



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:

This Sunday's liturgy presents us with a text from Luke's Gospel concerning prayer, a theme dear to the heart of Luke. This is the second time that this Evangelist quotes the words of Jesus to teach us how to pray. The first time (Lk 11:1-13), introduces the text of the Our Father and, by means of comparisons and parables, teaches us that we must pray always tirelessly. Now, the second time (Lk 18:1-4), Luke has recourse once more to parables taken from every day life to teach us how to pray: the parable of the widow and the judge (18:1-8) and that of the Pharisee and the Publican (Lk 18:9-14). Luke tells the parables in quite a didactic form. Each parable begins with a brief introduction as a key to its reading. There follows the parable and, lastly, Jesus himself applies the parable to life. This Sunday's text only narrates the first parable of the widow and the judge (Lk 18:1-8). While reading, it would be good to keep in mind the following: "What is the attitude of each person involved in this parable?"

b) A division of the text to help us in our reading:

Luke 18:1: A key given by Jesus for an understanding of the parable

Luke 18:2-3: The contrast between the Judge and the Widow

Luke 18:4-5: The change in the judge and the reason for this change

Luke 18: 6-8a: Jesus applies the parable

Luke 18: 8b: A final provocative statement

c) The text:

1 Then he told them a parable about the need to pray continually and never lose heart. 2 'There was a judge in a certain town,' he said, 'who had neither fear of God nor respect for anyone. 3 In the same town there was also a widow who kept on coming to him and Luke 18:1-8 saying, "I want justice from you against my enemy!" 4 For a long time he refused, but at last he said to himself, "Even though I have neither fear of God nor respect for any human person, 5 I must give this widow her just rights since she keeps pestering me, or she will come and slap me in the face." ' 6 And the Lord said, 'You notice what the unjust judge has to say? 7 Now, will not God see justice done to his elect if they keep calling to him day and night even though he still delays to help them? 8 I promise you, he will see justice done to them, and done speedily. But when the Son of man comes, will he find any faith on earth?'

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 pleased you most in this text?

b) What is the attitude of the widow? Or what strikes you most in what she does and say?

c) What strikes you most in the attitude and words of the judge? Why?

d) How does Jesus apply this parable?

e) What does this parable teach us concerning our manner of looking at life and people?

5. A key to the reading

for a deeper understanding of the theme.

a) The historical context:

When analysing the historical context of Luke's Gospel, we must always keep in mind this dual dimension: the time of Jesus in the 30's, and the time of those for whom the Gospel is written in the 80's. These two times influence, each in its own way, the writing of the text and must be present as we try to discover the meaning Jesus' parables have for us today.

b) The literary context:

The immediate literary context presents us two parables on prayer: praying insistently and perseveringly (the widow and the judge) (Lk 18:1-8); praying humbly and realistically (the Pharisee and the Publican) (Lk 18:9-14). Although they are different, these two parables have something in common. They tell us that Jesus saw the things of life in a different way. Jesus saw God's revelation where others saw something negative. For instance, he saw something positive in the Publican, who all said: "He does not know how to pray!" And in the poor widow of whom it was said: "She is so insistent that she

even troubles the judge!” Jesus was so united to the Father that for him everything was transformed into a source of prayer. Many are the ways we can express ourselves in prayer. There are those who say: “I do not know how to pray”, yet they speak to God all day. Have you come across anyone like this?

c) A commentary on the text:

Luke 18:1: The key to an understanding of the parable

Luke introduces the parable thus: “Then he told them a parable about the need to pray continually and never lose heart”. The words “to pray and not lose heart” appear frequently in the New Testament (1 Thes 5:17; Rom 12:12; Eph 6:18; etc). This was a feature of the spirituality of the early Christian communities. It is also a point on which Luke insists both in the Gospel and in Acts. If you are interested in discovering this dimension in Luke’s writings, carry out this exercise: read the Gospel and Acts and write down all the verses where Jesus or others are praying. You will be surprised!

Luke 18:2-3: The contrast between the widow and the judge

Jesus presents us with two persons from real life: a judge who neither respects God nor persons, and a widow who will not stop fighting for her rights before the judge. The simple fact that Jesus presents these two persons reveals that he knows well the society of his time. Not only does the parable present poor people fighting in court to have their rights recognised, but it also shows us the violent contrast among social groups. On the one hand, an insensitive and irreligious judge, and on the other, the widow who knows which door to knock on to get what is owed to her.

