

Sunday Readings Study for Small Communities

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

Cycle C - March 6, 2022



OPENING PRAYER

Leader: Be with me, Lord, when I am in trouble.

All: You who dwell in the shelter of the Most High, who abide in the shadow of the Almighty, say to the Lord, "My refuge and fortress, my God in whom I trust."

Leader: *Let us invoke the presence of God:*

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and renew the face of the earth.

O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit have instructed the hearts of the faithful grant that by the same Spirit we may truly wise and ever enjoy His consolations.

Though Christ, our Lord. Amen.

FIRST READING [Deuteronomy 26 (4-10)]

Moses spoke to the people, saying:

"The priest shall receive the basket from you and shall set it in front of the altar of the Lord, your God. Then you shall declare before the Lord, your God, 'My father was a wandering Aramean who went down to Egypt with a small household and lived there as an alien. But there he became a nation great, strong, and numerous. When the Egyptians maltreated and oppressed us, imposing hard labor upon us, we cried to the Lord, the God of our fathers, and he heard our cry and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression.

He brought us out of Egypt with his strong hand and outstretched arm, with terrifying power, with signs and wonders; and bringing us into this country, he gave us this land flowing with milk and honey.

Therefore, I have now brought you the firstfruits of the products of the soil which you, O Lord, have given me.' And having set them before the Lord, your God, you shall bow down in his presence."

We Christians are used to reciting the Creed (which, incidentally, is not a prayer, but a summary of the things we believe), as a recitation of concepts: I believe in God the Father - in God the Son - in the Holy Spirit Holy, in the Church, in the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, in the forgiveness of sins, in the resurrection, etc.

But the Israelites had a different way of expressing their faith. They did so by reviewing God's actions in history. This being so, this brief passage can be understood as a Jewish Creed. In a few lines it is summarized how great God has been with his people. We can note three elements: (1) The call to the patriarchs; (2) Deliverance from Egypt; (3) The gift of the promised land. Each of these stages is understood as a demonstration of God's affection, who acts in favor of his people.

The Israelite believers recognize, when they review their history, that everything they have is a gift from God. Therefore, the most logical reaction is to offer God the first fruits of his harvest. The gifts offered in the temple, apart from contributing to the support of those who serve there and thus guaranteeing the maintenance of the cult, had the mark of gratitude to God and recognition of his power.

Only God should be the object of recognition, since everything we have comes from him. A couple of weeks ago we came across a text from the prophet Jeremiah that warned us against placing our hope in men ("Cursed is the man who trusts in men..."). It is good to remember at this time that if sometimes there are people who have helped us, it is because God has used them to bring us his mercy and providence. All good things come from God.

- (1) What are the blessings that we can count on as a parish community?
- (2) And as a family?
- (3) And on a personal level?
- (4) Have there been times when it seemed that God was absent? What happened?

SECOND READING [Romans 10 (8-13)]

Brothers and sisters:

What does Scripture say? The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart—that is, the word of faith that we preach—for, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. For the Scripture says, No one who believes in him will be put to shame.

For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all, enriching all who call upon him.

For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

Paul collects what is probably the oldest formula of faith of Christians: Kyrios Iesous, Jesus is Lord. The only way that leads to salvation is faith in Jesus Christ, the Lord. This salvation is not for the believer something that he has to search painfully and that is far from him, but something that he carries in his heart and confesses with his lips.

If we remember, two Sundays ago we reflected on this second reading, other words of the apostle Paul himself told us that if we do not believe in the Risen Christ, our faith is in vain. Now Paul, consistent with his ideas, tells us in another way. Faith here, as in many other biblical places, is not only intellectual assent, although it includes it, but the total attitude of man. The external (“mouth”, “lips”) and the internal (“heart”). The content of that faith is to recognize and accept the Risen Lord Jesus. To believe that he lives after his death.

The pagans did not seek justice, they did not worry about pleasing God; but justice in person came out to meet them. The Jews, on the other hand, had the law of justice, but they did not even fulfill the law; fewer still reached the goal to which the law led, Christ, who gives justice to everyone who believes.

