

the goods belong to God and that we are simple administrators of these goods, in such a way that there will be abundant life for all. The practice of sharing and of solidarity is one of the characteristics of the first Christian communities: “None of their members was ever in want, as all those who owned land or houses would sell them and bring the money from the sale of them to present it to the apostles; (Acts 4: 34-35; 2: 44-45). The money from the sale, offered to the apostles, was not accumulated, but rather “it was then distributed to any who might be in need” (Acts 4: 35b; 2: 45). The entrance into the community of persons who were richer introduced into the community the mentality of accumulation and blocked the movement of solidarity and of sharing. James warns these persons: “Now you rich! Lament; weep for the miseries that are coming to you. Your wealth is rotting; your clothes are all moth-eaten” (Jm 5: 1-3). To learn the way to the Kingdom, we all need to become pupils of that poor widow, who shared all she had, what was necessary to live (Mk 12: 41-44).

Personal Questions

- How is it that the two cents of the widow can be worth more than one thousand dollars of the rich? Look well at the text and see why Jesus praises the poor widow. What message does this text contain for us today?
- What difficulties and what joys have you found in your life in the practice of solidarity and in sharing with others?

Concluding Prayer

My mouth is full of your praises,
filled with your splendor all day long. Do not reject me in my old age,
nor desert me when my strength is failing. (Ps 71: 8-9)

Sunday, June 6, 2021

*The institution of the Eucharist
The supreme power of love
Mark 14:12-16.22-26*

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus, send your Spirit to help us to read the Scriptures with the same mind that you read them to the disciples on the way to Emmaus. In the light of the Word, written in the Bible, you helped them to discover the presence of God in the disturbing events of your sentence and death. Thus, the cross that seemed to be the end of all hope became for them the source of life and of resurrection.

Create in us silence so that we may listen to your voice in Creation and in the Scriptures, in events and in people, above all in the poor and suffering. May your word guide us so that we too, like the two disciples from Emmaus, may experience the force of your resurrection and witness to others that you are alive in our midst as source of fraternity, justice, and peace. We ask this of you, Jesus, son of Mary, who revealed to us the Father and sent us your Spirit. Amen.

Reading

a) A key to the reading:

Today, the feast of *Corpus Christi*, the Church places before us the scene of the Last Supper, the last meeting of Jesus with his disciples. This was a tense meeting, full of contradictions. Judas had already decided to betray Jesus (Mk 14: 10). Peter had protested that he would not deny him (Mk 14: 30). Jesus knew all this. But he did not lose his calm or his sense of friendship. Rather, it was precisely during this Last Supper that he instituted the Eucharist and realized the supreme sign of his love for them (Jn 13: 1).

The four verses that describe the Eucharist (Mk 14: 22-25) are part of a larger context (Mk 14: 1-31). The verses that come before and after the Eucharist, greatly help us understand better the significance of Jesus' action. Before the institution of the Eucharist, Mark speaks of the decision of the authorities to kill Jesus (Mk 1: 1-2), of the act of fidelity of the anonymous woman who anoints Jesus in anticipation of his burial (Mk 14: 3-9), of the betrayal pact of Judas (Mk 14: 10-11), of the preparation for the Passover (Mk 14: 12-16) and of the sign of the traitor (Mk 14: 17-21). After the institution, there follows the foretelling of the flight by all (Mk 14: 26-28) and the announcement that Peter would deny him (Mk 14: 29-31).

The liturgy of today cuts the text in pieces, but keeps the essential elements of the story of the institution of the Eucharist (Mk 14: 12-16, 22-26). In our text we keep verses 17-21 and 27-31, which are omitted in the text of the Mass. In our commentary we can limit ourselves to the text offered in the liturgy of the day. As we read, let us imagine we are with Jesus and the disciples in the room, partaking of the Last Supper, and let us seek to keep our attention on what strikes us most and what touches our hearts most. A division of the text to help us with the reading:

- Mark 14: 12: The disciples want to know where to celebrate the Passover
- Mark 14: 13-15: Jesus tells them where and how to prepare for the Passover
- Mark 14: 16: The disciples do what Jesus tells them to do
- Mark 14: 17-21: The announcement of the betrayal of Judas
- Mark 14: 22-24: Jesus gives a new meaning to the bread and wine
- Mark 14: 25-26: The final words
- Mark 14: 27-31: The announcement of the dispersion of all and of the denial of Peter

b) Text:

¹² On the first day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover lamb was sacrificed, his disciples said to him, 'Where do you want us to go and make the preparations for you to eat the Passover?' ¹³ So he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, 'Go into the city and you will meet a man carrying a pitcher of water. Follow him, ¹⁴ and say to the owner of the house which he enters, "The Master says: Where is the room for me to eat the Passover with my disciples?" ¹⁵ He will show you a large upper room furnished with couches, all prepared. Make the preparations for us there.'

