



1. 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.

2. Reading

a) A key to the reading:

The text of this Sunday's liturgy is part of a long section typical of Luke (Lk 9:51 to 19:28), which describes the slow ascent of Jesus towards Jerusalem, where he will be made prisoner, sentenced and die. A large part of this section is given to instructing the disciples. Our text is part of this instruction to the disciples. Jesus teaches them how to live in community (Lk 17:1).

Luke 17:5-10b) A division of the text as a help to its reading:

Luke 17:5: The apostles ask Jesus to increase their faith

Luke 17:6: Living one's faith the size of a mustard seed

Luke 17:7-9: Living one's life at the free service of God and neighbour

Luke 17:10: Application of the comparison with the useless servant

c) The text:

5 The apostles said to the Lord, 'Increase our faith.' 6 The Lord replied, 'If you had faith like a mustard seed you could say to this mulberry tree, "Be uprooted and planted in the sea," and it would obey you. 7 'Which of you, with a servant ploughing or minding sheep, would say to him when he returned from the fields, "Come and have your meal at once"? 8 Would he not be more likely to say, "Get my supper ready; fasten your belt and wait on

me while I eat and drink. You yourself can eat and drink afterwards"? 9 Must he be grateful to the servant for doing what he was told? 10 So with you: when you have done all you have been told to do, say, "We are useless servants: we have done no more than our duty." "

3. A moment of prayerful silence

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

4. Some questions

to help us in our personal reflection.

- a) What part of this text did I like best or struck me most?
- b) Faith in whom? In God? In the other? Or in oneself?
- c) Faith the size of a mustard seed: is my faith like this?
- d) To give one's life in service without expecting any return: am I capable of living thus?

5. A key to the reading

in order to delve deeper into the theme.

a) The historical context of our text:

The historical context of Luke's Gospel always has two dimensions: the time of Jesus in the 30's, when the things described in the text took place, and the time of the communities to whom Luke addresses his Gospel, more than 50 years after the events. When Luke reports the words and actions of Jesus, he is not only thinking of what happened in the 30's, but rather of the life of the communities of the 80's with all their problems and concerns, and he tries to offer them some light and possible solutions (Lk 1:1-4).

b) A key to the reading: the literary context:

The literary context (Lk 17:1-21) within which is our text (Lk 17:5-10) helps us better understand Jesus' words. In this text Luke brings together the words Jesus used to teach how one should live in community. Firstly (Lk 17:1-2), Jesus draws the attention of the disciples to the little ones, that is those excluded from society. The communities must hold these dear. Secondly (Lk 17:3-4), he draws attention to the weak members of the communities. In their regard, Jesus wants the disciples to feel responsible for them and to take an attitude of understanding and reconciliation towards them. Thirdly (Lk 17:5-6) (and here begins our text), Jesus speaks of faith in God that must be the driving force of the life of the communities. Fourthly (Lk 17:7-10), Jesus says that the disciples must serve others with the greatest degree of self-denial and selflessness, considering themselves to be useless servants. Fifthly (Lk 17:11-19), Jesus teaches them how to accept the service of others. They must show gratitude. Sixthly (Lk 17:20-21), Jesus teaches them to look at reality around them. He tells them not to run after the deceitful propaganda of those who teach that the Kingdom of God, when it comes, will be able to be seen by all. Jesus says the contrary. The coming of the Kingdom, unlike that of earthly rulers, will not be able to be seen. For Jesus, the Kingdom of God is already here!

It is already in our midst, independently of our efforts and merits. It is pure grace! And only faith can perceive it.

c) A commentary on the text:

Luke 17:5: The apostles ask Jesus for an increase in faith

The disciples are aware that it is not easy to possess the qualities that Jesus has just asked of them: care for the little ones (Lk 17:1-2) and reconciliation with the weakest of the brothers and sisters of the community (Lk 17:3-4). And with much faith! Not just faith in God, but also faith in the possibility of regaining the brother and sister. That is why they go to Jesus and ask him: "Increase our faith!".

