas 4:12
1S 14:45
Acts 27:34
6:26
12:12
29 For only a few cents you can buy two sparrows, yet not one sparrow falls to the ground without your Father's consent. 30 As for you, every hair of your head has been counted. 31 So do not be afraid: you are worth much more than many sparrows.

Lk 9:26
2Tim 2:12
Rev 3:5
2Tim 2:12
32 Whoever acknowledges me before others I will acknowledge before my Father in heaven. 33 Whoever rejects me before others I will reject before my Father in heaven.

Lk 12:51
34 Do not think that I have come to establish peace on earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.

Lk 2:34
22:36
Mic 7:6
35 For I have come to set a man against his father and daughter against her mother; a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. 36 Each one will have as enemies those of one's own family.

Dt 33:9
Lk 14:26
16:24
37 Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me. And whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. 38 And whoever does not take up his cross and come after me is not worthy of me.

Lk 17:33
Jn 12:25
39 One who wants to benefit from his life will lose it; one who loses his life for my sake will find it.

40 Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes him who sent me. 41 The one who welcomes a prophet as a prophet will receive the reward of a prophet; the one who welcomes a just man because he is a just man will receive the reward of a just man. 42 And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones, because he is a disciple of mine, I assure you, he will not go unrewarded."

cuted by the Pharisees at the time Matthew wrote his Gospel.

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

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

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

- 32. *Whoever acknowledges me.* After stressing the sovereign power of his Father, Jesus puts himself on the same level: He will decide our eternal fate. Jesus refers not only to

recognizing him in the ultimate sense, that is, by not denying our Christian faith before others; his words also convey a day-by-day demand. We must not be ashamed to act or talk as people of faith, to go public about our Christian convictions when necessary.

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

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

The Gospel moves us to make decisions with greater freedom, disregarding the criticism of those close to us whenever we are convinced that they cannot understand the Gospel values which motivate us. Take, for example, a pregnant girl resisting her parents' advice to obtain

Jesus and John the Baptist*(Lk 7:18; 16:16; 10:13)*

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

⁴Jesus answered them, “Go back and report to John what you hear and see: ⁵the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are made clean, the deaf hear, the dead are brought back to life and good news is reaching the poor. ⁶And how fortunate is the one who does not take offense at me.”

⁷As the messengers left, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John, “When you went out to the desert, what did you expect to see? A reed swept by the wind? ⁸What did you go out to see?

Is
26:19
42:18

13:57
26:31
Jn
6:61

14:5
21:26
Lk
1:76

an abortion. Christians have been persecuted in many countries for teaching that divine law is above parental authority, which was considered the supreme authority. Thus it happened with the ancient Romans and, more recently, in Korea and China.

Moreover, the devil stirs up persecutions against every person who becomes converted, in order to scare her and make her turn away.

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

- **11.1** See commentary on Lk 7:18.

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

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

Good news is reaching the poor... (v. 5). Jesus' message includes a preferential love of

A man dressed in fine clothes? People who wear fine clothes live in palaces.

⁹What did you actually go out to see? A prophet? Yes, indeed, and even more than a prophet. ¹⁰He is the man of whom Scripture says: *I send my messenger ahead of you to prepare the way before you.*

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

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

¹⁶Now, to what can I compare the people of this day? They are like children sitting in the marketplace, about whom their companions complain:

Dt
18:15
Lk
1:76
Ex
23:20
Mal
3:1
Jn
1:15
6:14

Lk
16:16

Mal
3:23
Mk
9:11
Lk
1:17
Jn
1:21
Rev
2:7

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

EVANGELIZATION OF THE POOR AS A PRIORITY

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

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

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

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

V. 12. This sentence could also be translated: “The kingdom of heaven is advancing forcefully.” The kingdom of God is the moving force that makes history progress, taking advantage of both gentle and violent changes in human life.

Lk 1:15 ¹⁷ ‘We played the flute for you but you would not dance. We sang a funeral-song but you would not cry!’

3:4 ¹⁸ For John came fasting and people
9:14 said: ‘He is possessed.’ ¹⁹ Then the Son
9:11 of Man came, he ate and drank, and
Lk 15:1 people said: ‘Look at this man! A glut-
19:17 ton and drunkard, a friend of tax collec-
tors and sinners!’ Yet the outcome will
prove Wisdom to be right.”

13:58 • ²⁰ Then Jesus began to denounce
Jn 15:24 the cities in which he had performed
most of his miracles, because the
people there did not change their ways,
Is 23:1 ²¹ “Alas for you Chorazin and Bethsai-
Ezk 26:28 da! If the miracles worked in you had
Jl 3:4 taken place in Tyre and Sidon, the peo-
Am 1:9 ple there would have repented long ago
Zec 9:2 in sackcloth and ashes. ²² But I assure
Es 4:1 you, for Tyre and Sidon it will be more
Is 14:13 bearable on the day of judgment than
for you. ²³ And you, Capernaum, will
you be lifted up to heaven? You will be
thrown down to the place of the dead!
For if the miracles which were per-
formed in you had taken place in So-
dom, it would still be there today! ²⁴ But
I tell you, it will be more bearable for

Gen 19
2P
2:6

Sodom on the day of judgment than for you.”

Take my yoke upon you
(Lk 10:21)

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

Jn 7:48
1Cor 1:17
1:26

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

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

²⁸ Come to me, all you who work
hard and who carry heavy burdens and
I will refresh you. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon
you and learn from me for I am gentle
and humble of heart; and you will find
rest. ³⁰ For my yoke is good and my
burden is light.”

Jer 31:25
Hos 10:11

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

12 • ¹ It happened that Jesus walked
through the wheat fields on a

Jer 6:16
Pro 3:17
1Jn 5:3

The believers are called to participate actively in this constant transformation. Death and resurrection are at work among us and all over the world.

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

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

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

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

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

Come to me: I will not relieve you of your load but by placing my yoke on you, I give you the means of carrying the load.

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

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

• **12.1** This chapter records the conflicts of Jesus with the Pharisees regarding the Sabbath. Why does the gospel make so much of these conflicts? Perhaps because at the time of Jesus the heavy load of religious obligations was a

Sabbath. His disciples were hungry, and began to pick some heads of wheat and crush them to eat the grain. ²When the Pharisees noticed this, they said to Jesus, “Look at your disciples; they are doing what is prohibited on the Sabbath!”

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

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

⁸Besides the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.”

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

¹¹But he said to them, “What if one of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath? Will you not take hold of your sheep and lift it out? ¹²But a human person is much more valuable than a sheep! It is therefore permitted to do good on the Sabbath.” ¹³Then Jesus said to the man, “Stretch out your

arm.” He stretched it out and it was completely restored, as sound as the other one.

¹⁴Then the Pharisees went out and made plans to get rid of him. ¹⁵As Jesus was aware of the plot, he went away from that place. Many people followed him and he cured all who were sick. ¹⁶Then he gave them strict orders not to make him known.

¹⁷In this way Isaiah’s prophecy was fulfilled:

“Here is my servant whom I have chosen, the one I love, and with whom I am pleased. I will put my Spirit upon him and he will announce my judgment to the nations.

“He will not argue or shout, nor will his voice be heard in the streets. ²⁰The bruised reed he will not crush, nor snuff out the smoldering wick. He will persist until justice is made victorious ²¹and in him all the nations will put their hope.”

The unforgivable sin

(Mk 3:22; Lk 11:15)

• ²²Then some people brought to him a possessed man who was blind and who could not talk. Jesus healed the man, who was then able to speak and see. ²³All in the crowd were amazed and wondered, “Could he be the Son of David?” ²⁴When the Pharisees heard this, they said, “It is by Beelzebub, prince of the devils, that this man drives out devils.”

²⁵Jesus knew their thinking, so he

formidable obstacle for those searching for God. It may have been also because the Christians lost no time making new laws to which they gave an exaggerated importance. If Jesus deliberately violated the most sacred of the laws given by God to Moses, what about our ecclesiastical laws not guaranteed by the Word of God? In the name of man-made laws, adapted to a context that is not ours, Christian communities have at times been paralyzed and we let millions of people look for churches where they have the communities and pastors they have been deprived of.

- 22. See commentary on Mark 3:22. *Your own people* (v. 27). Jesus refers here to

the Jewish exorcists who cast out demons with prayers and formularies, as told in Acts 19:13.

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

Either in this age or in the age to come (v. 32). This is a Jewish idiom meaning that this sin cannot be forgiven, by God or people. How can God forgive one who puts himself out of reach of the forgiving God?

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

7:23
9:13

27:1
Mk
11:18
Jn
5:16

8:4
9:30
Mk
3:12
5:43
7:36

Is
42:1

Dt
23:25
Ex
20:10
Dt
5:14

1S
21:2
Lev
24:5

Num
28:9

Hos
6:6
12:41
Lk
11:30

Jn
5:16

Lk
14:3

6:26
10:31
Lk
12:7

Lk
13:16
Jn
5:9

said to them, "Every kingdom that is divided by civil war will fall apart, and every dynasty that is divided cannot last. ²⁶So if Satan drives out Satan, he is divided: how then can his reign stand? ²⁷And if it is by Beelzebul that I drive out devils, by whom do your own people drive them out? They themselves will give you the answer.

²⁸But if it is by the Spirit of God that I drive out devils, then the kingdom of God has already come upon you.

²⁹How can anyone break into the strong man's house and make off with his belongings, unless he first ties him up? Only then can he plunder his house.

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

³¹And so I tell you this: people can be forgiven any sin and any evil thing they say against God, but whoever says evil words against the Spirit will not be forgiven. ³²The one who speaks against the Son of Man, will be forgiven;

but the one who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.

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

produces good things from his good store, and an evil person produces evil from his evil store.

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

Jesus criticizes his own generation
(Mk 8:11; Lk 11:16)

• ³⁸Then some teachers of the Law and some Pharisees spoke up, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from you." ³⁹Jesus answered them, "An evil and unfaithful people want a sign, but no sign will be given them except the sign of the prophet Jonah. ⁴⁰In the same way that Jonah spent three days and three nights in the belly of the monster fish, so will the Son of Man spend three days and three nights in the depths of the earth.

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

⁴³When an evil spirit goes out of a person, it wanders over arid wastelands

and seeks to rest, but it finds no place. So it says, "I will go back to my home, and I will find it empty." Then it goes and brings seven other evil spirits, and they enter and dwell there, and the last state is worse than the first. For this reason I tell you, every sin and every evil thing will be forgiven people, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven.

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

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

An evil and unfaithful people. Gospel says in fact: "evil and adulterous". This expression in the Bible means the unfaithful believer who, without denying God in words, keeps other gods to himself.

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

The Niniivites: see Jonah 3:5.
The Queen of the South: 1 Kings 10.
The sign of Jonah is the resurrection of Jesus. The similarity seen in the three days that Jonah was in the belly of the fish and the time Jesus spent in the tomb is somewhat forced.

Acts 10:38

Is 49:25
Jn 12:31

Mk 9:40
Lk 9:50

1Tim 1:13
Lk 12:10

3:7
23:33
Lk 3:7

15:18
Mk 7:21

Jas 3:1

Jon 2:1

1K 10:1

looking for a place to rest but it cannot find one. ⁴⁴Then it says to itself: 'I will go back to my house which I had to leave.' So it goes back and finds the house empty, clean, and in order. ⁴⁵Off it goes again to bring back with it, this time, seven spirits, more evil than itself. ^{Mk 5:9} ^{Lk 8:2} ^{2P 2:20} They move in and settle there, so that this person is finally in a worse state than he was at the beginning. This is what will happen to this evil generation."

^{Jn 2:12} ^{Acts 1:14} • ⁴⁶While Jesus was still talking to the people, his mother and his brothers wanted to speak to him and they waited outside. ⁴⁷So someone said to him, "Your mother and your brothers are just outside; they want to speak with you."

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

The parable of the sower

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

^{Lk 5:1} **13** • ¹That same day Jesus left the house and sat down by the

lakeside. ²As many people gathered around him, he got in a boat. There he sat while the whole crowd stood on the shore, ³and he spoke to them in parables about many things.

⁴Jesus said, "The sower went out to sow and, as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path and the birds came and ate them up. ⁵Other seeds fell on rocky ground where there was little soil, and the seeds sprouted quickly because the soil was not deep. ⁶But as soon the sun rose the plants were scorched and withered because they had no roots. ⁷Again other seeds fell among thistles; and the thistles grew and choked the plants. ⁸Still other seeds fell on good soil and produced a crop; some produced a hundredfold, others sixty and others thirty. ⁹If you have ears, then hear!"

• ¹⁰Then his disciples came to him with the question, "Why do you speak to them in parables?"

¹¹Jesus answered, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but not to these people. ¹²For the one who has, will be given more and he will have in abundance. But the one who does not have

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

For this parable of the Sower which gives the general direction of this chapter, see the commentary of Mk 4:1 and Lk 8:4.

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

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

For the one who has will be given more. Here

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

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

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

For those listening to Jesus, the reign of God signified first of all a liberation of his oppressed

11:15
13:43

Mk 4:23
Lk 14:35
Rev 2:7

1Cor 4:1
Eph 3:3
6:19
Col 2:2
4:3
Mk 4:25
Lk 8:18
19:26

will be deprived of even what he has.
¹³That is why I speak to them in parables, because they look and do not see; they hear, but they do not listen or understand.

^{Is} ^{6:9} ^{Jn} ^{12:40} ^{Acts} ^{28:26} ¹⁴In them the words of the prophet Isaiah are fulfilled: *Much as you hear, you do not understand; much as you see, you do not perceive.*

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

^{Lk} ^{10:23} ¹⁶But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears, because they hear.

^{Eph} ^{3:5} ^{1P} ^{1:12} ¹⁷For I tell you that many prophets and upright people would have longed to see the things you see, but they did not, and to hear the things you hear, but they did not hear it.

• ¹⁸Now listen to the parable of the sower.

¹⁹When a person hears the message of the Kingdom but without taking it to

himself, the devil comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed that fell along the footpath.

²⁰The seed that fell on rocky ground stands for the one who hears the word and accepts it at once with joy. ²¹But such a person has no roots. No sooner is he harassed or persecuted because of the word, than he gives up.

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

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

The parable of the weeds

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

²⁶When the plants sprouted and pro-

has means produce, bear as does the tree that “has” fruit. It will be given to those who are fruitful.

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

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

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

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

Next come those who do not dare to face contradiction and are easily discouraged and cowed: these are *soon burnt*. Yet to hope means to be firm despite any obstacle. If God

puts us on a road in life, this road will lead somewhere. Hope is courage and endurance.

Next are those *that fell among the thistles*. They are believers, but the fruits to be harvested along the difficult path seem not to satisfy them. They want to “save their lives,” to serve God and Money at the same time. They are dragged down by their aim of winning material success, and hope in the kingdom of God becomes but a flimsy desire for them.

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

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

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

Jesus himself commented on this parable: see v. 36.

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

²⁸He answered them: ‘This is the work of an enemy.’ They asked him: ‘Do you want us to go and pull up the weeds?’ ²⁹He told them: ‘No, when you pull up the weeds, you might uproot the wheat with them. ³⁰Let them just grow together until harvest; and at harvest time I will say to the workers: Pull up the weeds first, tie them in bundles and burn them; then gather the wheat into my barn.’

The mustard seed and the yeast

(Mk 4:30; Lk 13:18)

• ³¹ Jesus put another parable before them, “The kingdom of heaven is like a

mustard seed, that a man took and sowed in his field.

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

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

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

• ³⁶ Then he sent the crowds away and went into the house. And his dis

Jn
15:6

17:20
Lk
17:6
Ezk
17:23
31:6
Dn
4:12

1Cor
5:6
Gal
5:9

Ps
78:2

15:15
Mk
4:10

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

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

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

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

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

Let them be yeast for the dough, not small separate and finer dough. The yeast transforms human history, not by bringing all people into the Church, but by infusing into human activity the spirit that gives life to humankind.

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

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

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

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

• 36. *The field is the world.* This parable does not refer to what happens within each of us, or only in the Church, as described in *the net* (13:47). Rather it teaches that the kingdom of God exists and grows in the world, in all dimensions of the secular world. Sacred history is more than an ancient history in the land of Jesus; it is the entire human story of which the risen Christ is Lord.

So will it be at the end of time. Jesus speaks

ciples came to him saying, “Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field.”

³⁷ Jesus answered them, “The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man.