The disciples set out and went to the city and found everything as he had told them, and prepared the Passover.

When evening came he arrived with the Twelve ¹⁸ And while they were at table eating,

Jesus said, 'In truth I tell you, one of you is about to betray me, one of you eating with me.'¹⁹ They were distressed and said to him, one after another, 'Not me, surely?'²⁰ He said to them, 'It is one of the Twelve, one who is dipping into the same dish with me.'²¹ Yes, the Son of man is going to his fate, as the scriptures say he will, but alas for that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! Better for that man if he had never been born.²² And as they were eating he took bread, and when he had said the blessing he broke it and gave it to them. 'Take it,' he said, 'this is my body.'²³ Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he handed it to them, and all drank from it,²⁴ and he said to them, 'This is my blood, the blood of the covenant, poured out for many.'²⁵ In truth I tell you, I shall never drink wine any more until the day I drink the new wine in the kingdom of God.'

²⁶ After the psalms had been sung they left for the Mount of Olives.²⁷ And Jesus said to them, 'You will all fall away, for the scripture says: I shall strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered;²⁸ however, after my resurrection I shall go before you into Galilee.'²⁹ Peter said, 'Even if all fall away, I will not.'³⁰ And Jesus said to him, 'In truth I tell you, this day, this very night, before the cock crows twice, you will have disowned me three times.'³¹ But he repeated still more earnestly, 'If I have to die with you, I will never disown you.' And they all said the same.

A Moment of Prayerful Silence

so that the Word of God may penetrate and enlighten our life.

Some Questions

to help us in our personal reflection.

- Which part of this text struck you most and why?
- Name one by one the many events that the text describes.
- What is the attitude of Jesus towards Judas who betrays him, and towards Peter who denies him?
- What does the action of Jesus mean when he breaks the bread saying: "Take and eat! This is my body which will be given up for you!" How does this text help us understand the Eucharist better?
- Look into the mirror of the text, enter into your heart and ask yourself: "Am I like Peter who denies? Am I like Judas who betrays? Am I like the twelve who run away? Or am I like the anonymous woman who remained faithful (Mk 14: 3-9)?"

To Go Deeper into the Text

a) The Context:

We are in the room of the Last Supper. What happened over the last couple of days has heightened the tension between Jesus and the authorities. Jesus' solemn entry into Jerusalem (Mk 11: 1-11), the driving out of the sellers at the temple (Mk 11: 12-26), the discussions with the priests, the Scribes and the elders (Mk 11: 27 to 12: 12), with the Pharisees and the Herodians (Mk 12: 13-17), with the Sadducees (Mk 12: 18-27), with the Scribes (Mk 12: 28- 40), his reflections on the offerings of the rich and the poor (Mk 12: 41-44), his announcement concerning the destruction of the Temple (Mk 13:1-3) and his

discourse on the final judgment (Mk 13: 4-37): all these things helped to increase the opposition of the great against Jesus. On the one hand we have the anonymous woman, a faithful disciple who accepted Jesus as Messiah and as crucified (Mk 14: 2-9), on the other we have the disciples who could not understand and even less accept the Cross, and who wanted to run away, deny and betray (Mk 14: 17-21, 27-31). And in the middle of this tense and menacing environment we have the act of love of Jesus who gives himself completely while breaking the bread for his disciples.

In the 70's, in Mark's time, many Christians from fear had refused, denied or betrayed their faith. And now they were asking themselves: "Have we broken our relationship with Jesus? Is it possible that he has broken his relationship with us? Is it possible for us to go back?" There was no clear answer. Jesus had not left anything in writing. It was by reflecting on what happened and remembering the love of Jesus that Christians gradually discovered the answer. As we shall see in the commentary, by the way Mark describes the Last Supper, he communicates the reply he discovered to these questions of the community, namely, that the welcome and love of Jesus are greater than the defeat and failure of the disciples. A return is always possible!

b) A Commentary on the Text:

Mark 14: 12-16: Preparation for the Passover Supper

In complete contrast with the anonymous disciple who anointed Jesus, Judas, one of the twelve, decided to betray Jesus and conspired with the enemies who promised him money (Mk 14: 10-12). Jesus knows that he will be betrayed. Nevertheless, he seeks to fraternize with the disciples at the last supper. They must have spent a good bit of money to hire the "large upper room furnished with couches, all prepared" (Mk 14: 15). Then, it being the eve of the Passover, the city was overcrowded with visitors. The population usually tripled. It was difficult to find a room to meet in.

