



Opening prayer

Oh Father who wanted to save man
by the Cross of Christ, your Son,
grant to us who have known on earth
his mystery of love,
to enjoy in Heaven the fruits of his redemption.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.

1. LECTIO

Reading: John 3, 13-17

Jesus said to Nicodemus: 'No one has gone up to heaven except the one who came down from heaven, the Son of man; as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so must the Son of man be lifted up so that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him. For this is how God loved the world: he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. For God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but so that through him the world might be saved.'

2. MEDITATIO

a) Key for the reading:

The text proposed to us by the Liturgy has been taken from the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. It should not surprise us that the passage chosen for this celebration forms part of the fourth Gospel, because, it is precisely this Gospel which presents the mystery of the cross of the Lord, as the exaltation. This is clear from the beginning of the Gospel: "as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so must the Son of man be lifted up" (Jn 3, 14; Dn 7, 13). John explains the mystery of the Incarnate Word in the paradoxical movement of the descent-ascent (Jn 1, 14.18; 3, 13). In fact, it is this mystery which offers the key for the reading in order to understand the evolution of the identity and of the mission of the *passus et gloriosus* of Jesus Christ, and that we may well say that this is not only valid for the text of John. The Letter to the Ephesians, for example, uses this paradoxical movement to explain the mystery of Christ: "Now, when it says, 'he went up', it must mean that he had gone down to the deepest levels of the

earth" (Ef 4, 9).

Jesus is the Son of God who becoming Son of man (Jn 3,13) makes known to us the mysteries of God (Jn 1, 18). He alone can do this, in so far as he alone has seen the Father (Jn 6, 46). We can say that the mystery of the Word who descends from Heaven responds to the yearning of the prophets: who will go up to heaven to reveal this mystery to us? (cf. Dt 30, 12; Pr 30, 4). The fourth Gospel is over full of references to the mystery of he who "is from Heaven" (1 Co 15, 47). The following are some quotations or references: Jn 6, 33. 38.51. 62; 8, 42; 16, 28-30; 17, 5.

The exaltation of Jesus is precisely in his descent to come to us, up to death, and the death on the Cross, on which he was lifted up like the serpent in the desert, which, "anybody... who looked at it would survive" (Nm 21,7-9; Zc 12,10). John reminds us in the scene of the death of Jesus of Christ being lifted up: "They will look to the one whom they have pierced" (Jn 19, 37). In the context of the fourth Gospel, to turn and look means, "to know", "to understand", "to see".

Frequently, in John's Gospel, Jesus speaks about his being lifted up: "When you have lifted up the Son of man, then you will know that I am He" (Jn 8,28); "when I am lifted up from the earth, I shall draw all peoples to myself. By these words he indicated the kind of death he would die" (Jn 12, 32-33). In the Synoptics also Jesus announces to his disciples the mystery of his condemnation to death on the cross (see Mt 20, 27-29; Mk 10, 32-34; Lk 18, 31-33). In fact, Christ had "to suffer all that to enter into his glory" (Lk 24, 26).

This mystery reveals the great love which God has for us. He is the Son given to us, "so that anyone who believes in him will not be lost, but will have eternal life", this Son whom we have rejected and crucified. But precisely in this rejection on our part, God has manifested himself to us his fidelity and his love which does not stop before the hardness of our heart. And even in spite of our rejection and our contempt he gives us salvation (cf. Acts 4, 27-28), remaining firm in fulfilling his plan of mercy: God, in fact, has not sent his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world may be saved through him".

b) A few questions:

- i) What struck you in the Gospel?
- ii) What does the exaltation of Christ and of his cross mean for you?
- iii) What consequences does this paradoxical movement of descent-ascent imply in the living out of faith?

3. ORATIO

Psalm 77 (1-2, 34-38)

My people, listen to my teaching,
pay attention to what I say.

I will speak to you in poetry,
unfold the mysteries of the past.

Whenever he slaughtered them,
they began to seek him,

they turned back and looked eagerly for him,
recalling that God was their rock,
God the Most High, their redeemer.
They tried to hoodwink him with their mouths,
their tongues were deceitful towards him;
their hearts were not loyal to him,
they were not faithful to his covenant.
But in his compassion he forgave their guilt
instead of killing them,
time and again repressing his anger
instead of rousing his full wrath.

4. CONTEMPLATIO

"Jesus Christ as Lord,
to the glory of God the Father." (Phil 2,11)