Luke 17:5-6: Living with faith the size of a mustard seed

Jesus replies: "Were your faith the size of a mustard seed you could say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea', and it would obey you". This statement of Jesus raises two questions: (1) Is he insinuating that the apostles do not have faith the size of a mustard seed? The comparison used by Jesus is strong and insinuating. A grain of mustard seed is very small, as small as the smallness of the disciples. But with faith, they can become strong, stronger than the mountain or the sea! Were Jesus speaking today he might say: "Were your faith the size of an atom, you could blow up this mountain." That is, in spite of the difficulty inherent, reconciliation among brothers and sisters is possible, since faith can make that which seems impossible come true. Without the central axle of faith, a broken relationship cannot be healed and the community desired by Jesus cannot be realised. Our faith must bring us to the point where we are able to move within ourselves the mountain of our preconceived ideas and throw it in the sea. (2) With this statement, was Jesus referring to faith in God or faith in the possibility of bringing back the weakest of the brothers and sisters? Most probably it refers to both. As the love of God is made concrete in the love of neighbour, so also faith in God must be made concrete in faith in the brothers and sisters, in reconciliation and in forgiving even up to seventy times seven! (Mt 18:22) Faith is the remote control of the power of God who acts and reveals himself in the renewed human relationship lived in community!

Luke 17:7-9: Jesus points out how we must fulfil our obligations towards the community

To teach that in the life of a community all must deny and be detached from their own selves, Jesus uses the example of the slave. In those days, a slave could not merit anything. The master, hard and demanding, wanted only their service. It was not usual to thank a slave. For God we are like a slave before his master.

It may seem strange that Jesus should use such a harsh example taken from an unjust social institution of his times, to describe our relationship with the community. He does this on another occasion when he compares the life of the Kingdom to that of a thief. What matters is the aim of the comparison: God comes like a thief, without any previous notice, when least we expect him; like a slave before his master so also we cannot and must not obtain merits before our brothers and sisters in the community.

Luke 17:10: Application of the comparison of the useless servant

Jesus applies this example to life in community: as a slave before his master, so also must our attitude be in community: we must not do things in order to merit support,

approval, promotion or praise, but only to show that we belong to God! “So with you, when you have done all you have been told to do, say ‘We are merely servants; we have done no more than our duty.’“ Before God, we do not merit anything. Whatever we have received we have not merited. We live thanks to the gratuitous love of God.

d) A deepening on faith and service:

i) Faith in God is made concrete in bringing back brothers and sisters

First fact: During the Second World War in Germany, it happened that two Jews, Samuel and John were in a concentration camp. They were very badly treated and often tortured. John, the younger, was annoyed. He vented his anger by cursing and using bad language towards the German soldier who treated them badly and beat them. Samuel, the older one, kept calm. One day, in a distracted moment, John said to Samuel: “How can you keep calm when you are treated so brutally? Why is it that you have so much courage? You should react and show your opposition to this absurd regime!” Samuel replied: “It is more difficult to stay calm than to be courageous. I do not seek courage, because I am afraid that, due to my anger, he may switch off the last spark of humanity that lies hidden in this brutalised soldier”.

Second fact: During the Roman occupation of Palestine, Jesus was condemned to death by the Sanhedrin. Because of his faith in God the Father, Jesus welcomes all as brothers and sisters, and in acting thus, he challenges radically the system, which in the name of God, keeps so many people marginalized. The sentence of the Sanhedrin is ratified by the Roman Empire and Jesus is led to be tortured on Mount Calvary. The soldiers carry out the sentence. One of them pierces Jesus’ hands with nails. Jesus’ reaction is: “Forgive them Father for they know not what they do!” (Lk 23:34). Faith in God reveals itself in the pardon offered to those who are killing him.