Luke 18:4-5: The change in the judge and the reason for the change

For a long time, asking the same thing every day, the widow gets nothing from the insensitive judge. Finally the judge, even though “he had neither fear of God nor respect for man” decided to pay attention to the widow and give her justice. The reason is: to be free of this constant nuisance. A rather self-interested reason! However, the widow gets what she wants! This is a fact of daily life and Jesus uses it to teach us how to pray.

Luke 18:6-8: An application of the parable

Jesus applies the parable: “You notice what the unjust judge has to say? Now will not God see justice done to his chosen who cry to him day and night even when he delays to help them?” Then he adds that God will see justice done speedily. Were it not Jesus speaking, we would not have the courage to compare God to a judge in their moral attitude. What is important in the comparison is the widow’s attitude who, thanks to her insistence, finally gets what she wants.

Luke 18:8b: A statement on faith

At the end, Jesus expresses some doubt: “But when the Son of Man comes, will he find any faith on earth?” Will we have the courage to wait, to be patient, even if God takes time to answer us? We need much faith to go on insisting and acting when we see no result. Anyone who expects immediate results will be disappointed. Many of the psalms speak of this hard and difficult insistence before God until he sees fit to respond (Ps 71:14; 37:7; 69:4; Lm 3:26). When quoting Psalm 80. Saint Peter says that one day for God is like a thousand years (2Pt 3:8; Ps 90:4).

d) A deepening: Prayer in Luke’s writings

i. Jesus prays in the Gospel

The Gospels present us with a Jesus who prays, who live in continuous contact with the Father. Jesus' only wish is to do the will of the Father (Jn 5:19). Luke is the one who speaks most of the prayer life of Jesus. He shows us a Jesus who prays always. Jesus prayed much and insistently, so that people and his disciples too would do the same. It is when facing God in truth that the person sees him/herself in its reality and humility. Here are some of the moments when Jesus is praying in Luke's Gospel:

Lk 2:46-50: When he is twelve, he goes to the Temple, his Father's house

Lk 3:21: He prays at his baptism and when he takes on his mission

Lk 4:1-2: At the beginning of his mission he spends forty days in the desert

Lk 4:3-12: When he is tempted, he faces the devil with texts from Scripture

Lk 4:16: On Saturdays, Jesus goes to celebrate in the synagogue

Lk 5:16; 9:18: He seeks solitude in the desert to pray

Lk 6:12: He spends the night in prayer before choosing the Apostles

Lk 9:16; 24:30: He prays before meals

Lk 9:18: He prays before speaking the his passion

Lk 9:28: In a crisis, on the Mountain to pray, he is transfigured during prayer

Lk 10:21: When the Gospel is revealed to little ones he says: "Thank you, Father..."

Lk 11:1: As he prays, he inspires the apostles the desire to pray

Lk 22:32: He prays for Peter, that he may have faith

Lk 22:7-14: He celebrates the Paschal meal with his disciples

Lk 22:41-42: He prays and sweats blood in the Garden of Olives

Lk 22:40.46: In his agony, he asks his friends to pray with him

Lk 23:34: When he was being nailed to the cross, he asks pardon for his torturers

Lk 23:46; Ps 31:6: At the moment of death he says: "Into your hands I commend my spirit"

Lk 23:46: Jesus dies with the cry of the poor on his lips

This list of quotations shows us that for Jesus prayer was intimately connected with life, with concrete fact, with decisions to be taken. To be faithful to the Father's plan, he sought to be alone with him, to listen to him. In difficult and decisive moments of his life, Jesus prayed the Psalms. Like every other devout Jew, he knew them by heart. Saying the Psalms did not quench his creative spirit. Rather, Jesus invented a Psalm, that is, the Our Father. His life was a constant prayer: "At all times I do what the Father asks me to do!" (Jn 5:19.30). That which the Psalm says applies to Jesus: "... all I had done was pray for them!" (Ps 109:4)

ii. The praying communities in the Acts of the Apostles

As in the Gospel, so also in the Acts, Luke often speaks of prayer. The first Christians are those who continue the prayer of Jesus. Here is a list, which in one way or another, speak of prayer. If you look carefully, you will find other texts again:

