



1) Opening prayer

Lord,
increase our eagerness to do your will
and help us to know the saving power of your love.
You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

2) Gospel reading - Luke 21,29-33

Jesus told to his disciples a parable, 'Look at the fig tree and indeed every tree. As soon as you see them bud, you can see for yourselves that summer is now near. So with you when you see these things happening: know that the kingdom of God is near. In truth I tell you, before this generation has passed away all will have taken place. Sky and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.'

3) Reflection

- The Gospel today presents the final recommendations of the Apocalyptic Discourse. Jesus insists on two points: (a) on the attention which should be given to the signs of the times (Lk 21, 29-31) and (b) on hope founded on the firmness of the word of God which drives away fear to despair (Lk 21, 32-33)..
- Luke 21, 29-31: Look at the fig tree and indeed every tree. Jesus orders to look at nature: “Look at the fig tree and indeed every tree; as soon as you see them bud, you can see for yourselves that summer is now near. So with you when you see these things happening know that the kingdom of God is near”. Jesus asks to contemplate the phenomena of nature to learn how to read and interpret the things which are happening in the world. The buds or sprouts on the fig tree are an evident sign that summer is near. In the same way when the seven signs appear they are a proof that “the Kingdom of God is close at hand!” To make this discernment is not easy. A person who is alone does not become aware of this. By reflecting together in community, the light appears. And the light is this: to experience in everything that happens the call not to close ourselves in the present, but rather to keep the horizon open and to perceive in everything that happens an arrow directed toward the future. But nobody knows the exact hour of the coming of the Kingdom, nobody. In Mark’s Gospel, Jesus says: “But

as for that day or hour, nobody knows it, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, no one but the Father!" (Mk 13, 32).

- Luke 21, 32-33: "In truth I tell you, before this generation has passed away all will have taken place. Sky and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away." This word of Jesus recalls the prophecy of Isaiah which says: "All humanity is grass and all its beauty like the wild flowers. The grass withers, the flower fades when the breath of Yahweh blows on them. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God remains for ever". (Is 40, 7-8). The word of Jesus is the source of our hope. What he says will arrive!

- The coming of the Messiah and the end of the world. Today, many people live worried concerning the end of the world. Some, basing themselves on a mistaken and fundamentalist reading of the Apocalypse of John, even arrive at calculating the exact date of the end of the world. In the past, beginning at "one thousand years" quoted in the Apocalypse (Rv 20, 7), it was usually repeated: "The year one thousand has gone by but the year two-thousand will not pass!" And because of this, as the year two thousand approached, many were worried. There were some people who anguished because of the coming of the end of the world, committed suicide! But the year 2000 arrived and nothing happened. The end of the world did not arrive! In the Christian communities of the first centuries, they faced the same problems. They lived in the expectation of the imminent coming of Jesus. Jesus was coming to carry out the Final Judgment so as to finish with the unjust history of the world here on earth and to inaugurate the new phase of history, the definitive phase of the New Heavens and of the New Earth. They thought that this would take place between one or two generations. Many people would still be alive when Jesus would appear glorious in Heaven (1Th 4, 16-17; Mk 9, 1). There were some persons who no longer worked, because they thought that the end would arrive within a few days or weeks (2Th 2, 1-3; 3, 11). This is what they thought. But even today, the coming of Jesus has not arrived as yet! How can this delay be interpreted? On the streets of the cities people see writings on the walls which say Jesus will return! Is he coming or not? And how will his coming be? Many times, the affirmation "Jesus will return" is used to frighten persons and to oblige them to go to a determinate church.

In the New Testament the return of Jesus is always a reason for joy and peace! For those who are exploited and oppressed, the coming of Jesus is Good News! When will this coming take place? Among the Jews, there were various opinions. The Sadducees and the Herodians said: "The Messianic times will come!" They thought that their well being during the government of Herod was the expression of the Kingdom of God. And for this reason, they did not accept any changes and they fought against the preaching of Jesus who invited people to change and to convert themselves. The Pharisees said: "The coming of the Kingdom will depend on our effort in observing the law!" The Essens said: "The promised Kingdom will arrive only when we will have purified the country from all its impurity". Among the Christians there was the same variety of opinions. Some of the community of Thessalonica the Greeks, basing themselves on Paul's preaching, said: "Jesus will return!" (1 Th 4, 13-18; 2 Th 2, 2). Paul responds that it was not that simple as they imagined. And to those who did not work he said: "Anyone who does not

work has no right to eat!" (2 Th 3, 10). Probably, it was a question of persons who at meal time they would go to beg for food to the neighbour's hose. Other Christians thought that Jesus would return only after the Gospel had been announced to the whole world (Ac 1, 6-11). And they thought that, the greater their effort would be to evangelize, the more rapidly would the end of the world arrive. Others, tired of waiting, said: "He will never come back!" (2 P 3, 4). Others basing themselves on the word of Jesus justly said: "He is already among us!" (Mt 25, 40).

The same thing happens today. There are people who say: "The way things are in the Church and in society, it is alright". They want no changes. Others are waiting for the immediate coming of Jesus. Others think that Jesus will return only through our work and announcement. For us, Jesus is already among us (Mt 28, 20). He is already at our side in the struggle for justice, for peace and for life. But the fullness has not as yet been attained. For this reason, we wait with perseverance the liberation of humanity and of nature (Rm 8, 22-25).

4) Personal questions

- Jesus asks to look at the fig tree to contemplate the phenomena of nature. In my life have I already learnt something contemplating nature?
- Jesus says: "The sky and earth will pass, but my words will not pass". How do I embody in my life these words of Jesus?

5) Concluding prayer

Lord, how blessed are those who live in your house;
they shall praise you continually.

Blessed those who find their strength in you,
whose hearts are set on pilgrimage. (Ps 84,4-5)