Because the problem is not in walking or running, but in doing it in the right direction; rather, it lies in letting oneself be taken by the one who takes us to the goal. This is the faith that saves, the one that leads us to place all our hope in the Lord. It is not the almost magical declaration of a few words (“I believe in Jesus Christ”) that brings salvation, but the exercise in practical life of the effects of that faith.

(1) How would you explain your faith to others?

(2) Why don't we all make the same faith commitment?

GOSPEL [Luke 4 (21-30)]

Filled with the Holy Spirit, Jesus returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the desert for forty days, to be tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and when they were over he was hungry.

The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread.”

Jesus answered him, “It is written, One does not live on bread alone.”

Then he took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a single instant. The devil said to him, “I shall give to you all this power and glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I may give it to whomever I wish. All this will be yours, if you worship me.”

Jesus said to him in reply, “It is written You shall worship the Lord, your God, and him alone shall you serve.”

Then he led him to Jerusalem, made him stand on the parapet of the temple, and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written: He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you, and: With their hands they will support you, lest you dash your foot against a stone.”

Jesus said to him in reply, “It also says, You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test.” When the devil had finished every temptation, he departed from him for a time.



After the baptism in the Jordan, which launches Jesus on the mission, and before he begins preaching and acting in Galilee, we have this scene full of meaning that symbolizes and synthesizes, by contrast, the style of Messiah that Jesus wants to be. Jesus prepares to begin the proclamation of his Kingdom. The scene of prayer in the Jordan in which he has been manifested as the beloved Son of God, now continues more slowly, in the encounter with the Father in the desert, where he is moved by the power of the Spirit. And here he considers what his mission must mean. And the approach is radically realistic: experience everything that would lead him astray from God's path, and overcome it, and prepare to undertake his mission according to God's way of thinking and not the devil's.

As the devil cannot deviate him from the path of God, he leaves him until a new opportunity: it will be in the passion, "the hour of the power of darkness", when Jesus will have to decide whether to go all the way in the path of God, and will win again. Placing this scene here, the evangelists are saying several affirmations: that Jesus is human, and therefore problems and obscurities arise for him about the mission that he has to carry out; that Christians and the Church are also human, and having temptations does not disqualify anyone; and that there are certain temptations, those that Jesus had, which are the ones that must be fought the most, because they are the ones that most radically contradict the way of Jesus.

The three temptations are certainly well characterized and ultimately are very similar: they are to propose to Jesus that he act in other ways different from the very content of what he wants to announce: faithful, trusting, devoted love, as the only way of living that truly humanizes and divinizes. Faced with that, the devil proposes:

- 1) Escape from the difficulties of this surrendered love, and seek tranquility and well-being using the name of God.
- 2) Dominate everything, and be able to impose what Jesus wants to impose (it is the most "diabolical" temptation: in the other two, the devil tells Jesus to make God intervene; in this one it is not necessary).
- 3) Get people's adhesion by enticing them with spectacular performances instead of seeking to convert hearts to God.

(1) What is worse? Have temptations or give in to them?

(2) Was Jesus Christ tempted again? When? How?

(3) What are the most present temptations in our society?

(4) How can they be combated...and overcome?

(5) When an athlete goes to a competition, he trains to strengthen his condition. We could say the same in the spiritual area... How can we make ourselves strong to resist the onslaught of the evil one?

(6) How can we become "out of shape" spiritually? What would we have to do (or stop doing) to lose spiritual vigor?

(7) Can this Lent serve us to come out of it stronger? In what way, for example?

CLOSING PRAYER

Leader: *Lord of the day and night, of the beginning and of the end: At the closing of this meeting, once again we lift up our hearts to You, divine source of all life.*

All: **We thank you for the gifts you have bestowed on us. We thank you for the love expressed in companionship and understanding, mutual respect and shared ideas. We give you thanks for your holy power that will help us in our concerns that we have shared. For these and all the gifts that come from You, we give you thanks.**

Leader: *Lord hear our prayers* (attendees can propose their own needs of prayer)

All: **In the same way in which we have being blessed by your presence as we meet, we ask now to bless our safe return to our homes. May your holy blessing be over us + in the name of the Father**

Leader: *May the King of the eternal glory gather us together in His heavenly banquet. Amen.*