³⁸ The field is the world; the good seed are the people of the Kingdom; the weeds are those who follow the evil one. ³⁹ The enemy who sows them is the devil; the harvest is the end of time and the workers are the angels.

Jn
8:44
1Jn
3:10

3:10
7:19
Jn
15:6
Rev
14:15

Zep
1:3

⁴⁰ Just as the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so will it be at the end of time. ⁴¹ The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom all that is scandalous and all

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

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

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

Our quick reply is that Jesus has spoken as the prophets spoke. To speak of the good and the wicked was a simple way, suitable to the mentality of people less developed than ourselves, to show that each one of us, in each of our acts, takes a step in one of two opposed directions. For centuries women and men have felt themselves interpreted by this way of speaking: it is still effective and pedagogic for us on many occasions. It is very important to understand that Jesus is not duped by images. For the majority of

who do evil. ⁴² And these will be thrown in the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ⁴³ Then the just will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. If you have ears, then hear.

Dn
3:6
Rev
21:8
8:12
22:13
24:51
25:30
Dn
12:3

The treasure, the pearl and the net

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

Pro
2:4
4:7

⁴⁵ Again the kingdom of heaven is like a trader who is looking for fine

us, the separation is not made, even if after a conversion or two, until we have taken decisive steps.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

pearls. ⁴⁶Once he has found a pearl of exceptional quality, he goes away, sells everything he has and buys it.

• ⁴⁷Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a big fishing net let down into the sea, in which every kind of fish has been caught. ⁴⁸When the net is full, it is dragged ashore. Then they sit down and gather the good fish in buckets, but throw the worthless ones away. ⁴⁹That is how it will be at the end of time; the angels will go out to separate the wicked from the just ⁵⁰and throw them into the blazing furnace, where they will weep and gnash their teeth.”

Dn
3:6
Mt
13:42

⁵¹Jesus asked, “Have you under-

stood all these things?” “Yes,” they answered. ⁵²So he said to them, “You will see that every teacher of the Law who becomes a disciple of the Kingdom is like a householder who can produce from his store things both new and old.”

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

Jn
7:15

Lk
3:23
Jn
6:42

EVIL IN THE CHURCH

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

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

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

HELL

They will throw them into the blazing furnace. This affirmation which we have already seen (13:30) only confirms what the whole Bible says: we shall be judged and the plenitude of life offered to those who will be “in” God will have as counterpart the despairing lot of those who have refused life.

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

The affirmation of purgatory shocks those who have not experienced divine holiness which is never without a burning of everything that belongs to us; have they ever really pondered what “becoming God in God” exacts of us? Hell does not hurt less. We know, of course, that fire is only a figure and we should not interpret it as a vengeance of God: it is the “damned” who are unable to renounce the harrowing solitude in which they have enclosed themselves; it is at the same time their enjoyment and their torture. However, we no longer accept the idea of pain

that has no end and we readily support this with philosophic argument.

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

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

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

The mystery remains. If we understood to what God invites us – and for an eternity in its truest sense, and that life is unique and that here below we shall give our response and finally give birth to our eternity – are there words too strong for someone who has lost everything?

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

get all this?"⁵⁷ And so they took offense at him.

^{Jn 4:44} Jesus said to them, "The only place where prophets are not welcome is their hometown and in their own family."⁵⁸ And he did not perform many miracles there because of their lack of faith.

John the Baptist beheaded

(Mk 6:14; Lk 9:7)

^{16:14} **14** • ¹At that time the news about Jesus reached King Herod. ²And he said to his servants, "This man is John the Baptist. John has risen from the dead, and that is why miraculous powers are at work in him."

³Herod had, in fact, ordered that John be arrested, bound in chains and put in prison because of Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip. ⁴For John had said to him, "It is not right for you to have her as wife."⁵ Herod wanted to kill him but he did not dare, because he feared the people who regarded John as a prophet.

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

⁹The king was very displeased, but because he had made this promise under oath in the presence of the guests, he ordered it to be given her. ¹⁰So he had John beheaded in prison ¹¹and his

head brought on a dish and given to the girl. The girl then took it to her mother.

¹²Then John's disciples came to take his body and bury it. And they went to bring the news to Jesus.

First miracle of the loaves

(Mk 6:32; Jn 6)

• ¹³On hearing this, Jesus set out secretly by boat for a secluded place. But the people heard of it, and they followed him on foot from their towns.

¹⁴When Jesus went ashore, he saw the crowd gathered there and he had compassion on them. And he healed their sick.

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

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

¹⁹Then he made everyone sit down on the grass. He took the five loaves and the two fishes, raised his eyes to heaven, pronounced the blessing, broke the loaves and handed them to the disciples to distribute to the people.

²⁰And they all ate, and everyone had enough; then the disciples gathered up the leftovers, filling twelve baskets. ²¹About five thousand men had eaten there besides women and children.

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

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

Do not forget that bread was by far the main

food and *to eat bread* signified to have a meal (15:2).

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

• 13. See commentary on Mk 6:32 and Jn 6.

9:36
15:32

2K
4:43-
44

Jesus walks on the water*(Mk 6:45; Jn 6:16)*

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

²³ And having sent the people away, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. At nightfall, he was there alone.

²⁴ Meanwhile, the boat was very far from land, dangerously rocked by the waves for the wind was against it.

²⁵ At daybreak, Jesus came to them walking on the lake. ²⁶ When they saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, thinking that it was a ghost. And they cried out in fear. ²⁷ But at once Jesus said to them, "Courage! Don't be afraid. It's me!" ²⁸ Peter answered, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you walking on the water."

Jn
21:78:26
Mk
4:39
16:16
26:63
27:54
Mk
14:61
Lk
22:70
Jn
1:49

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

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

³⁴ They came ashore at Gennesareth. ³⁵ The local people recognized Jesus and spread the news throughout the region. So they brought all the sick

to him, ³⁶ begging him to let them touch just the fringe of his cloak. All who touched it became perfectly well.

God's command and human tradition*(Mk 7:1)*

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

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

³ Jesus answered, "And you, why do you break God's command for the sake of your traditions? ⁴ For God commanded: *Do your duty to your father and your mother, and: whoever curses his father or his mother is to be put to death.* ⁵ But you say that anyone may say to his father or mother: 'What you could have expected from me, I have reserved for the Temple.' ⁶ In this case, according to you, a person is freed of his duty to his father and mother. And so, you have nullified the command of God for the sake of your traditions.

Ex
20:12
21:17
Eph
6:2

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

Is
29:13
Ps
78:36**Washing hands and cleanness of heart***(Mk 7:14; Lk 6:39)*

• ¹⁰ Jesus then called the people near him and said to them, "Listen and under

- 22. See commentary on Mark 6:45.

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

Command me to come to you (v. 28). Matthew is not interested in emphasizing Peter's doubt, but his faith. Peter alone dared to attempt something that seemed to be reserved for Jesus, and after joining his companions again in the boat he was, though soaked, the happiest of them all.

Man of little faith (v. 31). Once more Jesus' reproaches are addressed to his best disciples (as

in 6:30; 8:26; 16:8; 17:20) – in order to convince future disciples, like us, that much is still lacking in our faith.

- 15.1 See commentary on Mark 7:1.

They don't wash their hands. The Pharisees uphold something that is excellent and which we ourselves practice. Jesus' vision, however, goes further: all these good customs and religious practices (feasts and meditations included) easily become a smoke screen, hiding the essential from us: a constant readiness to listen to God's call, a simple trust in his mercy which alone can save us.

- 10. See commentary on Mark 7:14.

stand: ¹¹ what enters into the mouth does not make a person unclean, what defiles one is what comes out of his mouth.”

¹² After a while the disciples gathered around Jesus and said, “Do you know that the Pharisees were offended by what you said?” ¹³ Jesus answered, “Every plant which my heavenly Father has not planted shall be uprooted.

¹⁴ Pay no attention to them! They are blind leading the blind. When a blind person leads another, the two will fall into a pit.”

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

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

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

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

²² Now a Canaanite woman came from those borders and began to cry out,

“Lord, Son of David, have pity on me! My daughter is tormented by a demon.”

²³ But Jesus did not answer her, not even a word. So his disciples approached him and said, “Send her away: see how she is shouting after us.”

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

²⁵ But the woman was already kneeling before Jesus and said, “Sir, help me!” ²⁶ Jesus answered, “It is not right to take the bread from the children and throw it to the little dogs.” ²⁷ The woman replied, “It is true, sir, but even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their master’s table.” ²⁸ Then Jesus said, “Woman, how great is your faith! Let it be as you wish.” And her daughter was healed at that moment.

Second miracle of the loaves
(Mk 7:31)

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

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

For the Jewish people, the worship of God was everything and they felt very much concerned about exactly who and what things were worthy of being part of this worship. Thus they made a distinction between the clean and the unclean. Jesus shows that true purity is that of *the heart*.

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

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

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

The multiplication of loaves is the kind of miracle which most shocks our contemporaries and their absolute faith in the “laws of nature” that God himself would not have the power to surpass, or which he could not ignore without contradicting himself. Many do not openly deny the testimony of the apostles, but they avoid

23:16
Lk
6:39
Rom
2:19

Lk
16:21

8:10
8:13
9:29

1Cor
5:10
6:9
Eph
5:3
Col
3:5
1Tim
1:9
2Tim
3:2
Rev
21:8
22:15

5:1

9:27
20:30
Mk
10:47

9:36
14:14

³² Jesus called his disciples and said to them, “I am filled with compassion for these people; they have already followed me for three days and now have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them away fasting, or they may faint on the way.” ³³ His disciples said to him, “And where shall we find enough bread in this wilderness to feed such a crowd?” ³⁴ Jesus said to them, “How many loaves do you have?” They answered, “Seven, and a few small fish.”

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

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

The Pharisees ask for a sign

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

19:3

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

taking any stand and say for example: “The miracle is still more beautiful if we imagine that Jesus merely invited the people to share their individual snacks, so that finally there was enough for everyone: a miracle of solidarity!”

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

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

• **16.1** *They asked for some heavenly sign.* They want a miracle that will undoubtedly be the work of God.

No sign will be given to them. Jesus refuses

² Jesus answered, “(When evening comes, you say: ‘It will be a good day for the sky is red.’ ³ And in the morning you say: ‘Stormy weather today, for the sky in the east is red.’ If you know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, why can’t you interpret the signs of the times?) ⁴ An evil and unbelieving people want a sign, but no sign will be given them except the sign of Jonah.”

So Jesus left them and went away.

• ⁵ When the disciples went to the other side, they forgot to take bread. ⁶ It was then that Jesus said to them, “Beware and do not trust the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” ⁷ And the disciples said to one another, “He means the bread we did not bring.”

⁸ Jesus was aware of this, so he said to them, “You of little faith! Why do you speak about the bread you haven’t got? ⁹ Do you still not understand? Do you not remember the five loaves for the five thousand and how many baskets you gathered? ¹⁰ Or the seven loaves for the four thousand and how many wicker baskets you gathered?”

¹¹ How can you fail to understand that I was not talking of bread when I told you: Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees?” ¹² Then

to prove his authority by multiplying miracles. People who love truth and seek what is right will recognize the seal of God in the deeds of Jesus – and of his followers – no matter how many speak ill of them.

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

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

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

Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees. See commentary on Mark 8:11.

12:38
Jn
6:30
1Cor
1:22
Mt
12:39
Lk
11:29

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

Peter's faith; Jesus' promises

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

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

¹⁵ Jesus asked them, "But you, who

do you say I am?" ¹⁶ Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." ¹⁷ Jesus replied, "It is well for you, Simon Barjona, for it is not flesh or blood that has revealed this to you but my Father in heaven.

¹⁸ And now I say to you: You are Peter (or *Rock*) and on this rock I will build my Church; and never will the powers of death overcome it.

¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven: whatever you bind on

18:18
Rev
3:7

17:9
Mk
9:9

Very often the Gospel associates these two names. We have already seen that the Sadducees were the party of the chief priests. They were by family right, responsible for the national and religious life of the people of God. The Pharisees for their part were a party devoted to defending the law of God. They were enemies of the Sadducees. Let us not say: "They were perverse people." Opposition to Jesus came quite naturally from the civil and religious authorities of his people. How could God visit his people and be welcomed by the majority of its leaders, if they feel and act as owners of their titles, of their authority, of their own merits?

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

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

Faith in the Son of God, which Peter, among the apostles is the first to proclaim, really comes from God. This faith is not a human opinion, or a sentimental attachment. It does not come from *flesh and blood*, an expression that for the Jews meant what is purely human, what a human being does and understands by his own capacity. The words with which Jesus greets Peter, *happy are you, Simon*, are true for all the believers. For it is *the Father* who has chosen us and has brought us to Christ: see John 6:37; 6:44.

Next the primacy of Peter is emphasized. His name was Simon, but Jesus gave him this surname of Rock, foreseeing that he would be for his Church a foundation rock (Jn 1:40). This change of his name attests that a mission is given to him as happened to Abraham and Jacob (Gen 17:5 and 32:19). Other texts attest to the leadership and faith of Peter: Mt 10:2; 14:28; 17:25; Lk 5:8-10; 22:32; Jn 6:68; 21:15-19.

Is what Jesus tells Peter true also of his successors? No one can deny that even in the Old Testament God wanted his people to have a visible head. Jerusalem and the nation had as their center the Temple and the kings, sons of

David. When God chose David, the first king of Israel, he promised him that his sons would rule the Kingdom of God forever: this promise was fulfilled in Christ. Now Jesus chooses Peter to be forever the visible foundation of the building. In the future his successors will be for the Church, what Peter was in the early Church.

For the Jews, *to bind and to unbind* (v. 19) meant to state what is forbidden and what is allowed. So Peter and his successors will have the last word about what is, or is not, the faith of the Church. The history of the primitive Church shows that already in the first centuries the local churches were conscious of the supreme authority of the bishop of Rome, successor of Peter. His role could not but develop in the course of history, which was all the more necessary because of the growing tensions between Christians, and diverse continents and cultures endlessly divided in their religious expressions. In spite of the fact that as humans Peter's successors can commit mistakes, Christ does not ignore what they ultimately decide on: *whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven*.

The recognition of this mission of Peter's successor, however, does not mean that his word drowns all other voices in a silent Church, or that his authority justifies a structure that might crush life.

This text does not contradict other statements of the Gospel that are equally important, where the basis of the Church is a "college" of apostles, where nothing is done without dialogue. Peter is the "door keeper" (Mk 13:34) but he is neither "master" nor "Father" (Mt 23:9).

His authority is only genuine in a Church where all have the right to express themselves, where the leaders are not only imposed, but also accepted.

The powers of death (v. 18). The text says "the gates of Hades." "Gates" here signifies "Power"; as for Hades, it designates the netherworld, the world of the dead and demonic powers. Even if deathly strength tried to crush the Church, or sow there the seed of corruption it would not be prevented from accomplishing its mission of salvation. A part of Revelation (Rev 12-17) depicts such a confrontation.

The fact that Peter is the foundation of the Church does not contradict other verses that say that its basis is the Twelve Apostles (Eph 2:20

earth shall be bound in heaven, and what you unbind on earth shall be unbound in heaven.”

²⁰ Then he ordered his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Christ.

Jesus predicts his death

(Mk 8:31; Lk 9:22; 12:9; 14:27)

^{17:12} ²¹ From that day Jesus began to make it clear to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem; he would suffer many things from the Jewish authorities, the chief priests and the teachers of the Law. He would be killed and be raised on the third day.

²² Then Peter took him aside and began to reproach him, “Never, Lord! No, this must never happen to you.” ²³ But Jesus turned to him and said, “Get behind me, Satan! You are an obstacle in my path. You are thinking not as God does, but as people do.”

^{10:38} ²⁴ Then Jesus said to his disciples, “If you want to follow me, deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me. ²⁵ For whoever chooses to save his life will lose it, but the one who loses his life for my sake will find it. ²⁶ What will one gain by winning the whole world if he destroys himself? There is nothing you can give to recover your own self.

^{25:31} ²⁷ Know that the Son of Man will come in the Glory of his Father with the holy angels, and he will reward each one according to his deeds. ²⁸ Truly, I tell you, there are some here who will not die before they see the Son of Man coming as king.”

and Rev 21:14). They also receive the power to bind or loose in John 20:21, but in this case it refers clearly to the forgiveness of sins.

Upon reading the narratives in Mk 8:27 and Lk 9:18, some questions regarding Peter’s faith arise: see commentary on Lk 9:18.