The night of the Passover, families came from all parts of the country, bringing with them their lamb for the sacrifice in the Temple and, immediately after, each family celebrated in the intimacy of the family the Passover Supper and ate the lamb. The celebration of the Passover Supper was presided over by the father of the family. That is why Jesus presided at the ceremony and celebrated the Passover with his disciples, his new "family" (cf. Mk 3: 33- 35).

That "large upper room" stayed in the memory of the first Christians as the place of the first Eucharist. They were there after the Ascension of the Lord Jesus (Acts 1: 13); they were there when the Holy Spirit descended upon them on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2: 1). It must have been in the same room that they met to pray when they were persecuted (Acts 4: 23, 31) and where Peter met with them after his liberation (Acts 12: 12). Memory is concrete, connected to times and places of life.

Mark 14: 22-26: The Eucharist is the act of supreme love.

The last meeting of Jesus with his disciples took place in the solemn atmosphere of the traditional celebration of the Passover. The contrast is very pronounced. On the one hand we have the disciples who feel insecure and do not understand what is going on. On the other hand we have Jesus, calm and master of the situation, presiding at the supper and fulfilling the act of the breaking of the bread, inviting his friends to partake of his body and blood. He does what he always prayed for: to give his life so that his friends might have life. This is the deep meaning of the Eucharist: to learn from Jesus to share oneself, to give oneself, without fear of the forces that threaten life. Life is stronger than death. Faith in the resurrection cancels the power of death.

After the supper, Jesus goes to the Garden with his friends and announces that all will

abandon him: They will flee or be scattered! But he already tells them: “after my resurrection I shall go before you into Galilee!” They break their relationship with Jesus, but not Jesus with them! He goes on waiting for them in Galilee, where three years previously he had first called them. That is, the certainty of the presence of Jesus in the life of the disciple is stronger than abandonment or flight! Jesus goes on calling. He always calls! It is always possible to come back! This is the message of Mark to the Christians of the 70’s and for all of us.

The way Mark describes the Eucharist gives greater stress to the contrast between the action of Jesus and the attitude of the disciples. Before his act of love, Jesus speaks of the betrayal of Judas (Mk 14: 17-21) and, after the act of love he speaks of the denial of Peter and of the flight of the disciples (Mk 14: 26-31). Thus he places emphasis on the unconditional love of Jesus who overcomes the betrayal, the denial and the flight of his friends. It is the revelation of the gratuitous love of the Father! Anyone who experiences this love will say: “neither... the heights nor the depths, nor any created thing whatever, will be able to come between us and the love of God, known to us in Christ Jesus our Lord!” (Rm 8: 39).

Further information:

- **The celebration of the Passover in Jesus’ times**

The Passover was the principal feast of the Jews. During this feast they commemorated their liberation from Egypt, which is at the origin of the people of God. But it was not just a simple recalling of the Exodus. The Passover was a door that opened once more every year so that the generations might have access to the same liberating action of God who, in the past, had given rise to his people. By the celebration of the Passover, each generation, each person, drew from the same spring from which their fathers in the past had drawn when they were liberated from slavery in Egypt. The celebration was like an annual rebirth.

In Jesus’ times, the celebration of the Passover was such that the participants might travel the same journey that was travelled by the people after their liberation from Egypt. For this to happen, the celebration took place with many symbols: bitter herbs, a lamb poorly roasted, unleavened bread, a chalice of wine, and other symbols. During the celebration, the youngest son had to ask the father: “Dad, why is this night different from all other nights? Why are we eating bitter herbs? Why is the lamb poorly roasted? Why is the bread unleavened?” And the father would answer with a free narration of past events: “The bitter herbs allow us to experience the hardness and bitterness of slavery. The poorly cooked lamb recalls the speed of the divine liberating action. The unleavened bread shows the need for renewal and constant conversion. It also recalls the lack of time to prepare everything because of the speed of the divine action”. This manner of celebrating the Passover, presided by the father of the family, gave the presider freedom and creativity in the manner he conducted the celebration.

- **The Eucharist: The Passover celebrated by Jesus at the Last Supper**

It was in order to celebrate the Passover of the Jews that Jesus, on the eve of his death, met with his disciples. It was his last meeting with them. That is why we call it the “Last Supper” (Mk 14: 22-26; Mt 26: 26-29; Lk 22: 14-20). The many aspects of the Passover of the Jews continue to be valid for the celebration of the Passover of Jesus and form its background. They help us understand the whole significance of the Eucharist.