ii) The service to be offered to the people of God and to humanity

In Jesus’ time, there was a great variety of messianic expectations. According to the many interpretations of the prophecies, there were those who expected a Messiah King (Lk 15:9-32), a Holy Messiah or High Priest (Mk 1:24), a Warrior Messiah (Lk 23:5; Mk 15:6; 13:6-8), a Doctor Messiah (Jn 4:25; Mk 1:22-27), a Judge Messiah (Lk 3:5-9; Mk 1:8), a Prophet Messiah (Mk 6:4; 14:65). All, according to their own interests or social class, expected the Messiah according to their wishes and expectations. But it seems that no one, except the anawim, the poor of Yahweh, expected a Servant Messiah, proclaimed by the prophet Isaiah (Is 42:1; 49:3; 52:13). The poor often recalled the messianic promise considered as a service offered to humanity by the people of God. Mary, the poor of Yahweh, said to the angel: “Behold the handmaid of the Lord!” It was from her that Jesus learnt the way of service. “The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve” (Mk 10:45).

The figure of the Servant described in the four canticles of Isaiah (Is 42:1-9; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; 52:13 to 53:12), did not point to an isolated individual, but to the people of the captivity (Is 41:8-9; 42:18-20; 43:10; 44:1-2; 44:21; 45:4; 48:20; 54:17), described by Isaiah as a people “oppressed, disfigured, without the appearance of a person and without the least human condition, a people exploited, ill treated, reduced to silence,

without grace or beauty, full of suffering, avoided by all like a leper, condemned like a criminal, without recourse or defence” (Cf. Is 53:2-8). This is a perfect image of one third of humanity today! This servant people “does not cry out, does not raise its voice, will not be heard in the streets, will not break the crushed reed” (Is 42:2). Persecuted but does not persecute; oppressed but will not oppress; trodden under foot but will not tread on others. This people will not enter into the abyss of violence of the empire that oppresses. This attitude of resistance of the Servant of Yahweh is the root of justice that God wishes to see planted in the whole world. That is why God asks the people to be his Servant with the mission of making such justice shine brightly throughout the world (Is 42:2.6; 49:6).

Jesus knows these canticles and in fulfilling his mission he lets himself be guided by them. At the time of his baptism in the Jordan, the Father entrusts him with the mission of Servant (Mk 1:11). When, in the synagogue of Nazareth, he explains his programme to his own people, Jesus publicly assumes this mission (Lk 4:16-21). It is in this attitude of service that Jesus reveals the face of God that attracts us and shows us the way back to God.

6. Prayer: Psalm 72 (71)

Hope for all that the Messiah Saviour may come
God, endow the king with your own fair judgement,
the son of the king with your own saving justice,
that he may rule your people with justice,
and your poor with fair judgement.
Mountains and hills, bring peace to the people!
With justice he will judge the poor of the people,
he will save the children of the needy
and crush their oppressors.
In the sight of the sun and the moon he will endure,
age after age.
He will come down like rain on mown grass,
like showers moistening the land.
In his days uprightness shall flourish,
and peace in plenty till the moon is no more.
His empire shall stretch from sea to sea,
from the river to the limits of the earth.
The Beast will cower before him,
his enemies lick the dust;
the kings of Tarshish and the islands will pay him tribute.
The kings of Sheba and Saba will offer gifts;
all kings will do him homage,
all nations become his servants.
For he rescues the needy who calls to him,

and the poor who has no one to help.
He has pity on the weak and the needy,
and saves the needy from death.
From oppression and violence he redeems their lives,
their blood is precious in his sight.
Long may he live; may the gold of Sheba be given him!
Prayer will be offered for him constantly,
and blessings invoked on him all day.
May wheat abound in the land,
waving on the heights of the hills,
like Lebanon with its fruits and flowers at their best,
like the grasses of the earth.
May his name be blessed for ever,
and endure in the sight of the sun.
In him shall be blessed every race in the world,
and all nations call him blessed.
Blessed be Yahweh, the God of Israel,
who alone works wonders;
blessed for ever his glorious name.
May the whole world be filled with his glory! Amen! Amen!

7. 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 practise the Word. You who live and reign with the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit forever and ever. Amen.