Jesus, Rock and Foundation: Mk 12:10; 1 Cor 3:11; 1 P 2:6.

- 21. See commentary on Mark 8:31.

Get behind me, Satan... (v. 23). When Peter stands in front of Jesus to block the way to the cross, Jesus recognizes in his words the same spirit that tempted him in the desert. Jesus calls him Satan, meaning tempter. Let Peter get

The transfiguration of Jesus

(Mk 9:2; Lk 9:28)

17 ¹ Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain where they were alone.

² Jesus’ appearance was changed before them: his face shone like the sun and his clothes became bright as light.

³ Just then Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Jesus.

⁴ Peter spoke and said to Jesus, “Master, it is good that we are here. If you so wish, I will make three tents: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.”

⁵ Peter was still speaking when a bright cloud covered them in its shadow, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my Son, the Beloved, my Chosen One. Listen to him.”

⁶ On hearing the voice, the disciples fell to the ground, full of fear. ⁷ But Jesus came, touched them and said, “Stand up, do not be afraid.” ⁸ When they raised their eyes, they no longer saw anyone except Jesus. ⁹ And as they came down the mountain, Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone what they had just seen, until the Son of Man be raised from the dead.

¹⁰ The disciples then asked him, “Why do the teachers of the Law say that Elijah must come first?” ¹¹ And Jesus answered, “So it is: first comes Elijah to set everything as it has to be.

¹² But I tell you, Elijah has already come

behind Jesus and follow him as is proper for a disciple.

Whoever chooses to save his life will lose it. Jesus draws attention to the great option of every human life: we cannot discover God; we cannot make a success of life without sacrificing it. All the rest is idle talk. The option terrifies us in the same measure that life for us seems promising. It is also the reason why marriage and family frighten many.

He will find his life (v. 25). In 10:39 we translated this phrase: “benefit one’s life”.

- 17.1 See commentaries on Mark 9:2 and Luke 9:28.

and they did not recognize him, but treated him as they pleased. And they will also make the Son of Man suffer.”

11:14 Lk 1:17 ¹³ Then the disciples understood that Jesus was referring to John the Baptist.

Jesus heals an epileptic boy

(Mk 9:14; Lk 9:37)

• ¹⁴ When they met the people, a man approached Jesus, knelt before him and said, ¹⁵ “Sir, have pity on my son who is an epileptic and is in a wretched state. He has often fallen into the fire and at other times into the water. ¹⁶ I brought him to your disciples but they could not heal him.”

¹⁷ Jesus replied, “You, faithless and evil people! How long must I be with you? How long must I put up with you? Bring him here to me.” ¹⁸ And Jesus commanded the evil spirit to leave the boy, and the boy was immediately healed.

Lk 17:6 1Cor 13:2 ¹⁹ The disciples then gathered around Jesus and asked him privately, “Why couldn’t we drive out the spirit?”

²⁰ Jesus said to them, “Because you have little faith. I say to you: if only you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you could tell that mountain to move from here to there, and the mountain would obey. Nothing would be impos-

sible to you. ²¹ (Only prayer and fasting can drive out this kind of spirit.”)

• ²² While Jesus was in Galilee with the Twelve, he said to them, “The Son of Man will be delivered into human hands, ²³ and they will kill him. But he will rise on the third day.” The Twelve were deeply grieved. Mk 9:30
16:21
17:12
20:17

The Temple tax

• ²⁴ When they returned to Capernaum, the Temple tax collectors came to Peter and asked him, “Does your master pay the temple tax?” ²⁵ He answered, “Certainly.” Ex 30:13

Peter then entered the house, but immediately Jesus asked him, “What do you think, Simon? Who pay taxes or tributes to the kings of the earth: their sons or the other people?” ²⁶ Peter replied, “The others.” And Jesus told him, “The sons, then, are tax-free. ²⁷ But so as not to offend these people, go to the sea, throw in a hook and open the mouth of the first fish you catch. You will find a coin in it, take it and let it pay for you and for me.”

Who is the greatest? Scandals

18 • ¹ At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked him, Lk 22:24

• 14. See commentary on Mark 9:14. Verse 21 is lacking in many old texts: compare with Mk 8:28-29.

• 22. Several times Jesus announced his death: see 16:21; 20:17. Never did he present it as a misfortune that might counteract his mission. John will say that Jesus looked for it as the means for giving glory to his Father and reconciling humankind (Jn 17). Jesus speaks of himself in the third person: *the Son of Man*, because he looks at his destiny as an outsider. This is the will of his Father, and he is not concerned about himself.

• 24. All the Jews paid a tax for the maintenance of the Temple. The collectors approach Peter as owner of the house where Jesus also lives. Jesus observes the Law, but takes this opportunity to give a hint as to who he is: the collectors do not realize they are addressing “the Son.” Notice how the Lord has control over all crea-

tures even fish, and see also his intimate solidarity with Peter.

The coin mentioned in 27 was worth the Temple tax. Matthew may have had a special interest for this story because at the time he wrote Christians of Jewish origins were wondering whether they should be still paying this tax.

• **18.1** Here we have the beginning of the fourth Discourse of Matthew’s Gospel, not very consonant but centered on the life of the community. Those who say “Our Father” are not isolated. In place of the nation of Israel, Jesus offers them his Church, which is first of all community of communities.

6-11: concern for the *little ones*;
12-14: care for those who have strayed;
15-20: a fraternal community in the presence of Christ;
21-35: a community of pardon.

For the commentary on verses 1–5 see Mk 9:33.

“Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”

^{19:14} ^{Mk} ^{10:15} ^{Lk} ^{18:17} ^{Jn} ^{3:5} ^{20:26} ^{10:40} ^{Lk} ^{10:16} ^{Jn} ^{13:20} ² Then Jesus called a little child, set the child in the midst of the disciples, ³ and said, “I assure you that unless you change and become like little children, you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven. ⁴ Whoever becomes lowly like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, ⁵ and whoever receives such a child in my name receives me.

⁶ If any of you should cause one of these little ones who believe in me to stumble and fall, it would be better for you to be thrown into the depths of the sea with a great millstone around your neck.

^{Lk} ^{17:1} ⁷ Woe to the world because of so many scandals! Scandals necessarily come, but woe to the one who has brought it about.

⁸ If your hand or foot drags you into sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life without a

hand or a foot than to be thrown into eternal fire with your two hands and two feet. ⁹ And if your eye drags you into sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to be thrown into the fire of hell with your two eyes.

¹⁰ See that you do not despise any of these little ones, for I tell you: their angels in heaven continually see the face of my heavenly Father.

¹¹ (The Son of Man has come to save the lost).

• ¹² What do you think of this? If someone has a hundred sheep and one of them strays, won't he leave the ninety-nine on the hillside, and go to look for the stray one? ¹³ And I tell you: when he finally finds it, he is more pleased about it than about the ninety-nine that did not get lost. ¹⁴ It is the same with your Father in heaven: there they don't want even one of these little ones to be lost.

THE LITTLE ONES

With verse 5 we pass from the *children* to the *little ones*, that is, simple people (*such a child* refers perhaps to the lowly one). They are little, because they do not count for much in society.

Woe to the world because of so many scandals. Must we recall the real meaning of the word “scandal”? “Scandalon” in Greek is the little pebble that when unnoticed causes a fall: scandal is not something that makes noise or causes a stir in society but which leads consciences astray and causes those who seemed honest to fall.

Jesus then speaks (v. 7) of the harm caused by social pressures. Many times the little ones strive to raise their standard of living and become more self-reliant, better educated and able to earn more. Often enough, society puts obstacles in the way of anyone who does not want to play dirty and who refuses to imitate the lifestyle of selfish persons. Because of this, the *little ones* will have to give up, to accept failure, to *lose an eye* before losing the most important thing, which is to live in the sight of God.

It is better for you to enter life without a hand or a foot. Jesus stresses the incomparable value of eternal life. At times, to gain the Kingdom we will have to sacrifice even our job, our security and our life.

Woe to the world because of so many scandals (v. 7). Sometimes it is an individual who leads others to sin; at other times it is society itself with its corruption, violence and unjust social

structures. Jesus invites us to be aware of sin, personal and social: the bad structures will be destroyed, no matter how, by tears and blood (Lk 23:28).

These scandals necessarily come. Jesus lived in a world of violence, but apparently he did not complain about the situation. He did not encourage us to dream of paradise on earth. While some Christian communities aspire to be a flock of sheep meekly surrounding their shepherd, Jesus has a different vision of Christian life.

The real world, the one God is saving, was not created to be an oasis of happiness, but a place where free persons grow through their struggles. Scandals are part and parcel of this world, but the power of evil does not diminish in any way the glory that God will receive in the end. Through suffering and hunger for justice God will awaken love and make it grow.

Verse 10: See commentary on Dn 12:6.

• 12. The parable of the *one hundred sheep* is also found in the Gospel of Luke (15:1). It teaches us several things: Jesus' special concern for sinners and those who stray and, therefore, the missionary dimension of his apostolate. In fact, Jesus came “to seek and save the lost” (Lk 19:10), “to call the outcasts, not the respectable people” (Mt 9:13). This attitude should impel our parishes and Christian communities to constantly reach out to the unchurched and marginalized, instead of just working with those who already are in touch with the Church.

Living together in the Church

(Lk 17:3)

Lk 17:3 • ¹⁵If your brother or sister has sinned against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are in private, and if he listens to you, you have won your brother. ¹⁶If you are not listened to, take with you one or two others so that *the case may be decided by the evidence of two or three witnesses*. ¹⁷If he still refuses to listen to them, tell it to the assembled Church. But if he does not listen to the Church, then regard such a one as a pagan or a publican.

Dt 19:15
Jn 8:17
2Cor 13:1
1Tim 5:19
1Cor 5:11
Tit 3:10

16:19 ¹⁸I say to you: whatever you bind on earth, heaven will keep bound; and whatever you unbind on earth, heaven will keep unbound.

7:7
21:22
Mk 11:24
Jn 15:7
28:20
Jn 14:23

¹⁹In like manner, I say to you: if on earth two of you are united in asking for anything, it will be granted to you by my heavenly Father. ²⁰For where two or three are gathered in my Name, I am there among them.”

• ²¹Then Peter asked him, “Lord, how many times must I forgive the offenses of my brother or sister? Seven times?” ²²Jesus answered, “No, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.” Lk 17:3

The unmerciful servant

• ²³This story throws light on the kingdom of heaven. A king decided to settle the accounts of his servants. ²⁴Among the first was one who owed him ten thousand gold ingots. ²⁵As the man could not repay the debt, the king commanded that he be sold as a slave with his wife, children and all his goods in payment.

²⁶The official threw himself at the feet of the king and said, ‘Give me time, and I will pay you back everything.’ ²⁷The king took pity on him and not only set him free but even canceled his debt. Lk 7:42

²⁸This official then left the king’s presence and he met one of his companions who owed him a hundred

• 15. *If your brother or sister has sinned...* Jesus had told Peter before: Whatever you tie on earth will be tied in Heaven. He declares it now for the whole Church. The believers must attempt to settle their suits among themselves, knowing that Christ is among them, as signified in his name Emmanuel: God-with-us.

The text of 18:15 is doubtful. Perhaps it was written *if your brother or sister has sinned, go ...* in which case it would refer to the effort of the Christian community to correct one who has gone astray.

Gathered in the name of Jesus (v. 20). The prayer of the community, of the apostolic group, of the Christian couple.

Have we noticed that this chapter on the Church is so short? Yet Matthew is the one who is most concerned about the Church of Jesus, whether in the parables of the kingdom or in Peter’s profession of faith.

Jesus does not seem to have said anything whatsoever to his apostles about structures that would emerge (or even disappear): nothing but a community spirit. Welcome for the poor and lowly, never-ending forgiveness and acceptance of others, prayer of a community that has apostolic ambitions and cries to God to give what is asked of him; there we have the sum total of the wisdom and means the Church has in order to confront all that challenges its evangelization.

While we participate in the common activities, overcoming unavoidable conflicts, and persevering in apostolic work, we grow as children

of God in truth, thus knowing the Father in truth. The Church, therefore, is that sacred place where we find God, and to express this reality we say that the Church is “the sacrament of God.”

We also speak of several “sacraments”: baptism, eucharist... Some people want to receive the sacraments without having any commitment to the Church; they forget that religious rites confer the grace of God because they are gestures of the Church, which is “the” sacrament of God. God is not contained inside things, but rather reveals himself through the family of Christ, where he wants us to find him: *Whatever you tie on earth...* Our faithfulness within the Christian community, even if we have to dissent from it, is a sign that we are in the grace of God.

• 21. *Seventy-seven times*. Compare with Genesis 4:24. Forgiveness must replace the thirst for revenge.

This is about the forgiveness of one who returns repentant: see Luke 17:1.

• 23. **THE PARDON**

The offenses we suffer from our *companions* are nothing compared with our offenses against God. While God *forgives all*, we do not even give others enough breathing space. God does not demand his rights, but we, in demanding them, behave like *wicked servants* (see Mt 5:43).

pieces of silver. He grabbed him by the neck and almost strangled him, shouting, 'Pay me what you owe!' ²⁹ His companion threw himself at his feet and asked him, 'Give me time, and I will pay everything.' ³⁰ The other did not agree, but sent him to prison until he had paid all his debt.

³¹ His companions saw what happened. They were indignant and so they went and reported everything to their lord. ³² Then the lord summoned his official and said, 'Wicked servant, I forgave you all that you owed when you begged me to do so. ³³ Weren't you bound to have pity on your companion as I had pity on you?' ³⁴ The lord was now angry, so he handed his servant over to be punished, until he had paid his whole debt."

5:25
Lk
12:58

6:15
Mk
11:15
Eph
4:32
Col
3:13

³⁵ Jesus added, "So will my heavenly Father do with you unless each of you sincerely forgive your brother or sister."

Jesus speaks about divorce

(Mk 10:2; Mt 5:31; Lk 16:18)

Lk
9:51

19 ¹ When Jesus had finished this teaching, he left Galilee and arrived at the border of Judea, on the other side of the Jordan River. ² A great crowd was with him and there, too, he healed their sick.

³ Some Pharisees approached him. They wanted to test him and asked, "Is a man allowed to divorce his wife for any reason he wants?"

16:1
Lk
11:54
Jn
8:6

⁴ Jesus replied, "Have you not read that in the beginning the Creator *made them male and female*, ⁵ and he said: *Man has now to leave father and mother, and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one body?* ⁶ So they are no longer two but one body; let no one separate what God has joined."

Gen
1:27
Gen
2:24
1Cor
6:16
Eph
5:31

⁷ They asked him, "Then, why did Moses command us to write a bill of dismissal in order to divorce?" ⁸ Jesus replied, "Moses knew your stubborn heart, so he allowed you to divorce your wives, but it was not so in the beginning. ⁹ Therefore I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, unless it be for concubinage, and marries another, commits adultery."

Dt
24:1

¹⁰ The disciples said, "If that is the condition of a married man, it is better not to marry." ¹¹ Jesus said to them, "Not everybody can accept what you have just said, but only those who have received this gift. ¹² There are eunuchs born so from their mother's womb. Some have been made that way by others. But there are some who have given up the possibility of marriage for

1Cor
7:10
5:32

1Cor
7:1
7:7

This parable goes beyond personal problems. The world needs, above everything else, the forgiveness of God, and those who want a more just society will not achieve it through accusations and hatred.

The parable helps us understand much better another verse in the Bible: *Revenge is mine, says the Lord; I will pay each one according to his own conduct.* God will not demand an account regarding his own rights, (what we owe him), but regarding the rights of the *little ones* who, unable to pay, were deprived of them. He will also demand an accounting regarding those who were sorry for their sins but were not forgiven by others.

The fourth Discourse of Matthew's Gospel ends with this parable on the duty to forgive. The Church has not always been as holy as she should have been. Yet nobody can deny that, at all times, in the Church the mercy of God has been preached and people have learned to forgive.

• **19.1** See commentary on Mark 10:2; Matthew 5:31.

Every human society has had its laws on marriage, and it was the same for Israel. There was then a law on divorce, in harmony with the difference of status accorded by society to man and woman; it was in Scripture (Dt 24:1). Jesus does not want to be involved in the discussions of teachers and interpreters of the Law: he opposes this law with another word of Scripture which presents God's point of view regarding human attitudes which he tolerates.