Taking advantage of the freedom that the ritual gave him, Jesus gave new significance to the symbols of bread and wine. When he shared the bread he said: “*Take and eat, this is my body given up for you!*” When he shared the

chalice of wine he said: *“Take and drink, this is my blood shed for you and for many.”* Finally, aware that this was the last meeting, the “last supper”, Jesus said: *“I shall never drink wine any more until the day I drink new wine in the kingdom of God”* (Mk 14: 25). He thus united his commitment, symbolized by the broken and shared bread, with the utopia of the Kingdom.

Eucharist means celebrating the memory of Jesus who gives his life for us, so that it might be possible for us to live in God and to have access to the Father. This is the deep meaning of the Eucharist: to make present in our midst, and to experience in our lives, the experience of Jesus who gives himself in his death and resurrection.

- **The celebration of the Eucharist among the early Christians**

Not always have Christians succeeded in maintaining this ideal of the Eucharist. In the 50's, Paul criticizes the community of Corinth that, in the celebration of *the supper of the Lord*, did the exact opposite because *each one of you has his own supper first, and there is one going hungry while another is getting drunk* (1 Cor 1: 20-22). Celebrating the Eucharist as a memorial of Jesus means taking on the plan of Jesus. It means assimilating the plan of Jesus. It means assimilating his life shared, completely at the service of the lives of the poor.

At the end of the first century, the Gospel of John, rather than describe the rite of the Eucharist, describes how Jesus knelt down to render the lowest service of those times: *washing feet*. After rendering this service, Jesus does not say: *“Do this in memory of me”* (as is said at the institution of the Eucharist in Lk 22: 19; 1 Cor 11: 24), but he says: *“Do as I have done to you”* (Jn 13: 15). Instead of ordering a repetition of the rite, the Gospel of John asks for attitudes of life that keep alive the memory of the gift that Jesus offers himself without limits. The Christians of John's community felt they needed to insist on the meaning of the Eucharist as service rather as rite.

- **A Summary**

To forget the richness of the Passover of the Jews when we celebrate the Eucharist is like tearing down the wall where the frame is hung. The richness of the celebration of the Passover, as it was celebrated in the Old Testament and in the times of Jesus, helps us deepen the meaning of the Eucharist and avoids the sense of routine that trivializes everything. Summarizing what we have said, here are some points that may enrich our celebrations:

- Be aware of the oppression in which we live today - chewing bitter herbs
- Remember the liberation from oppression – the answers of the father to the questions of the son
- Experience the speed of the liberating force of God – poorly cooked meat and unleavened bread
- Celebrate the Covenant; commit yourself once more – committing ourselves in eating the bread that Jesus offers
- Be thankful for the wonders of God towards us – acts of praise
- Rekindle faith, hope and love – encourage each other
- Remember what has already been achieved and what remains to be done – remember the things God has done for us
- Recreate the same gift that Jesus made of himself – washing feet

- Live the passion, death and resurrection – of the constant mystery of life
- Practice communion, source of fraternity – acts of peace and help

Praying with a Psalm: Psalm 16 (15)

The Lord is my share of the inheritance

Protect me, O God, in you is my refuge. To Yahweh I say, 'You are my Lord, my happiness is in none of the sacred spirits of the earth.' They only take advantage of all who love them. People flock to their teeming idols. Never shall I pour libations to them! Never take their names on my lips. My birthright, my cup is Yahweh; you, you alone, hold my lot secure.

The measuring-line marks out for me a delightful place, my birthright is all I could wish. I bless Yahweh who is my counsellor, even at night my heart instructs me. I keep Yahweh before me always, for with him at my right hand, nothing can shake me.

So my heart rejoices, my soul delights, my body too will rest secure, for you will not abandon me to Sheol, you cannot allow your faithful servant to see the abyss. You will teach me the path of life, unbounded joy in your presence, at your right-hand delight forever.

Final Prayer

Lord Jesus, we thank for the word that has enabled us to understand better the will of the Father. May your Spirit enlighten our actions and grant us the strength to practice that which your Word has revealed to us. May we, like Mary, your mother, not only listen to but also practice the Word. You who live and reign with the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit forever and ever. Amen.

Monday, June 7, 2021

Opening Prayer

God of wisdom and love, source of all good, send your Spirit to teach us your truth and guide our actions in your way of peace.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading - Matthew 5: 1-12

Seeing the crowds, Jesus went onto the mountain. And when he was seated his disciples came to him.

Then he began to speak. This is what he taught them:

How blessed are the poor in spirit: the kingdom of Heaven is theirs.

Blessed are the gentle: they shall have the earth as inheritance.

Blessed are those who mourn: they shall be comforted.