Act 1:14: The community perseveres in prayer with Mary, the mother of Jesus

Act 1:24: The community prays so as to know who will take the place of Judas
Act 2:25-35: Peter quotes from the Psalms in his homily
Act 2:42: The first Christians are faithful in prayer
Act 2:46-47: They go to the temple to praise God
Act 3:1: Peter and John go to the temple to pray at the ninth hour
Act 3:8: The healed lame man praises God
Act 4:23-31: The community prays under persecution
Act 5:12: The first Christians stay at Solomon's gate (temple)
Act 6:4: The apostles devote themselves to prayer and the service of the word
Act 6:6: They pray before imposing hands on the deacons
Act 7:59: When he is dying, Stephen prays: "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit"
Act 7:60: Then Stephen prays: "Lord, do not hold this sin against them"
Act 8:15: Peter and John pray that the converts may receive the Holy Spirit
Act 8:22: The sinner is told: Repent and pray that you may be forgiven
Act 8:24: Simon says: "Pray to the Lord for me yourselves so that none of the things you have spoken about may happen to me"
Act 9:11: Paul is praying
Act 9:40: Peter prays for the healing of Tabitha
Act 10:2: Cornelius prayed constantly to God
Act 10:4: Cornelius' prayers are heard in heaven
Act 10:9: At the sixth hour, Peter prays on the roof of the house
Act 10:30-31: Cornelius prays at the ninth hour, and his prayer is heard
Act 11:5: Peter tells the people of Jerusalem: "I was praying!"
Act 12:5: The community prays when Peter is in jail
Act 12:12: Many people are gathered in prayer in Mary's house
Act 13:2-3: The community prays and fasts before sending Paul and Barnabas
Act 13:48: The pagans rejoice and glorify the Word of God
Act 14:23: The missionaries pray to appoint the coordinators of the communities
Act 16:13: At Philippi, near the river, there is a place of prayer
Act 16:16: Paul and Silas were going to prayer
Act 16:25: At night, Paul and Silas sing and pray in prison
Act 18:9: Paul has a vision of the Lord at night
Act 19:18: Many confess their sins
Act 20:7: They met to break bread (the Eucharist)
Act 20:32: Paul commends to God the coordinators of the communities
Act 20:36: Paul prays on his knees with the coordinators of the communities
Act 21:5: They kneel on the shore to pray
Act 21:14: Before the inevitable, the people say: God's will be done!
Act 21:20: They glorify God for all that Paul has done
Act 21:26: Paul goes to the temple to fulfil a promise
Act 22:17-21: Paul prays in the temple, he has a vision and speaks with God
Act 23:11: In the prison in Jerusalem, Paul has a vision of Jesus
Act 27:23ff: Paul has a vision of Jesus during the storm at sea

Act 27:35: Paul takes the bread, gives thanks to God before arriving in Malta

Act 28:8: Paul prays over Publius' father who had a fever

Act 28:15: Paul gives thanks to God on seeing the brethren in Pozzuoli

This list tells us two important things. On the one hand, the early Christians kept the traditional liturgy of the people. Like Jesus, they pray at home among the family, in community and in the synagogue and together with the people of the temple. On the other hand, apart from the traditional liturgy, there appears a new way of praying among them in community and with a new content. The root of this new prayer comes from the new experience of "God in Jesus and from a clear and deep awareness of the presence of God in midst of the community: "In him we live, move and are!" (Acts 17:28)

6. Prayer: Psalm 63 (62)

A longing for God expressed in prayer

God, you are my God, I pine for you;
my heart thirsts for you, my body longs for you,
as a land parched, dreary and waterless.

Thus I have gazed on you in the sanctuary,
seeing your power and your glory.

Better your faithful love than life itself;
my lips will praise you.

Thus I will bless you all my life,
in your name lift up my hands.

All my longings fulfilled as with fat and rich foods,
a song of joy on my lips and praise in my mouth.

On my bed when I think of you,
I muse on you in the watches of the night,
for you have always been my help;
in the shadow of your wings I rejoice;
my heart clings to you,
your right hand supports me.

May those who are hounding me to death
go down to the depths of the earth,
given over to the blade of the sword,
and left as food for jackals.

Then the king shall rejoice in God,
all who swear by him shall gain recognition,
for the mouths of liars shall be silenced.

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.