In doing this Jesus shows how he brings the Law to "perfection" (5:17), but clearly this "law of God" can only be heard by those who have received the Spirit from Jesus, a fact that is emphasized in the reaction of the disciples (v. 10).

Better not to marry (v. 10). Jesus does not apologize for these demanding words. He only proposes something more difficult to under-

the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let the one who can accept it, accept it.”

Jesus and the children

(Mk 10:13; Lk 18:15)

¹³Then little children were brought to Jesus that he might lay his hands on them with a prayer. But the disciples scolded those who brought them.

¹⁴Jesus then said, “Let them be! Do not stop the children from coming to me, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to people such as these.” ¹⁵So Jesus laid his hands on them and went his way.

Lk 9:47
1P 2:1

The rich young man

(Mk 10:17-22; Lk 18:18-23)

¹⁶It was then that a young man approached him and asked, “Master, what good work must I do to receive eternal life?” ¹⁷Jesus answered, “Why do you ask me about what is good? Only one is Good. If you want to enter eternal life, keep the commandments.”

Lk 10:25
Lev 18:5

¹⁸The young man said, “Which commandments?” Jesus replied, “Do not kill, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not bear false witness, ¹⁹honor your father and mother, and love your neighbor as yourself.”

Lk 10:28
Rom 13:9
Ex 20:12

Lev 19:18

²⁰The young man said to him, “I have kept all these commandments, what is still lacking?” ²¹Jesus an-

Mk 14:5
Lk 12:33
Jn 12:5

swered, “If you wish to be perfect, go and sell all that you possess and give the money to the poor and you will become the owner of a treasure in heaven. Then come back and follow me.”

Acts 2:45
4:34
6:20
Ps 62:11

²²On hearing this answer, the young man went away sad for he was a man of great wealth.

²³Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Truly I say to you: it will be hard for one who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven. ²⁴Yes, believe me: it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for the one who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven.”

²⁵On hearing this the disciples were astonished and said, “Who, then, can be saved?” ²⁶Jesus looked steadily at them and answered, “For humans it is impossible, but for God all things are possible.”

Lk 13:23

Gen 18:14
Job 42:2
Lk 1:37

²⁷Then Peter spoke up and said, “You see we have given up everything to follow you: what will be our lot?”

²⁸Jesus answered, “You who have followed me, listen to my words: on the Day of Renewal, when the Son of Man sits on his throne in glory, you, too, will sit on twelve thrones to rule the twelve tribes of Israel. ²⁹As for those who have left houses, brothers, sisters, father,

Dn 7:9
Wis 3:8
20:21
Lk 22:28
1Cor 6:2
Rev 3:21

stand. He praises those to whom have been given to choose celibacy as a way of life for love of the Kingdom.

- 16. See commentary on Mark 10:17.

Jesus faces a question. He discloses three aspects and gives three answers:

Only one is Good (v. 17). This man has been captivated by the personality of Jesus, and Jesus, as always, directs him to the Father. There is, in fact, a distortion to Christian faith, dangerous as it is subtle: to speak only of Jesus: “Jesus sees you...” “Jesus loves you...” “Jesus is love...” as if we were not living for God. Love of the Father means wanting to be perfect as the Father is and working for his Kingdom. First of all it needs to be free, and the rich can only be free through voluntary poverty.

This man also wanted to know how to receive eternal life (the text says in Hebrew style “to have in heritage”) and Jesus will clearly state at the end, that even if we obey the commandments,

we do not “merit” eternal life: salvation is always a gift of God.

Finally there is the question that bothers us most for all that touches money affects us deeply, and it is there that the Gospel shocks us: *it is easier for a camel...*

The call of the rich young man has always been considered the model of the religious, apostolic vocation. Without effective, voluntary poverty a person will never attain union with God that is the goal of the true religious. Besides, as long as the apostles share the life of comfortable people, they will be able to be their friends but they will never have deep conversions nor will they during this time reach the immense world of the poor.

The problem of poverty is also at the heart of the family in today’s world: for the greater number, believers or non-believers, the joys and blessings that God showers on a large family will only be given to those who have ceased to evaluate everything according to the criteria of money and security.

mother, children or property for my Name's sake, they will receive a hundredfold and be given eternal life.

20:16 ³⁰ Many who are now first will be last, and many who are now last will be first.

The workers in the vineyard

20 ¹ This story throws light on the kingdom of heaven. A landowner went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. ² He agreed to pay the workers a salary of a silver coin for the day, and sent them to his vineyard.

21:28

³ He went out again at about nine in the morning, and seeing others idle in the square, ⁴ he said to them: 'You, too, go to my vineyard and I will pay you what is just.' So they went.

The owner went out at midday and again at three in the afternoon, ⁵ and he did the same. ⁶ Finally he went out at the last working hour – it was the eleventh – and he saw others standing there. So he said to them: 'Why do you stay idle the whole day?' ⁷ They answered: 'Because no one has hired us.' The master said: 'Go and work in my vineyard.'

⁸ When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager: 'Call the workers and pay them their wage, beginning with the last and ending with the first.' ⁹ Those who had come to work at the eleventh hour turned up

Lev 19:13
Dt 24:14

and were given a denarius each (a silver coin). ¹⁰ When it was the turn of the first, they thought they would receive more. ¹¹ But they, too, received a denarius each. So, on receiving it, they began to grumble against the landowner.

¹² They said: 'These last hardly worked an hour, yet you have treated them the same as us who have endured the day's burden and heat.' ¹³ The owner said to one of them: 'Friend, I have not been unjust to you. Did we not agree on a denarius a day?' ¹⁴ So take what is yours and go. I want to give to the last the same as I give to you. ¹⁵ Don't I have the right to do as I please with my money? Why are you envious when I am kind?'

¹⁶ So will it be: the last will be first, the first will be last." 19:30

Third prophecy of the passion

(Mk 10:32; Lk 18:31)

¹⁷ When Jesus was going to Jerusalem, he took the Twelve aside and said to them on the way, ¹⁸ "See, we are going to Jerusalem. There the Son of Man will be given over to the chief priests and the teachers of the Law who will condemn him to death. ¹⁹ They will hand him over to the foreigners who will mock him, scourge him and crucify him. But he will be raised to life on the third day."

16:21
17:12
Lk 9:22
24:7
1Cor 15:4

• 20.1 THE MASTERS

Many are surprised at this parable. They find it unfair to give the same reward to everyone, without taking into account the labor and sacrifices of everyone.

Without doubt Jesus wanted to shock us and shatter the idea we obstinately cling to: that we have merits that God must recognize. However we should pay closer attention to the story: Jesus makes a comparison, not of several laborers, but of several groups of laborers. Each group represents a nation or a social class, and while some of them have long ago received the word of God, others have just become believers.

All throughout history, God has been calling different people to work in his vineyard. He called Abraham first and placed his descendants in charge of his work in the world. Later on, during the time of Moses many others joined his

group in order to leave Egypt and that has continued throughout history. The elders never cease to claim their right to receive better treatment than the others. Actually the vineyard has not been confided to them exclusively.

Then, with the coming of Christ, the Gospel was brought to other nations that were until then pagan. They came into the Church and shaped Christianity. They also claimed to be owners of the kingdom of God and the Church.

To this day, there are also social groups that are amazed when the Church criticizes their demand for privileges and does not assign them the first benches in the temple for they had always believed that the Church was theirs.

In this parable, all are treated on equal terms and receive one silver coin each. Let them be happy for having been invited to work, as they were unemployed.

The mother of James and John asks for the first seats

(Mk 10:35)

•²⁰ Then the mother of James and John came to Jesus with her sons, and she knelt down to ask a favor. ²¹ Jesus said to her, “What do you want?” And she answered, “Here you have my two sons. Grant that they may sit, one at your right and one at your left, when you are in your kingdom.”

²² Jesus said to the brothers, “You do not know what you are asking. Can you drink the cup that I am about to drink?” They answered, “We can.” ²³ Jesus replied, “You will indeed drink my cup, but to sit at my right or at my left is not for me to grant. That will be for those for whom the Father has prepared it.”

²⁴ The other ten heard all this and were angry with the two brothers. ²⁵ Then Jesus called them to him and said, “You know that the rulers of the nations act as tyrants, and the powerful oppress them. ²⁶ It shall not be so among you; whoever wants to be more important in your group shall make himself your servant. ²⁷ And if you want to be first, make yourself the servant of all. ²⁸ Be like the Son of Man who has come, not to be served but to serve and to give his life to redeem many.”

²⁹ As they left Jericho, a great crowd followed them on the way. ³⁰ Two blind men were sitting by the roadside, and when they heard that Jesus was pass-

ing by, they began to call out, “Son of David, have mercy on us!” ³¹ The people told them to keep quiet. But they shouted even louder, “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!” ³² Jesus stopped, called out to them and asked, “What do you want me to do for you?” ³³ They said, “Lord, open our eyes.”

³⁴ Jesus was moved with compassion and touched their eyes. Immediately they recovered their sight and they began to follow Jesus.

Jesus enters Jerusalem

(Mk 11:1; Lk 19:28; Jn 12:12)

21 • ¹ When they drew near Jerusalem and arrived at Bethphage, on the mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples, ² saying, “Go to the village in front of you, and there you will find a donkey tied up with its colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. ³ If anyone says something to you, say: The Lord needs them but he will send them back immediately.”

⁴ This happened in fulfillment of what the prophet said: ⁵ *Say to the daughter of Zion: See, your king comes to you in all simplicity, riding on a donkey, a beast of burden, with its colt.*

⁶ The disciples went as Jesus had instructed them, ⁷ and they brought the donkey with its colt. Then they threw their cloaks on its back, and Jesus sat on them.

⁸ Many people also spread their

• 20. See commentary on Mark 10:35. Compare Matthew 20:23 and Mark 10:46.

• **21.1** See commentary on Mark 11. Matthew, Mark and Luke place the incident about those selling in the Temple at the time of Jesus’ entrance into Jerusalem. John, on the other hand, situates this event at the beginning of Jesus’ mission. Once more we see how each of the evangelists disposes of events following the plan he has chosen to develop the mystery of Salvation. Their aim is not to draw up a life of Jesus where events would be placed in the exact order in which they occurred.

Besides, there are several details in this triumphant entrance of Jesus that remind us more of the Feast of the Tabernacles (which was cele-

brated in September), than of the days before the Passover:

– The joyous spirit of the people is more appropriate to that feastday, which was the most popular of all.

– The branches and palms, as in the procession of the feastday, on the way to the fountain of Siloe, while singing Psalm 118: “Blessed be he who comes in the name of the Lord!” and shouts of “Hosannah!” (that is: Save us!).

– Mention of the Mountain of Olives, where tents of branches and leaves were erected for the feast.

See, in this respect, Zec 14 that refers to this feastday (14:16) and foretells the purification of the Temple.

Very possibly, the evangelists placed the en-

Lk 22:30

26:39 Jn 18:11

23:11 Mk 9:35

26:28 Phil 2:7

1Tim 2:6

Rom 5:6

Mk 10:46

Lk 18:35

9:27 Lk 15:22

Gen 49:11 Is 62:11 Zec 9:9 11:29

1K 1:33

2K 9:13

cloaks on the road, while others cut leafy branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ^{23:39} ^{Ps} ^{118:} ²⁶ The people who walked ahead of Jesus and those who followed him began to shout: “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna, glory in the highest!”

¹⁰ When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was disturbed. The people asked, “Who is this man?” ¹¹ And the crowd answered, “This is the Prophet Jesus from Nazareth of Galilee.”

Jesus expels the dealers

(Mk 11:11; Lk 13:35; Jn 2:14)

¹² So Jesus went into the Temple and drove out all who were buying and selling in the temple area. He overturned the tables of the money changers, and the stools of those who sold pigeons. ¹³ And he said to them, “*It is written: My house shall be called a house of prayer.* But you have turned it into a den of thieves.”

¹⁴ The blind and the lame also came to him in the Temple and Jesus healed them.

¹⁵ The chief priests and the teachers of the Law saw the wonderful things Jesus had just done, and the children shouting in the temple area, “Hosanna to the Son of David!” ¹⁶ They became

indignant and said to Jesus, “Do you hear what they say?” Jesus answered them, “Yes. Have you never read this text: *From the mouths of children and infants you have got perfect praise?*”

¹⁷ So leaving them he went out of the city and came to Bethany where he spent the night.

Jesus curses the fig tree

(Mk 11:12; Lk 13:6)

¹⁸ While returning to the city early in the morning, Jesus felt hungry. ¹⁹ He noticed a fig tree by the road, went up to it and found nothing on it but leaves. Then he said to the tree, “Never again bear fruit!” And immediately, the fig tree withered.

²⁰ When the disciples saw this, they were astonished and they said, “How did the fig tree suddenly dry up!”

²¹ Jesus told them, “Truly, I say to you: if you had faith and did not doubt, not only could you do what I have done with the fig tree, but you could even say to that mountain: ‘Go and throw yourself into the sea!’ and it would be done. ²² Whatever you ask for in prayer full of faith, you will receive.”

Jesus’ response to the authorities

(Mk 11:27; Lk 20:1)

²³ Jesus had entered the Temple and was teaching when the chief

trance of Jesus into Jerusalem on the eve of the Passover for the simple reason that they only related one trip of Jesus to Jerusalem.

They arrived at Bethphage. The small village of Bethphage was the entrance to the district of Jerusalem towards the east. According to the Law, the Passover should be celebrated in Jerusalem, but the city was not big enough to accommodate more than a hundred and fifty thousand pilgrims for the festival. So it was necessary to enlarge the juridical limits of Jerusalem, embracing therefore some small villages like Bethphage. During those days, Jesus also used to lodge in Bethany (21:17).

- 12. See commentary on Mark 11:15.

Jesus cleanses the Temple, fulfilling the prophecy of Zechariah 14:21. Malachi 3 also foretold this event: The Lord would come to purify his people and his temple. Jesus comes as a prophet to demand respect for God. Also, as

God, he inaugurates the new era of religion in spirit and in truth. That is how John also understood this event in John 2:21, where he speaks of the new Temple, Christ.

You have got perfect praise (v. 16). These words of Psalm 8 were addressed to God, but Jesus applies them to himself, as he did with some other Scriptural texts.

- 18. This incident helps us understand the strange behavior of Jesus in looking for figs out of season and then *cursing the tree* as if it were responsible. Jesus behaved this way for a purpose: to call something to the attention of the apostles, through a teaching method used by the prophets. The fig tree is a figure of the Jewish people, who did not produce the fruits expected by God.

- 23. Jesus is what we would call today a simple layman. He respects the priests of the people of God and their high priest. He shows

priests, the teachers of the Law and the Jewish authorities came to him and asked, "What authority have you to act like this? Who gave you authority to do all this?"

²⁴ Jesus answered them, "I will also ask you a question, only one. And if you give me an answer, then I will tell you by what authority I do these things. When John began to baptize, was it a work of God, or was it merely something human?"

^{Jn 1:6 3:27} ²⁵ They reasoned out among themselves, "If we reply that it was a work of God, he will say: Why, then, did you not believe him? ²⁶ And if we say: The baptism of John was merely something human, beware of the people: since all hold John as a prophet." ²⁷ So they answered Jesus, "We do not know."

^{Lk 3:12 7:30 19:1} And Jesus said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what right I do these things."

The parable of the two sons

^{Is 5:1} • ²⁸ Jesus went on to say, "What do you think of this? A man had two sons. He went to the first and said to him: 'Son, today go and work in my vineyard.' ²⁹ And the son answered: 'I don't want to.' But later he thought better of it and went. ³⁰ Then the father went to the second and gave him the same command. This son replied: 'I will go, sir,' but he did not go.

^{22:6} ³¹ Which of the two did what the father wanted?" They answered, "The first." And Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you: the publicans and the prostitutes are ahead of you on the way to the kingdom of heaven. ³² For John came to show you the way of goodness

but you did not believe him, yet the publicans and the prostitutes did. You were witnesses of this, but you neither repented nor believed him.

The parable of the tenants

(*Mk 12:1; Lk 20:9*)

³³ Listen to another example: There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a fence around it, dug a hole for the winepress, built a watchtower, leased the vineyard to tenants and then went to a distant country. ³⁴ When harvest time came, the landowner sent his servants to the tenants to collect his share of the harvest. ³⁵ But the tenants seized his servants, beat one, killed another and stoned another.

³⁶ Again the owner sent more servants, but they were treated in the same way.

³⁷ Finally, he sent his son, thinking: 'They will respect my son.' ³⁸ But when the tenants saw the son, they thought: 'This is the one who is to inherit the vineyard. Let us kill him and his inheritance will be ours.' ³⁹ So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

⁴⁰ Now, what will the owner of the vineyard do with the tenants when he comes?" ⁴¹ They said to him, "He will bring those evil to an evil end, and lease the vineyard to others who will pay him in due time."

⁴² And Jesus replied, "Have you never read what the Scriptures say? *The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This was the Lord's doing; and we marvel at it.* ⁴³ Therefore I say to you: the kingdom of heaven will be taken from you and

however that if they want others to be accountable, for their part they must be ready to take a stand on the things of God when the people need this. They had been and were unwilling to give such a response in the case of John the Baptist.

• 28. This parable refers to the refusal of the chief priests to recognize John the Baptist as a messenger of God.

A good number of sinners were converted by John's preaching and confessed their sins. Such people were well disposed to receive the message of Jesus that opened for them the kingdom of God and showed them the true face of God the Father. Because of that, they were *ahead of the priests*, who were indifferent to John's call, for they felt neither the desire nor the need to change.

Jn 3:16
Gal 3:16 4:7
Heb 1:2
Heb 13:12
Ps 118: 22
Is 28:16
Acts 4:11
1P 2:4-7
Acts 13:5
Rom 11:11

given to a people who will yield a harvest.

⁴⁴ (Whoever falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, and it will ground to dust on whom it falls.)”

^{14:5} ^{21:26} ^{16:14} ^{21:11} ^{Lk} ^{7:16} ^{Jn} ^{4:19} ⁴⁵ When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard these parables, they realized that Jesus was referring to them. ⁴⁶ They would have arrested him, but they were afraid of the crowd who regarded him as a prophet.

^{Pro} **The wedding feast**
^{9:1-6} (Lk 14:15)

22 ¹ Jesus went on speaking to them in parables:

^{21:34} ² “This story throws light on the kingdom of heaven. A king celebrated the wedding of his son. ³ He sent his servants to call the invited guests to the wedding feast, but the guests refused to come.

⁴ Again he sent other servants ordering them to say to the invited guests: ‘I have prepared a banquet, slaughtered my fattened calves and other animals, and now everything is ready; come then, to the wedding feast.’ ⁵ But they

paid no attention and went away, some to their fields, and others to their work. ⁶ While the rest seized the servants of the king, insulted them and killed them.

⁷ The king became angry. He sent his troops to destroy those murderers and burn their city. ⁸ Then he said to his servants: ‘The wedding banquet is prepared, but the invited guests were not worthy. ⁹ Go, then, to the crossroads and invite everyone you find to the wedding feast.’

¹⁰ The servants went out at once into the streets and gathered everyone they found, good and bad alike, so that the hall was filled with guests.

¹¹ The king came in to see those who were at table, and he noticed a man not wearing the festal garment. ¹² So he said to him: ‘Friend, how did you get in without the wedding garment?’ But the man remained silent. ¹³ So the king said to his servants: ‘Bind his hands and feet and throw him into the dark where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

• ¹⁴ Know that many are called, but few are chosen.”

Every parish that carries out a mission experiences the same thing: many uncommitted Christians will neither work as missionaries, nor receive them, believing they do not need conversion.

• 22.1 THE BANQUET

This parable contains two parts.

In the first part, God invites us to a banquet where there is a place for everyone. All through history he has been sending his prophets to preach justice, the mercy of God and trust in him. The Jewish nation, however, did not heed God’s call through these prophets and now will pay even less heed to Jesus. God’s plan will not fail. He will send his apostles to preach the Gospel in foreign nations (*go to the exits of the ways*) so that non-Jews, too, may enter the Church. Some Jews, however, the *selected few among so many called*, will be the first members of the Church.

The king *celebrates the wedding of his son*, Christ, who deserves to be called “the bridegroom” of humankind (Mk 2:19), because he has become one body with it. All throughout history the Risen Christ gathers together mortal and divided human beings. The Spirit of God will transform and raise them from the dead, so that they may *sit at the table* of the living, according to the parable.

The only table of Christ that Christians usually know is the Eucharist. While taking part in it, we must not forget what has been said above. Our meeting in the Mass should remind us that God calls us to prepare, in our daily lives, for the banquet reserved by him for all humankind. Ours is the task of uniting and reconciling all people.

What if we do not answer? Then, little by little, the life of the holy and universal Church will be withdrawn from our assemblies of comfortable Christians, and others will be called to take charge of the work of God: *invite to the wedding*.

The second part of the parable points this out: You, Christians, who are already inside the Church, do you wear the new garment – a life of justice, honesty and trustworthiness?

Let us not believe that the surprised guest who was not properly dressed for the occasion was some kind of poor person. No, for it was customary during those times to supply all guests with the robe they should wear at the banquet. This one could have put on the robe but did not, so he had nothing to answer.

• 14. *Many are called* (v. 14). Some are disturbed upon reading this: does it mean that only a few persons will be saved?

• Paying taxes to Caesar

(Mk 12:13; Lk 20:20)

¹⁵The Pharisees went out and took counsel on how they could trap Jesus with his own words. ¹⁶They then sent their disciples with the members of Herod’s party for this purpose.

They said to Jesus, “Master, we know that you are an honest man and truly teach God’s way; you are not influenced by others nor are you afraid of anyone. ¹⁷Tell us, then, what you think: is it against the Law to pay taxes to Caesar or not?”

¹⁸But Jesus understood their evil intent, and said to them, “Hypocrites! Why are you testing me? ¹⁹Show me the coin with which you pay the taxes.”

They showed him a denarius, ²⁰and Jesus said to them, “Whose head is this, and whose name?” ²¹They answered, “Caesar’s.” Then Jesus replied, “Therefore, return to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.”

²²Astonished by his answer, they left him and went away.

The resurrection of the dead

(Mk 12:18; Lk 20:27)

Acts 23:8 • ²³That same day, some of the Sadducees came to Jesus. Since they claim that there is no resurrection, they questioned him in this way, ²⁴“Master, Moses said that if anyone dies without any children, his brother must take the wife and have a child who will be considered the child of the deceased man. ²⁵Now, there were seven brothers. The

Acts 23:8

Gen 38:8
Dt 25:5

first married a wife, and he died; since he had no children, he left his wife to his brother. ²⁶The same thing happened to the second and to the third until the seventh. ²⁷Then, last of all, the woman also died. ²⁸Now, in the resurrection of the dead, to which of the seven will she be wife, for all had her as wife?”

²⁹Jesus answered, “You are totally wrong because you understand neither the Scriptures nor the power of God. ³⁰First of all, in the resurrection of the dead, neither men nor women will marry, but they will be like the angels in heaven. ³¹As for the resurrection of the dead, have you never reflected on what God said to you: ³²*I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?* He is God, not of the dead but of the living.”

Ex 3:6

³³The people who heard him were astonished at his teaching.

7:28
13:54

³⁴When the Pharisees heard how Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they came together. ³⁵One of them, a teacher of the Law, tried to test him with this question, ³⁶“Teacher, which is the most important commandment in the Law?”

³⁷Jesus answered, “*You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind.* ³⁸This is the first and the most important of the commandments. ³⁹But after this there is another one very similar to it: *You shall love your neighbor as yourself.* ⁴⁰The whole Law and the Prophets are founded on these two commandments.”

Dt 6:5

5:43
7:12
Lev 19:18
Rom 13:9
Gal 15:14

If we associate this sentence with the first part of the parable, it means that, of those first invited, few will enter the banquet. These guests were the Jews and very few, indeed, entered the Church of Jesus. Interpreted in connection with the second part of the parable, it would mean that few of those entering the Church have the necessary dispositions, so the majority would be condemned at the time of judgment. This contradicts what was related in the parable, because only one of the guests was thrown out.

It is better not to associate this saying too much with the parable of the banquet, because we find

it also in other places in the Gospel. Here Jesus advises us (as in 7:13) that only a few discover through the Gospel true freedom and new life. Then, are they saved? Yes and no – because salvation, for Jesus, does not mean to escape from the punishment of hell, but to reach perfection.

• 15. See the commentary in Mk 12:13.

• 23. See the commentary in Mk 12:18.

In verse 24 the text reads: “take as a wife the sister-in-law and raise a descendant to his brother.”

The Messiah, Son of God

(Mk 12:35; Lk 20:41)

⁴¹As the Pharisees were gathered there, Jesus asked them, ⁴²“What do you think of the Messiah? Whose son is he to be?” They answered, “David’s.”

^{2S} ^{7:1} ^{Ps} ^{110:} ^{1Acts} ^{2:34} ^{1Cor} ^{15:25} ^{Heb} ^{1:13} ⁴³Jesus then asked, “Why did David, inspired by God, call the Messiah Lord? For he says in a psalm: ⁴⁴*The Lord said to my Lord: Sit at my right until I put your enemies under your feet.* ⁴⁵If David calls him Lord, how can he be his son?”

⁴⁶No one could answer him, not even a word. From that day on, no one dared question him anymore.

Do not imitate the teachers of the Law

(Lk 20:45; Mk 12:38)

23 ¹Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples:

• **23.1** The fifth Discourse of Matthew’s Gospel begins here. Only a few days separate us from Jesus’ departure from this world and it is here that Matthew places the words and parables of Jesus that enlighten the disciples on the attitude to adopt in face of the times to come. Scarcely born, the Church will have to face the formidable opposition of Jewish power, especially that of the Pharisees. She will therefore follow her own way and separate herself from the Jewish communities. This is the main theme of chapter 23. Chapter 24 declares that God will confirm this separation through the ruin of the Jewish nation. The Church, then, should turn towards the future and await the return of Christ. Let her not waste time in waiting for the end of the world but be always ready in active vigilance: this is chapter 25.

• 2. RELIGIOUS AUTHORITIES

Jesus was not from the tribe of Levi, to which the priests and those in charge of religious activities belonged. He did not, likewise, belong to any religious association, as the Pharisees did. He was on the side of the people and saw how the leaders of God’s people and the organized religious elite acted.

Obviously Matthew wants the words of Jesus to fall on the ears of important personages in the communities. Jesus judges in advance the authorities of the Church and more especially any group that sees itself the better, the more aware and the more efficacious. The Pharisees pretended to be just that, and in a sense they were.

The teachers of the Law and the Pharisees sat on the seat of Moses. The Gospel says it with more precision: *they have seated themselves in the chair of Moses.* This rather ironic formula suggests that the ambitious appropriate to them-

• ²“The teachers of the Law and the Pharisees sat on the seat of Moses. ³So you shall do and observe all they say, but do not do as they do, ⁴for they do not do what they say. They tie up heavy burdens and load them on the shoulders of the people, but they do not even raise a finger to move them. ⁵They do everything in order to be seen by people; so they wear very wide bands of the Law around their foreheads, and robes with large tassels. ⁶They enjoy the first place at feasts and reserved seats in the synagogues, ⁷and being greeted in the marketplace and being called ‘Master’ by the people.

⁸But you, do not let yourselves be called *Master* because you have only one Master, and all of you are brothers and sisters. ⁹Neither should you call anyone on earth *Father*, because you

selves the authority over the people of God and that to a certain point God tolerates it. Matthew, in recording these words of Jesus, wants to preserve in the Church fundamental equality. It is the whole Church that enjoys the Holy Spirit, and the heads or *doctors* will have no authority unless they are deeply rooted in the community’s life.

Paul will speak of Christ and the Church using the comparison of the head and the body (Eph 5:25). Likewise in the Church the authority of the bishop goes hand in hand with fidelity to the Church that he governs. He has accepted the Church as it is and does not seek to impose his own projects.

Do all they say. The bad example of the authorities does not discredit the word of God. Nor does it lessen the principle of authority. Their bad attitude discredits only their pretense at being superior to others. They cannot renounce their authority on the pretext of humble service and then carry out what the majority has decided.

Jesus speaks of the form of authority. *Do not be called master or father.* Do not be called “master,” the one “who knows” and before whom one is silent; neither must you be called “father,” the one who is venerated and imitated, forgetting to look directly at the One who alone is good. No one in the Church should eclipse the only “Father.”

Doubtless everyone will say that the word “Father” is simply the expression of respectful affection but Jesus affirms that the word has perverse effects.

The purity of faith, which submits to God alone, always suffers because of the cult of personality. The Church should be a community of free persons able to speak frankly.

Rom
2:17

11:30
Lk
11:46

6:1
Num
15:38
Lk
14:7

20:26 Lk 1:52 14:11 22:26 Job 22:29 Pro 29:23 Lk 14:11
 have only one Father, he who is in heaven. ¹⁰Nor should you be called *leader*, because Christ is the only leader for you. ¹¹Let the greatest among you be the servant of all. ¹²For whoever makes himself great shall be humbled, and whoever humbles himself shall be made great.”

Seven woes for the Pharisees
 (Lk 11:39)

• ¹³Therefore, woe to you, teachers of the Law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the door to the kingdom of heaven in people’s faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor do you allow others to do so.

15:14 Rom 2:19
¹⁴Woe to you, teachers of the Law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! ¹⁵You travel by sea and land to win a single convert, yet once he is converted, you turn him twice as fit for hell as yourselves.

¹⁶Woe to you, blind guides! You say: To swear by the Temple is not binding, but to swear by the treasure of the Temple is. ¹⁷Blind fools! Which is of more worth? The gold in the Temple or the Temple which makes the gold a sacred treasure? You say: ¹⁸To swear by the altar is not binding, but to swear by the offering on the altar is. ¹⁹How blind you are! Which is of more value:

the offering on the altar or the altar which makes the offering sacred? ²⁰Whoever swears by the altar is swearing by the altar and by everything on it. ²¹Whoever swears by the Temple is swearing by it and by God who dwells in the Temple. ²²Whoever swears by heaven is swearing by the throne of God and by him who is seated on it.

²³Woe to you, teachers of the Law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You do not forget the mint, anise and cumin seeds when you pay the tenth of everything, but then you forget what is most fundamental in the Law: justice, mercy and faith. These you must practice, without neglecting the others. ²⁴Blind guides! You strain out a mosquito, but swallow a camel.

²⁵Woe to you, teachers of the Law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You fill the plate and the cup with theft and violence, and then pronounce a blessing over them. ²⁶Blind Pharisee! Purify the inside first, then the outside too will be purified.

²⁷Woe to you, teachers of the Law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs beautiful in appearance, but inside there are only dead bones and uncleanness. ²⁸In the same way you appear as religious to

• 13. *You shut the door to the kingdom of heaven* (v. 13). Do not forget that “*the kingdom of Heaven*” means the kingdom of God. Many teachers of the people of God are an obstacle on the path leading to the true knowledge of God the Father. Even in the smallest village, the Jews had teachers of the Law but in fact, crowds came to Jesus to ask for what those priests and teachers did not give them. How can we forget that even in the Church religious education is often limited to moral compartment and keeping within religious norms? Hearing and constantly meditating on the Word of God would have favored the awakening of great ambitions: the search for God and apostolic creativity.
You say: To swear by the treasure of the Temple (vv. 16-22). Jesus refers to the common practices in his time. Some teachers found ways to get around certain oaths. In that manner, clever people could swear falsely and deceive their opponents by swearing firmly without promising much.

THE DEFENDERS OF THE FAITH

How could Jesus call such men hypocrites when they were so versed in the knowledge of the Bible?

In the language of Jesus, the word “hypocrite” equally denotes what is superficial as well as the one who makes light of what is of God. All the Pharisees were obviously not hypocrites; but Jesus denounces a frequent deformation in the religious elite. He calls us to be wary of those institutions born of possessors of wealth and culture who aspire to direct others – and the Church – without having learned from the poor or practiced true humility.

The mystery of God is so deep that no one can present himself as his lieutenant. The Pharisees trained, taught and gained many followers in the faith but their fasts and alms were already rewarded. Pride and love of money were given their place.

Ex 29:37

5:33

Lev 27:30

Mic 6:8 Am 5:21

Mk 7:4

Acts 23:3

Lk 16:15

others, but you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness within.

•²⁹ Woe to you, teachers of the Law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You build tombs for the prophets and decorate the monuments of the righteous.

³⁰ You say: Had we lived in the time of our ancestors, we would not have joined them in the blood of prophets.

³¹ So, you yourselves confess to be kins of those who murdered the prophets.

³² And now, finish off what your ancestors began!

Acts 7:52 ³³ Serpents, race of vipers! How can you escape condemnation to hell?

Lk 3:7 10:23 ³⁴ And so I am sending you prophets, sages and teachers, but you will murder and crucify them, and flog others in the synagogues or drive them from one city to another.

27:25 ³⁵ Because of this you will be accountable for all the innocent blood that has been shed on the earth, from the

Gen 4:10
Heb 11:4
Rev 16:6

THE PROPHETS

• 29. We have on one side “*the prophets*” and on the other those who “*kill the prophets*.” The Bible shows us that the prophets meet with much opposition among the people of God and especially among its leaders.

There is a people of God and this people has necessarily its institutions which help it to be faithful to its mission. In fact this people follows their reflexes and social prejudices, and the whole institution, even if born of the Spirit, becomes heavy and hardens with time. Prophets are readily condemned when they challenge peace and unity in mediocrity or even unfaithfulness to the word of God.

The Jewish people, harassed by foreigners, closed ranks around the Temple, religious practice and the Pharisee group. Moved by fear, the Jews did what any society would do when threatened: they became fanatically conservative and felt secure in the institutions God had given them in the past. (We are at present experiencing the same phenomenon. Our generation suddenly finds itself facing, in all areas, crises and threats for which it was not prepared; all our certitudes are questioned, and because of this we see emerging in all religions fundamentalist groups offering an appearance of safety by enclosing themselves in structures and systems of thought – or no thought – inherited from the past.)

The defenders of the Jewish community were not ready to listen to their prophet. It was one thing to honor the prophets of the past and keep

blood of upright Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the altar and the Sanctuary. ³⁶ Truly, I say to you: the present generation will pay for all this.

•³⁷ Jerusalem, Jerusalem! You murder the prophets and stone those sent to you by God. How often would I have gathered your children together, just as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you refused! ³⁸ Now you will be left with an empty Temple. ³⁹ I tell you that you will no longer see me until you say: “*Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!*”

Lk 13:34
1 K 9:7
Jer 7:14
Ezk 11:23
Tob 14:4
Ps 118:26
Mk 11:9

The ruin of Jerusalem and the end of the world

(Mk 13; Lk 21; 17:23; 12:36)

24 •¹ Jesus left the Temple and as he was walking away, his disciples came to him and boasted about the imposing Temple buildings. ² But he

Lk 19:44

the sacred books, another to accept the criticism addressed to them by God, not in the sacred books, but from the lips of Jesus, the carpenter.

Thus it was that the prominent Jews let the moment when *God visited them* slip by – following the path that would lead their nation to ruin.

The example of the Jewish nation must serve as a warning to us. Are our Christian communities, confronted today by a major crisis, able to build a poorer and more demanding Church? Will they be less preoccupied with their personal survival rather than giving the Gospel to the world?

• 37. How harshly Jesus speaks! Jerusalem was destroyed in the year 587 B.C. If we read the prophets, we find that Jerusalem’s destruction was a punishment for its crimes. Now, Jesus announces another destruction of wider historical consequences: *the blood of the prophets, the blood of Christ, the blood of the first Christians killed by the Jews.*

You will be left with an empty Temple. The presence of God in his Temple would leave them once more and be established among the converted pagans, as in Ez 8. There will be no further intervention by God to establish his Kingdom in Israel among the Jewish people until the day they welcome the Christ.

• **24.1** With reference to this great discourse see commentary on Mark 13.

In this discourse the Gospel uses the style of

said, "You see all this? Truly I say to you: not one stone will be left upon another here. All will be thrown down."

13:39 ³Later when Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples approached him privately and asked, "Tell us when this will take place. What sign will be given us before your coming and the end of history?"

⁴Jesus answered, "Be on your guard and let no one mislead you. ⁵Many will come, claiming my title and saying: 'I am the Messiah,' and they will mislead many people. ⁶You will hear about war and threats of war, but do not be troubled, for these things must happen, but it is not yet the end. ⁷Nations will fight one another, and kingdom oppose kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in several places, ⁸but all these are only the beginning: the first pains of childbirth.

⁹Then they will arrest you, and they will torture and kill you. All nations will hate you for you bear my name. ¹⁰In

those days, many will stumble and fall; they will betray one another and become enemies. ¹¹False prophets will appear and mislead many people, ¹²and because of such great wickedness, love will grow cold in many people. ¹³But the one who holds out to the end will be saved. ¹⁴The Good News of the Kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the world for all the nations to know; then the end will come.

¹⁵When you see what the prophet Daniel foretold: *the idol of the invader set up in the Temple* (may the reader understand!), ¹⁶then let those in Judea flee to the mountains.

¹⁷If you are on the housetop, do not come down to take anything with you. ¹⁸If you are in the field, do not turn back to fetch your cloak. ¹⁹How hard it will be for pregnant women and mothers with babies at the breast! ²⁰Pray that it may not be in winter or on a sabbath that you flee.

apocalyptic books (see the Introduction to Revelation). In this kind of literature signs announced great events. Hence the question of those closest to Jesus: "What will be the sign of your coming at the end of time?"

The discourse that follows comprises words pronounced by Jesus in very diverse circumstances. Jesus refuses speculation and reminds us that Christian history is one of persecution; he encourages us to be faithful.

In paragraph 24:4-28 Jesus speaks of the *days of trial* (vv. 21 and 29) that will conclude with the destruction of Jerusalem that Jesus' listeners will witness. It will be possible to run away before the disaster occurs (vv. 15-20).

The idol of the invader. The Gospel repeats an expression of Daniel (9:27) to indicate on this occasion, the taking over of the Temple by the Roman troops (see commentary on Mk 13:14).

It will be a time for evangelization, a time for persecutions and for Christians' testimony before the Jewish and pagan worlds (vv. 9-14). The Jewish people who did not recognize Jesus as their Savior, will let other saviors, or messiahs, stir them up against the Romans.

In paragraph 26-28, Jesus shows that this general confusion about the true savior is very far removed from what will happen when he returns at the end of time.

In paragraph 29-31 Jesus talks about his glorious coming. Then Jesus again asserts two things: the events and signs that refer to the end of Jerusalem will take place in the present

generation (vv. 32-35). *The day of Jesus* (vv. 36 and 42) will come much later.

The comparison of the *two men (or women)* working together means that, upon the coming of Jesus, the Judgment will take place, and there might be a separation within the same social or family group: some headed towards the Lord, others to be condemned (vv. 37 and 41).

Why is it that the Gospel draws a parallel with the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of time? Simple, because Matthew addresses Christians who have just experienced the first event and are awaiting the second. It is the moment when there emerges the Christian vision of the history of these two great stages.

First, we have the time of the Old Testament. God taught the people of Israel and nurtured their development in order that their history and experiences be enlightening for other peoples. At the end of this period, Jesus came during a national crisis to give them the full knowledge of their mission as a people of God. A minority believed, but the nation did not convert and crashed.

The message is then presented to other nations, and thus began the time of the New Testament. The Church teaches all peoples who must mature as nations and Christians. The Bible implies that New Testament times are leading up to a universal crisis where the Gospel will more than ever be a reality: "Believe or you will die." It is then that both the New Testament and history will end.

Lk
18:8
2Thes
2:3

28:19
10:18
Rom
10:18

1Mac
1:54
6:7
Dn
9:27

Lk
17:31

Jn
5:43

Jn
16:21
Rom
8:22
1Thes
5:3
Rev
12:2

10:17
Jn
16:2

Jl 2:2 Dn 12:1 Rev 7:14 ²¹For there will be great tribulation such as was never known from the beginning of the world until now, and is never to be known again. ²²And if that time were not to be shortened, no one would survive. But God will shorten it for the sake of his chosen ones. ²³Then, if anyone says to you: 'Look! The Messiah is here! He is there!', do not believe it. ²⁴For false Messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform signs and wonders so great that they would deceive even God's chosen people, if that were possible. ²⁵See, I have told you everything ahead of time.

Dt 13:2 2Thes 2:9 1Jn 2:18 4:1 Rev 13 ²⁶So, if anyone tells you: 'He is in the desert,' do not go. If they say: 'He is in such a secluded place,' do not believe it. ²⁷For the coming of the Son of Man will instead be like lightning which flashes from the east even to the west. ²⁸'Wherever the body is, the vultures will gather.'

Is 13:10 Ezk 32:8 **The coming of the Son of Man**
(Mk 13:28; Lk 17:20)

Jl 3:4 Am 8:9 Rev 6:12 1Thes 3:13 2Thes 2:1 2P 3:4 Zec 12:10 Dn 7:13 Rev 1:7 Is 27:13 1Cor 15:52 1Thes 4:16 ²⁹For later, after that distress, *the sun will grow dark, the moon will not give its light, the stars will fall from the skies, and the whole universe will be shaken.* ³⁰Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven: as all the nations of the earth beat their breasts, *they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with divine power and the fullness of Glory.* ³¹He will send his angels to sound the trumpet and gather the chosen ones from the four winds, from one end of the earth to the other.

10:23 16:28 ³²Learn a lesson from the fig tree. When its branches grow tender and its leaves begin to sprout, you know that summer is near. ³³In the same way, when you see all that I have told you, know that the time is near, even at the door. ³⁴Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have happened. ³⁵Heaven and

earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

Acts 1:7 1Thes 5:2 ³⁶But as for that Day and that Hour, no one knows when it will come, not even the angels of God nor the Son, but only the Father.

Gen 7 ³⁷At the coming of the Son of Man it will be just as it was in the time of Noah. ³⁸In those days before the Flood, people were eating and drinking, and marrying, until the day when Noah went into the ark. ³⁹Yet they did not know what would happen until the flood came and swept them away. So will it be at the coming of the Son of Man. ⁴⁰Of two men in the field, one will be taken and the other left. ⁴¹Of two women grinding wheat together at the mill, one will be taken and the other left.

Be on the alert

25:13 ⁴²Stay awake, then, for you do not know on what day your Lord will come. ⁴³Just think about this: if the owner of the house knew that the thief would come by night around a certain hour, he would stay awake to prevent his house to be broken into. ⁴⁴So be alert, for the Son of Man will come at the hour you least expect.

1Thes 5:2 2P 3:10 Rev 3:3 ⁴⁵Imagine a capable servant whom his master has put in charge of his household to give them food at the proper time. ⁴⁶Fortunate indeed is that servant whom his master will find at work when he comes. ⁴⁷Truly, I say to you, his lord will entrust that one with everything he has.

Lk 12:43 ⁴⁸Not so with the bad servant who thinks: My master is delayed. ⁴⁹And he begins ill-treating his fellow servants while eating and drinking with drunkards. ⁵⁰But his master will come on the day he does not know and at the hour he least expects. ⁵¹He will dismiss that servant and deal with him as with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

The ten bridesmaids

(Mk 13:35; Lk 13:25)

Lk
12:35

25 • ¹This story throws light on what will happen in the kingdom of heaven. Ten bridesmaids went out with their lamps to meet the bridegroom. ²Five of them were careless while the others were sensible.

³The careless bridesmaids took their lamps as they were and did not bring extra oil. ⁴But those who were sensible, brought with their lamps flasks of oil. ⁵As the bridegroom delayed, they all grew drowsy and fell asleep.

⁶But at midnight, a cry rang out: 'The bridegroom is here, come out and meet him!' ⁷All the maidens woke up at once and trimmed their lamps. ⁸Then the careless ones said to the sensible ones: 'Give us some oil, for our lamps

are going out.' ⁹The sensible ones answered: 'There may not be enough for both you and us. You had better go to those who sell and buy for yourselves.'

¹⁰They were out buying oil when the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went with him to the wedding feast, and the doors were shut.

¹¹Later the rest of the bridesmaids arrived and called out: 'Lord, Lord, open to us.' ¹²But he answered: 'Truly, I do not know you.'

¹³So, stay awake, for you do not know the day nor the hour.

The parable of the talents

(Lk 19:12; Mk 4:25; 13:34)

• ¹⁴Imagine someone who, before going abroad, summoned his servants to entrust his property to them. ¹⁵He

Rev
19:7

Mk
13:25

Mk
13:35

Mk
13:34

• **25.1 FAITHFULNESS**

The three parables that follow tell us how to await the return of Christ, being alert and active. The first, "the ten bridesmaids" is the most beautiful parable on fidelity. The ten girls followed the custom of waiting through the night for the bridegroom who will be accompanied to his house. The bridegroom is late, something that should astonish no one. The bride is not mentioned: perhaps they will discover at the end that there was no other than themselves.

They fell asleep. Once the sun has set, all is dark and nothing more can be done (Jn 9:4). No further work except fidelity of heart (Dt 5:2): oil will be needed to keep the flame alive.

Here as in other places, the Gospel shows us that more than conversion and enthusiasm is needed: it is necessary to last (7-24). Being sure of having a reserve of oil is to take the means that enable us to persevere in our vocation.

Some will say that Matthew has placed this parable here for the benefit of the first Christians, for after having awaited the return of Christ, they saw that nothing happened. Error! Jesus speaks to the believers of all times. For them one day or another fidelity becomes burdensome: "I did not know to what I was committing myself." There lies the grandeur of fidelity. It cannot be known in advance; giving one's hand to God is a jump into the unknown. Only through this perseverance can we be saved (Mt 24:13), in other words, find ourselves.

The Lord demands faithfulness and perseverance from those he has chosen: this is how we save a world that seeks truth everywhere and does not know to which Lord to surrender.

• **14. TO WORK – TO TRUST ONESELF**

During the time of Jesus, a talent was an amount, thirty kilograms of precious metal, but in this parable when Jesus spoke of talents he referred to the abilities given by God to each of us. Since then, people came to understand the word "talent" in this sense.

Good and faithful servant (v. 21). *Faithful*: it would be better translated: "reliable." We do not find any word of religious vocabulary in this parable.

God sees the way one has used his talents, and the sin is to have kept for self what one has received. What condemnation of a society where it is usual to enjoy and consume what has been received: a better human formation and knowledge inherited from the homeland which should be transmitted to one's descendants, the blessings and benefits of a family where the parents knew how to sacrifice themselves for their children, and perhaps the Word of God to be carried out in order to realize God's great plan for the world.

I will entrust you with much more. What we achieve on earth is not definitive but only the scaffolding: quite other will be the riches that God will distribute to those who will live in him.

You know that I reap where I have not sown (v. 26). As in Luke 18:1, Jesus is aware of our unavowed defiance towards God and takes us at our word. If we do not aspire to the place that the husband reserves for a wife (25:1), let us try at least not to be useless servants.

There are many opportunities for us to take initiatives, but we often are afraid to put ourselves forward: "I am not the most qualified." What if those who are qualified have not budged? Then, *take the talent from him and give it to someone else.*

gave five talents of silver to one, then two to another, and one to a third, each one according to his ability; and he went away.

¹⁶He who received five talents went at once to do business with the money and gained another five. ¹⁷The one who received two did the same and gained another two. ¹⁸But the one with one talent dug a hole and hid his master's money.

¹⁹After a long time, the master of those servants returned and asked for a reckoning. ²⁰The one who received five talents came with another five talents, saying: 'Lord, you entrusted me with five talents, but see I have gained five more with them.' ²¹The master answered: 'Very well, good and faithful servant, since you have been faithful in a few things, I will entrust you with much more. Come and share the joy of your master.'

²²Then the one who had two talents came and said: 'Lord, you entrusted me with two talents; I have two more which I gained with them.' ²³The master said: 'Well, good and faithful servant, since you have been faithful in little things, I will entrust you with much more. Come and share the joy of your master.'

²⁴Finally, the one who had received one talent came and said: 'Master, I know that you are an exacting man. You reap what you have not sown and gather what you have not invested. ²⁵I was afraid, so I hid your money in the ground. Here, take what is yours.' ²⁶But his master replied: 'Wicked and worthless servant, you know that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I have not invested. ²⁷Then you should have deposited my money in the bank, and you would have given it back to me with interest on my return.'

²⁸Therefore, take the talent from him, and give it to the one who has ten. ²⁹For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who are unproductive, even what they have will be taken from them. ³⁰As for that useless servant, throw him out into the dark where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

The last judgment

(Lk 9:26)

• ³¹"When the Son of Man comes in his glory with all his angels, he will sit on the throne of his Glory. ³²All the nations will be brought before him, and

• 31. THE UNIVERSAL JUDGEMENT

We know that Christians are a minority in the world. As we do now, the Jews wondered about the majority of nations in the world, who were not among the Chosen People and did not know about God or his promises. The Jews envisioned a huge multitude, ready to "devour them," a restless world where God should one day impose his Law. They used to call them: the nations.

Jesus goes beyond these narrow perspectives and shows us how he will judge everyone, making no distinctions based on origins when he comes as King of all nations. All those who, without knowing Christ, have shared in the common destiny of humankind, will be judged by him. In fact, he never abandoned them, but placed at their side "those little ones who are his brothers and sisters," as his representatives.

See, Christ reveals the innumerable human deeds that have built what is best in our civilization, and people brought before him look with amazement at the God whom they loved or despised in the person of their neighbor. Although the majority of them never thought of the

afterlife, the kingdom of God is presented to them with its only law: Love.

There is no neutral place. The fire means the torment of those who condemned themselves by closing and freezing their hearts so that they became incapable of love: now the splendor of God, who is love, burns and pains them.

Whenever you did this to these little ones who are my brothers and sisters (v. 40). Jesus speaks of looking after our neighbor, be he friend or foe, not of serving the community, or a class, or a nation in general, because using these words, we often exclude a group of our brothers and sisters, who do not belong to our nation or to our class. On the other hand, one who really loves, acknowledges his sisters and brothers without giving too much importance to any labels: it is the person who exists and lives for God.

And these will go into eternal punishment (v. 46). There is something that shocks us today in the division of the good and the wicked, and it seems to us to be an outdated view (see com. on Mt 13:36). In one sense it is true. Up to the recent times people were mainly "of one idea."

Jn
4:37

13:12

19:28
24:47
Lk
16:10
Jn
15:10

Zec
14:5
Rev
3:21
20:11

as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, ³³so will he do with them, placing the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

³⁴The King will say to those on his right: 'Come, blessed of my Father! Take possession of the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world. ³⁵For I was hungry and you fed me, I was thirsty and you gave me drink. ³⁶I was a stranger and you welcomed me into your house. I was naked and you clothed me. I was sick and you visited me. I was in prison and you came to see me.'

³⁷Then the good people will ask him: 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and give you food; thirsty and give you drink, ³⁸or a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? ³⁹When did we see you sick or in prison and go to see you?' ⁴⁰The King will answer, 'Truly, I say to you: whenever you did this to these little ones who are my brothers and sisters, you did it to me.'

⁴¹Then he will say to those on his left: 'Go, cursed people, out of my sight into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels! ⁴²For I was hungry and you did not give me anything to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink; ⁴³I was a stranger and you did not welcome me

into your house; I was naked and you did not clothe me; I was sick and in prison and you did not visit me.'

⁴⁴They, too, will ask: 'Lord, when did we see you hungry, thirsty, naked or a stranger, sick or in prison, and did not help you?' ⁴⁵The King will answer them: 'Truly, I say to you: whatever you did not do for one of these little ones, you did not do for me.'

⁴⁶And these will go into eternal punishment, but the just to eternal life."

26 ¹When Jesus had finished all he wanted to say, he told his disciples, ²"You know that in two days' time it will be the Passover and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified."

³Then the chief priests and the Jewish authorities gathered together at the palace of the High Priest whose name was Caiaphas, ⁴and they agreed to trap Jesus and kill him. ⁵But they said among themselves, "Not during the feast, lest there be an uprising among the people."

The anointing at Bethany

(*Jn 12; Mk 14:9*)

⁶While Jesus was in Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, ⁷a woman came up to him carrying a precious jar

Ezk 34:17
Lk 12:32
Lk 22:30
Rom 8:17
Eph 1:4
Is 58:7

Pro 19:17
Mk 9:41
Lk 10:16
Acts 9:5
7:23
Mk 9:48
Rev 20:10

Dn 12:2
Jn 5:29

Ex 12:1

Jn 11:47
Acts 4:25

Lk 7:36

It did not take long for youth to see what were the options in life, rarely did a person find more than one religion in the local milieu and she would choose either the "right" road or the "wrong" road. Some conversions for better or worse would follow (Ez 8), but humanity seemed to be divided between the good and the evil. Today it is quite different: the choices we make are extremely complex and it takes time to discern clearly. All of life or much of it today may be lived by a person who has within the self a good and an evil being at the same time.

Let us understand then that Jesus spoke the language of the prophets, schematizing options. In fact Jesus denounces, not heinous crimes but selfishness in daily life as is found in each of us, and he depicts, like a father to his children the end towards which we are heading. It is to be hoped that the great majority will not reject the truth; certain persons consciously choose their own ruin and unfortunately are capable of continuing in their choice to the bitter end.

To say that God is so good that he will save them at the last moment is to affirm something that Jesus never intended to say. It would mean that all that a person lived through was of slight importance and that our freedom was no more than a game.

What Jesus says about judging non-Christian people likewise applies to us. But we would be mistaken if we repeatedly presented this parable as expressing the totality of Christian duties. What the world needs above all is not bread and water and clothing, but the truth and the hope that God entrusted to his chosen people. Christians would be unfaithful to their mission if they confined themselves to merely talking about assistance, housing and the like and forgot what is really life for humankind – first, the knowledge and love of their Lord. He will always be first and we need him to be so for us. He takes as done to himself all that we do for our sisters and brothers but does not want to be confused with them.

of expensive perfume. She poured it on Jesus' head as he was at table. ⁸ Seeing this the disciples became indignant, protesting, "What a useless waste! ⁹ The perfume could have been sold for a large sum and given to the poor."

¹⁰ But Jesus was aware of this, so he said to them, "Why are you troubling this woman? What she has just done for me is indeed a good work. ¹¹ You always have the poor with you but you will not have me forever. ¹² She was preparing for my funeral when she anointed my body with this perfume. ¹³ Truly, I say to you: wherever the Gospel is proclaimed, all over the world, what she has done will be told in praise of her."

¹⁴ Then one of the Twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went off to the chief priests and said, ¹⁵ "How much will you give me if I hand him over to you?" They promised to give him thirty pieces of silver, ¹⁶ and from then on he kept looking for the best way to hand him over to them.

The last supper

(Mk 14:12; Lk 22:7; Jn 13:1)

¹⁷ On the first day of the Festival of the Unleavened Bread, the disciples came to Jesus and said to him, "Where do you want us to prepare the Passover meal for you?" ¹⁸ Jesus answered, "Go into the city, to the house of a certain man, and tell him: 'The Master says: My hour is near, and I will celebrate the Passover with my disciples in your house.'"

¹⁹ The disciples did as Jesus had ordered and prepared the Passover meal.

²⁰ When it was evening, Jesus sat at table with the Twelve. ²¹ While they were eating, Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you: one of you will betray me." ²² They were deeply distressed and asked him in turn, "You do not mean me, do you, Lord?"

²³ He answered, "He who will betray me is one of those who dips his bread in

the dish with me. ²⁴ The Son of Man is going as the Scriptures say he will. But alas for that one who betrays the Son of Man; better for him not to have been born." ²⁵ Judas, who was betraying him, also asked, "You do not mean me, Master, do you?" Jesus replied, "You have said it."

²⁶ While they were eating, Jesus took bread, said a blessing and broke it, and gave it to his disciples saying, "Take and eat; this is my body." ²⁷ Then he took a cup and gave thanks, and passed it to them saying, "Drink this, all of you, ²⁸ for this is my blood, the blood of the Covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. ²⁹ Yes, I say to you: I will not taste the fruit of the vine from now until the day I drink new wine with you in my Father's kingdom."

³⁰ After singing psalms of praise, they went out to the Mount of Olives. ³¹ Then Jesus said to them, "You will falter tonight because of me, and all will fall. For the Scripture says: *I will strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered.* ³² But after my resurrection I will go ahead of you to Galilee."

³³ Peter responded, "Even though all doubt you and fall, I will never fall." ³⁴ Jesus replied, "Truly, I say to you: this very night before the cock crows, you will deny me three times." ³⁵ Peter said, "Though I have to die with you, I will never deny you." And all the disciples said the same.

Gethsemane

(Mk 14:32; Lk 22:39)

³⁶ Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I go over to pray."

³⁷ He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be filled with anguish and distress. ³⁸ And he said to them, "My soul is filled with sorrow even to death. Remain here and stay awake with me."

Job
3:3
Ps
22
Jn
17:12

14:19
15:36

1Cor
10:16
Ex
24:8
Jer
31:31
Zec
9:11
Heb
9:20

Jn
12:23
13:1
17:1

Zec
13:7

Jn
11:16

Jn
12:27

Jn
18:1

17:1
Mk
5:37

Heb 5:7
Jn 4:34
6:38
Rom 5:19
Phil 2:8
39 He went a little farther and fell to the ground, with his face touching the earth, and prayed, "Father, if it is possible, take this cup away from me. Yet not what I want, but what you want."

6:13
20:22
40 He went back to his disciples and found them asleep, and he said to Peter, "Could you not stay awake with me for even an hour? 41 Stay awake and pray, so that you may not slip into temptation. The spirit indeed is eager, but human nature is weak."

2Cor 12:8
42 He again went away and prayed, "Father, if this cup cannot be taken away from me without my drinking it, let your will be done." 43 When he came back to his disciples, he again found them asleep, for they could not keep their eyes open. 44 He left them and again went to pray the third time, saying the same words.

Jn 14:30
45 Then he came back to his disciples and said to them, "You can sleep on now and take your rest! The hour has come and the Son of Man is now given over into the power of sinners. 46 Get up, let us go. Look: the betrayer is here."

Jesus arrested

• 47 Jesus was still speaking when Judas, one of the Twelve, arrived. With him was a crowd armed with swords and clubs, who had been sent by the chief priests and the Jewish authorities. 48 The traitor had arranged a signal for them: "The one I kiss, he is the man; arrest him." 49 And he went directly to

Jesus and said, "Good evening, Master" and he gave him a kiss. 50 But Jesus said to him, "Friend, do what you came for." Then they laid hold of Jesus and arrested him.

51 One of those who were with Jesus drew his sword and struck at the servant of the High Priest, cutting off his ear. 52 So Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back into its place, for he who uses the sword will perish by the sword. 53 Do you not know that I could call on my Father, and he would at once send me more than twelve legions of angels. 54 If Scripture says that this has to be, should it not be fulfilled?"

55 At that moment, Jesus said to the crowd, "Why do you come to arrest me with swords and clubs, as if I were a robber? Day after day I was seated among you teaching in the Temple, yet you did not arrest me. 56 But all this has come about in fulfillment of what the Prophets said." Then all his disciples deserted him and fled.

Jesus before the Sanhedrin

(Mk 14:53; Lk 22:54)

• 57 Those who had arrested Jesus brought him to the house of the High Priest Caiaphas, where the teachers of the Law and the Jewish authorities were assembled.

58 Peter followed him at a distance as far as the courtyard of the High Priest; he entered and sat with the guards, waiting to see the end.

59 The chief priests and the whole

• 47. See commentary on Mark 14:43. The kiss of Judas: this was the usual way a disciple greeted his master.

He drew his sword (v. 51). Peter, like other apostles who took part in resistance movements against Roman oppression, brought swords (Lk 22:49).

He who uses the sword. This sentence does not condemn soldiers and policemen in a world of violence, but Jesus asserts that weapons do not establish the kingdom of God, nor do they lead to life. Force leads to death (in one way or another) for those (and for the institutions) who use it, even where it is necessary.

• 57. We find two accusations against Jesus. The first: *I am able to destroy* (v. 61) is false in one sense, but it refers to the words Jesus had spoken about replacing the Temple of Jerusalem with another religion centered in his own person (Jn 2:19) and that was indeed subversive. Nothing was more sacred to the Jews than the Temple of Jerusalem, and to attack the Temple was, at the same time, to threaten the position of the priests whose power was based on the fact that they alone could perform sacrificial rites in the Temple. They also amassed wealth from offerings and taxes that the people paid to the temple. In defending the holy things, they were also protecting their own interests.

Gen 9:6
Rev 13:10

Jn 18:36

Lk 19:47
21:37
Jn 18:20

Zec 13:7
Jn 16:32

Jn 18:15

Supreme Council needed some false evidence against Jesus, so that they might put him to death.⁶⁰ But they were unable to find any, even though false witnesses came forward.⁶¹ At last, two

27:40
Jn
2:19
Acts
6:14

men came up and declared, "This man said: I am able to destroy the temple of God and rebuild it in three days."

Is
53:7

⁶²The High Priest then stood up and asked Jesus, "Have you no answer at all? What is this evidence against you?"

⁶³But Jesus kept silent. So the High Priest said to him, "In the name of the living God, I command you to tell us: Are you the Messiah, the Son of God?"⁶⁴ Jesus answered, "It is just as you say. I tell you more: from now on, you will see *the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Most Powerful God and coming on the clouds of heaven.*"

24:30
Dn
7:13
Ps
110:
1

⁶⁵Then the High Priest tore his clothes, saying, "He has blasphemed. What more evidence do we need? You have just heard these blasphemous words.⁶⁶ What is your decision?" They answered, "He must die!"⁶⁷ Then they began to spit on Jesus and slap him while others hit him with their fists,⁶⁸ saying, "Messiah, prophesy! Who hit you?"

Num
14:6
Ezra
9:3
Jer
36:24
Acts
14:14
Lev
24:16
Jn
19:7

For the second accusation, which is the most important, see commentary on Mark 14:53.

Jesus kept silent (v. 63). Not out of contempt for those men, who were the religious authorities, but because he saw it was useless to argue with them. He remained silent and felt confident, as do those who put their cause in the hands of God.

It is just as you say (v. 64). Perhaps this answer of Jesus should be translated: "You are the one saying it," which is to say that Jesus did not agree with the terms used by Caiaphas. The expression "Son of God" signified the kings and saviors of Israel, and Jesus is the Son of God in a very different sense. Jesus identifies himself with the prophecy of Daniel 7:13, announcing a Savior, a Son of Man, who comes directly from God from all eternity.

• 69. This denial by Peter is most amazing. His friend John is well known in the house of the high priest and Peter was introduced as his friend (Jn 18:16). The young girl knows very well who John is and does not say anything beyond an ironic word to Peter. Nobody is threatening him,

Peter disowns Jesus

(Mk 14:66; Lk 22:56)

• ⁶⁹Meanwhile, as Peter sat outside^{26:34} in the courtyard, a young servant-girl of the house said to him, "You also were with Jesus of Galilee."⁷⁰ But he denied it before everyone, saying, "I do not know what you are talking about."

⁷¹And as Peter was going out to the gateway, another servant-girl saw him and told the bystanders, "This man was with Jesus of Nazareth."

⁷²Peter denied it again with an oath, swearing, "I do not know that man."

⁷³After a little while, those who were standing there approached Peter and said to him, "Of course you are one of the Galileans; your accent gives you away."⁷⁴ Peter began justifying himself with curses and oaths protesting that he did not know the man. Just then a cock crowed.

⁷⁵And Peter remembered the words of Jesus, "Before the cock crows, you will deny me three times." And he went away weeping bitterly.

27 • ¹Early in the morning all the^{12:14} chief priests and the Jewish authorities met to look for ways of putting

least of all the men; instead they mock him for his provincial Galilean accent, the same as Jesus' accent! It was enough to make Peter lose his composure.

In placing this episode just after the witness of Jesus in the presence of the High Priest, the Gospel intends to contrast Peter's attitude with that of his Master.

• **27.1** Why this second appearance of Jesus before the Supreme Council or Sanhedrin? It is difficult to find agreement on this point in the Gospels.

It would seem that during the night Jesus was presented to Annas, ex-high priest, (succeeded by five sons and son-in-law Caiaphas). He retained real authority among the great priestly families. The Sanhedrin was not complete: the seventy-one members could not be accommodated in the house of Caiaphas. Besides, the Council could not legally hold a session during the night; so it met in the morning.

For the enemies of Jesus this private interrogation was the most important, and that is why Matthew and Mark place there all that they know of the trial of Jesus (Mt 26:57-64).

Jesus to death. ²They had him bound and led him away to be handed over to Pilate, the governor.

The death of Judas

^{Acts 1:18} • ³When Judas, the traitor, realized that Jesus had been condemned, he was filled with remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders, ⁴saying, “I have sinned by betraying an innocent man to death.” They answered, “What does it matter to us? That is your concern.” ^{27:24} ⁵So, throwing the money into the Temple, he went away and hanged himself.

⁶The priests picked up the money, and said, “This money cannot be put into the Temple treasury, for this is the price of blood.” ⁷So they met together and decided to buy the Potter’s Field with the money and make it a cemetery for foreigners. ⁸This is why that place has been called *Field of Blood* to this day.

^{Zec 11:12} ⁹So what the prophet Jeremiah said was fulfilled: *They took the thirty pieces of silver, the price the sons of Israel set on him. ¹⁰And they gave them for the Potter’s Field, as the Lord commanded me.*

Jesus before Pilate

(Mk 15:1; Lk 23:2; Jn 18:29)

^{2:2} ¹¹Jesus stood before the governor who questioned him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” Jesus answered, “You say so.”

¹²The chief priests and the Elders accused him, but he made no answer.

¹³Pilate said to him, “Do you hear all the charges they bring against you?”

^{Jn 19:9} ¹⁴But he did not answer even a single

question, so that the governor wondered.

• ¹⁵ It was customary for the governor to release any prisoner the people asked for on the occasion of the Passover. ¹⁶ Now there was a well-known prisoner called Barabbas. ¹⁷ As the people had gathered, Pilate asked them, “Whom do you want me to set free: Barabbas, or Jesus called the Messiah?” ¹⁸ For he realized that Jesus had been handed over to him out of envy.

¹⁹ As Pilate was sitting in court, his wife sent him this message, “Have nothing to do with that holy man. Because of him I had a dream last night that disturbed me greatly.”

²⁰ But the chief priests and the Elders stirred the crowds to ask for the release of Barabbas and the death of Jesus. ²¹ When the governor asked them again, “Which of the two do you want me to set free?” they answered, “Barabbas.” ²² Pilate said to them, “And what shall I do with Jesus called the Messiah?” All answered, “Crucify him!” ²³ Pilate insisted, “What evil has he done?” But they shouted louder, “Crucify him!”

• ²⁴ Pilate realized that he was getting nowhere and that instead there could be a riot. He then asked for water and washed his hands before the people, saying, “I am not responsible for his blood. It is your doing.” ²⁵ And all the people answered, “Let his blood be upon us and upon our children.”

²⁶ Then Pilate set Barabbas free, but had Jesus scourged, and handed him over to be crucified.

• 3. Judas, as soon as he betrays Jesus, disappears from the scene and dies. We do not even know what happened with the thirty coins: see Acts 1:18.

• 15. According to very old texts of the Gospel of Matthew the name of the troublemaker was Jesus, his nickname being Barabbas.

Pilate proposes to the people a choice between Jesus called Barabbas and Jesus called the Messiah.

• 24. *Pilate asked for water...* (v. 24). The Jews understood this gesture as a clear expression of his refusal to become the judge or accuser of Jesus (see Dt 21:6; Ps 26:6).

The way of the cross*(Mk 15:16; Lk 23:11)*

•²⁷ The Roman soldiers took Jesus into the palace of the governor and the whole troop gathered around him.²⁸ They stripped him and dressed him in a purple military cloak.²⁹ Then, twisting a crown of thorns, they forced it onto his head, and placed a reed in his right hand. They knelt before Jesus and mocked him, saying, “Long life to the King of the Jews!”³⁰ They spat on him, took the reed from his hand and struck him on the head with it.

³¹ When they had finished mocking him, they pulled off the purple cloak and dressed him in his own clothes again, and led him out to be crucified.

³² On the way they met a man from Cyrene called Simon, and forced him to carry the cross of Jesus.³³ When they reached the place called Golgotha (or

Calvary) which means *the Skull*,³⁴ they offered him wine mixed with gall. Jesus tasted it but would not take it. Ps
69:22

³⁵ There they crucified him and divided his clothes among themselves, casting lots to decide what each should take.³⁶ Then they sat down to guard him.³⁷ The statement of his offense was displayed above his head and it read, “This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.” Ps
22:19

³⁸ They also crucified two bandits with him, one on his right and one on his left. Lk
22:37

³⁹ People passing by shook their heads and insulted him,⁴⁰ saying, “Aha! So you will destroy the Temple and build it up again in three days. Now save yourself and come down from the cross, if you are Son of God.” Lm
2:15
26:61
Jn
2:19

⁴¹ In the same way the chief priests, the Elders and the teachers of the Law mocked him.⁴² They said, “The man

• 27. In the inner yard called the Pretorium, the soldiers make fun of Jesus in full view of Pilate and all the people employed in the palace.

Twisting a crown of thorns, they forced it onto his head (v. 29). In all probability, local reed was woven in the form of a cap and entwined with long thorns.

The soldiers enjoy the game of the fallen king. In many cultures the king was a divine character and, at the same time, often became the victim responsible for all evils. Therefore, the game of the king was known in many places. One engraved tile that was a soldiers' game has been found in Jerusalem. On it is seen the journey of the king through many trials ending with his assassination.

The soldiers made this game a reality, without realizing how true it actually was. A triumphal Procession with Palms led to the arrest of Jesus, but the humiliation of Jesus prepared him to be the king, the Savior of all, as told in the story of Joseph (Gen 37–44), or more vividly described by the Prophet Isaiah (52:13).

Jesus is Savior, because he is the victim. He broke the mechanism of violence, because he suffered the greatest violence without becoming violent himself. In his humiliation, Jesus shows the greatness and the power of God. He took upon himself all the humiliations of the defenseless, the dejected, the victims on whom were heaped the mindless violence of peoples and their leaders. Jesus bears the sin of the world, as announced by Isaiah. In the future, no one will be able to look at him without discovering their own wickedness, and mourning for him who was their victim (Zec 12:12). From this encounter

with God, hated and killed, (and so different from the God worshiped in heaven) will gush waters of pardon and purification (Zec 13:1).

They offered him wine mixed with gall (v. 34). According to Mark, they gave him bitter-sweet wine, a drink of the soldiers, mixed with myrrh, to dull the pain. This drink had probably been prepared according to custom by the charitable women of Jerusalem, perhaps the same mentioned by Luke in 23:28. Matthew speaks of wine with bile (a detestable drink) to give us an inkling of all the bitterness that Jesus had to swallow, and also to recall Psalm 69:22.

They also crucified two bandits with him (v. 38). Perhaps they were, like Barabbas, nationalist terrorists opposed to the Romans. They could have been the companions of Barabbas, and their execution enhanced the favor done to Barabbas. If so, they would have to die along with Jesus instead of Barabbas. They could also have belonged to a group of bandits who assaulted and robbed pilgrims in the hills of Palestine.

This is Jesus, the king of the Jews (v. 37). For Pilate and the people in general, this expression signified a nationalist leader in the movement for liberation from the Roman yoke.

The Jews are the people of God and the Father arranged that they would be associated, in a very special way, with the salvation Christ brings. In fact, they were later subjected to many trials and persecutions. Many Jews have suffered like Jesus without believing in him, but confident in the promises of God and in the kingdom of Justice. Jesus is really their king.

In Latin, the letters I.N.R.I. (that we read on crucifixes) are the initial letters of Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.

who saved others cannot save himself. Let the King of Israel now come down from his cross and we will believe in him. ^{Ps 22:9} ^{Wis 2:17} ⁴³He trusted in God; let God rescue him if God wants to, since he himself said: I am the Son of God.”

^{Jn 5:18} ^{10:36} ^{19:7} ⁴⁴Even the robbers who were crucified with him insulted him.

⁴⁵From midday darkness fell over the whole land until mid-afternoon.

^{Mk 15:34} ^{Ps 22:2} ⁴⁶At about three o'clock, Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “*Eloi, Eloi, lamma Sabbacthani?*” which means: My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

⁴⁷As soon as they heard this, some of the bystanders said, “He is calling for Elijah.” ⁴⁸And one of them went quickly, took a sponge and soaked it in vinegar and, putting it on a reed, gave him to drink. ⁴⁹Others said, “Leave him alone, let us see whether Elijah comes to his rescue.”

⁵⁰Then Jesus cried out again in a loud voice and gave up his spirit.

After the death of Jesus

^{Ex 26:33} ^{Rev 21:2} ^{1P 3:19} • ⁵¹Just then the curtain of the Temple sanctuary was torn in two from top to bottom, the earth quaked, rocks were split, ⁵²tombs were opened, and several holy people who had died were raised to life. ⁵³They came out of the tombs after the resurrection of Jesus, entered the Holy City and appeared to many.

^{Rev 11:13} ⁵⁴The captain and the soldiers who guarded Jesus were greatly terrified when they saw the earthquake and all that had happened, and said, “Truly, this man was a Son of God.”

⁵⁵There were also some women there who watched from a distance; they had followed Jesus from Galilee and saw to his needs. ⁵⁶Among them

^{Lk 8:2} ^{13:55} ^{20:20}

were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of Zebedee’s sons.

The burial

(*Mk 15:42; Lk 23:50; Jn 19:38*)

⁵⁷It was now evening and there arrived a wealthy man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who was also a disciple of Jesus. ⁵⁸He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus, and the governor ordered that the body be given him. ⁵⁹So Joseph took the body of Jesus, wrapped it in a clean linen sheet ⁶⁰and laid it in his own new tomb which had been cut out of the rock. Then he rolled a huge stone across the entrance of the tomb and left. ⁶¹Mary Magdalene and the other Mary remained sitting there in front of the tomb.

^{Dt 21:23}

^{Acts 13:29}

^{Jn 19:25}

The guards at the tomb

⁶²On the following day (the day after the Preparation for the Passover), the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate ⁶³and said to him, “Sir, we remember that when that impostor was still alive, he said: I will rise after three days. ⁶⁴Therefore, have his tomb secured until the third day, lest his disciples come and steal the body and say to the people: He was raised from the dead. This would be a worse lie than the first.” ⁶⁵Pilate answered them, “You have soldiers, go and take all the necessary precautions”. ⁶⁶So they went to the tomb and secured it, sealing the stone and placing it under guard.

^{12:40} ^{16:21}

Jesus appears to the women

(*Mk 16:1; Lk 24:1; Jn 20:1*)

28 • ¹After the Sabbath, at the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to

tombs signify that the Risen Christ conquers the kingdom of the dead.

• **28.1 THE RISEN CHURCH**

On the apparitions of the risen Jesus, see the commentary on Lk 24:1.

• 51. This paragraph declares in apocalyptic style that the death of Jesus marked the completion of definitive salvation. Some apparitions of dead persons were interpreted as a sign of fulfillment of the prophecies of Daniel (12:2) referring to the Day of Salvation. The open

visit the tomb. ² Suddenly there was a violent earthquake: an angel of the Lord descending from heaven, came to the stone, rolled it from the entrance of the tomb, and sat on it. ³ His appearance was like lightning and his garment white as snow. ⁴ The guards trembled in fear and became like dead men when they saw the angel.

17:2
Acts
1:10

⁵ The angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. ⁶ He is not here, for he is risen as he said. Come, see the place where they laid him; ⁷ then go at once and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead and is going ahead of you to Galilee. You will see him there. This is my message for you.”

26:32
Mk
14:28
Jn
21

⁸ They left the tomb at once in holy fear, yet with great joy, and they ran to tell the news to the disciples.

⁹ Suddenly, Jesus met them on the way and said, “Peace.” The women approached him, embraced his feet and

worshiped him. ¹⁰ But Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to set out for Galilee; there they will see me.”

¹¹ While the women were on their way, the guards returned to the city and some of them reported to the chief priests all that had happened. ¹² The chief priests met with the Jewish authorities and decided to give the soldiers a good sum of money, ¹³ with this instruction, “Say that his disciples came by night while you were asleep, and stole the body of Jesus. ¹⁴ If Pilate comes to know of this, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.” ¹⁵ The soldiers accepted the money and did as they were told. This story has circulated among the Jews until this day.

Jesus 'sends the apostles

• ¹⁶ As for the Eleven disciples, they went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. ¹⁷ When they

This first paragraph is still in apocalyptic style, with its resplendent angel and another earthquake. The Gospel refuses to describe a triumphal departure of Jesus, as his readers would have preferred. The risen Jesus is only seen by those who believe: the women who look for him will see him, the soldiers and rulers who do not seek him will not understand.

The evangelist mentions the names of Mary of Magdala and the other Mary, the mother of James and of Joseph (Mt 27:55), two of the “brothers of Jesus” (Mt 13:55), his closest cousins. (She is a relative of Mary, the mother of Jesus, Jn 19:25).

Suddenly, Jesus met them on the way (v. 9). It is obvious that Matthew is combining two different events; one, the discovery of the empty tomb, and the other, which happened later on, the apparition of Jesus to Mary Magdalene alone as related in John 20:11-18.

Set out for Galilee (v. 10). Why did Jesus say this date if he was going to appear later that same day in Jerusalem? (Lk 24:13-42). It is not clear. Probably the evangelists combined several apparitions to simplify their narration. Anyway, time was needed for the apostles to believe in the Resurrection and understand something about it. After the two apparitions in Jerusalem, in which Jesus tried to convince them that he was not a phantom or a spirit, they would have to return to their provinces and environments, far away from the city that had caused them such trauma, in order to ponder what they had expe-

rienced. In Galilee, Jesus will manifest himself differently, making them understand that he is already glorified, that his existence is earthly no more.

A woman, Mary Magdalene, conveys the message, in order to indicate that, in the Church, not everything will come from the authorities. God communicates with whomever he wishes, giving prophetic messages to simple people and to women.

The resurrection of Christ is the pivotal point of the Gospel; yet Matthew reports it briefly. Why? Because when Matthew wrote his Gospel, the Resurrection was considered too great an event to put into writing: rather, it should be proclaimed and witnessed to by the Spirit at work in the Christian communities.

Are we in a different situation? The Church that talks of the Risen Christ should never be a powerful Church but a Risen Church. If the Church finds itself in a situation where there is no apparent hope of salvation, yet it is revived by the power of God; if in each generation the Church seems doomed to die because of its ancient structures, its worldly ways or the persecution it undergoes, yet it is nevertheless given new energies and new apostles by the Lord, then the Church is a witness that the Lord has risen and has given her the power to rise.

- 16. *EVANGELIZATION – THE TRINITY*
Jesus sent his apostles to evangelize the world.

saw Jesus, they bowed before him, although some doubted.

11:27
Jn
3:35
17:2
Acts
1:8
Eph
1:20

¹⁸ Then Jesus approached them and said, “I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹ Go, therefore, and make disciples from all na-

tions. Baptize them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teach them to fulfill all that I have commanded you. I am with you always until the end of this world.”

Ex
3:12
Jos
1:5
Jn
14:23
13:39
24:3

The last apparition is related in a very simple way: no sudden appearance, no fear – no physical demonstration of the reality of Jesus. What is important are the words of Jesus Master.

Although some doubted (v. 17). With this, Matthew sums up the last apparitions of Jesus. Not all the disciples of Jesus (the Eleven and the rest) believed so quickly in the resurrection of Jesus.

Make disciples from all nations (v. 19). Jesus, following the example of Jewish teachers of his time, gathered around him a group of disciples who lived with him. The teacher knew his disciples and the disciples knew the teacher by sharing everyday life. The same holds true today: evangelization implies interpersonal sharing.

To evangelize means to help someone ponder his former experiences until he can recognize in the person of Christ, in his death and resurrection, the truth that lights up his own life.

Those who believe will be baptized in the one Name of *the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*, the Three Persons Christ taught us about. Of course, he named them separately because the Father is not the Son and the Son is not the Holy Spirit; in spite of that, the Three are the same God. Upon entering the Church, the baptized will enter into communion with the Father, with the Son and with the Holy Spirit. The Church is, before anything else, communion.

See Acts 19:5 regarding baptism *in the Name of the Lord Jesus*.

Teach them to fulfill all that I have commanded you (v. 20). These instructions of Jesus have first place in Matthew’s Gospel; they are in the five discourses and we are to do the will of the Father just as Jesus has revealed it.

I am with you always. Here we find again the certitude which the name Emmanuel already expressed in 1:23: Jesus is God-with-us until the end of time. The first generation Christians thought that Christ would not delay in returning but at the time the Gospel was written, they already understood that history would continue; the nation of Israel rejected the salvation offered to her and only a minority believed. Jesus was now committing himself to his apostles and to his Church and now began to build the Church of his apostles.

The Catholic Church is different from Protestant or Evangelical churches, because it was founded by the apostles of Jesus. Only she feels obliged to remain united around the successors of the apostles, the bishops; this unity and continuity are at times hard to maintain, especially in situations where it would seem easier to form a new reformed community alongside her. Obedience to the will of the Father is the means by which he purifies and strengthens our faith. Jesus is and remains “Lord” regarding the destiny of “his” Church.