

MATTHEW



INTRODUCTION

Who was Matthew, also known as Levi? We read in the Gospel that he was a tax collector and that Jesus made him one of his apostles (Mt 9:9) and (Mk 2:13). The earliest witnesses (Papias around 130; Irenaeus around 180; Origen around 200) attribute to him a Gospel written in Hebrew that was still known at the time of Saint Jerome (fourth century). We only know the Greek version of this Gospel that must have been written during the same years by Matthew or by one of his collaborators.

In all probability, this Gospel was written in a Christian community where there were Christians of Jewish and Greek origin, perhaps in Antioch (see Acts 12:1; 19:1; 13:1). This was the time when the high priest, Ananias, had James, the Bishop of Jerusalem, stoned to death. At that time, Christians were excluded from the synagogues and they were no longer protected by Roman laws that had allowed the Jews not to offer sacrifices to Roman gods. Within a short time, they would be persecuted by Nero (64–65).

This Gospel attempts to show that Christians should not be concerned if their own people are rejecting them now. The official community that refused to believe was left outside of the Kingdom to which those who acknowledged the Messiah had access. This minority received the “goods things of the Covenant” that had been promised by the prophets. From then on, they will have to share them with all believers who will seek to join the Church whatever their origin may be.

From this perspective, the whole history of Jesus is presented as a conflict that ends up in a separation.

Matthew has singled out the figure of Jesus as a preacher and as a teacher of Scripture. Matthew is especially interested in the words of Jesus and in his Gospel; Jesus’ words are more numerous than in the other Gospels. On the other hand, his gestures and miracles are presented in the most schematic way possible.

Therefore, we should not be surprised that Matthew built up his Gospel around five “discourses” in which he gathered the words that Jesus had said on different occasions. These discourses are: The Sermon on the Mount: Matthew 5–7. This “Magna Carta” of the children of God is completed by ten signs of power that announce our liberation from sin: chapters 8 and 9.

– Instructions to the Missionaries: Matthew 10. These instructions are completed by the controversies that oppose Jesus and his adversaries (chaps. 11–12).

– Parables of the Kingdom: Matthew 13. Then comes the blinding of the Pharisees, while the faith of the Twelve and of Peter enables Jesus to establish his Church.

– Warnings to the Christian community: Matthew 18. The fundamental law of fraternal forgiveness is completed by various instructions. The guides of the Jewish people are closed, showing by contrast what the guides of the Christian people will have to be.

– How to live while waiting for the end of the world: Matthew 24 and 25.

Matthew put the first two chapters on the infancy of Jesus to serve as an introduction. First, he recalls how Joseph adopted the child born of the Virgin Mary as the son of David. Then we have accounts of a special type, in which Matthew shows little concern for the historicity of the facts, since his intention is to present a theological teaching by way of images. These two chapters form a whole (1:1–4:16) with the activity of John the Baptist who introduces the Son of God in his public life.

The roots of Jesus

Lk 3:
23-38

1 • ¹This is the account of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, son of David, son of Abraham.

²Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers.

1:34;
2:4;
Gen
38:29;
Ru 4:13

³Judah was the father of Perez and Zerah (their mother was Tamar), Perez was the father of Hezron, and Hezron of Aram. ⁴Aram was the father of Aminadab, Aminadab of Nahshon, Nahshon of Salmon.

Ru 4:13

⁵Salmon was the father of Boaz. His mother was Rahab. Boaz was the father of Obed. His mother was Ruth. Obed was the father of Jesse.

2S 12:24

⁶Jesse was the father of David, the king. David was the father of Solomon. His mother had been Uriah's wife.

⁷Solomon was the father of Rehoboam. Then came the kings: Abijah, Asaph, ⁸Jehoshaphat, Joram,

Uzziah, ⁹Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah, ¹⁰Manasseh, Amon, Josiah.

¹¹Josiah was the father of Jeconiah and his brothers at the time of the deportation to Babylon.

¹²After the deportation to Babylon, Jeconiah was the father of Salathiel and Salathiel of Zerubbabel.

¹³Zerubbabel was the father of Abiud, Abiud of Eliakim, and Eliakim of Azor. ¹⁴Azor was the father of Zadok, Zadok the father of Akim, and Akim the father of Eliud. ¹⁵Eliud was the father of Eleazar, Eleazar of Matthan, and Matthan of Jacob.

¹⁶Jacob was the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, and from her came Jesus who is called the Christ—the Messiah.

¹⁷There were then fourteen generations in all from Abraham to David, and fourteen generations from David to the deportation to Babylon, and fourteen generations from the deportation to Babylon to the birth of Christ.

2K 24:12;
36:9;
36:20

• **1.1** Many books in the Bible are careful to show that the events and persons they speak about are rooted in earlier history, for the whole Bible draws its strength from a continuity of history and from the fidelity of God to his promises. That is the meaning of this list of ancestors. Matthew prefers to call it, as do the other books of the Bible: the document of the origins.

Luke 3:23 has another genealogy of Jesus that aims to emphasize his solidarity with the whole human race.

There are 42 names on the list, arranged in three series of 14 names each, a symbolic number for the Jews. It is obvious that it is not a complete list.

Jesus is the *son of Abraham*. Abraham is the father of the believers. God promised to unite all nations around his race. Jesus is also *the son of David*: all Israel knew that the Savior would be a descendant of David.

The first series of names appears in Ruth 4:18. The second is made up of kings, descendants of David, mentioned in the Book of Kings. The Bible does not say anything about the descendants of Zerubbabel (Ezra 2:3).

The list extends to *Joseph*, the adoptive father of Jesus (v. 16). Among the Jews, this adoption was sufficient for Jesus to be considered, like Joseph, son of David.

Four names included in the list belong to women, all described in the Bible: *Tamar*, who gave everything so as not to lose the divine blessings; *Rahab*, a foreign prostitute whom the Bible praises (Jos 2); *Ruth*, another foreigner of exemplary conduct; and the widow of Uriah, the beautiful *Bathsheba*, who shared David's sin.

All of this background discreetly announces him who came down to save sinners and to open the Kingdom of Israel to the multitudes coming from the pagan world.

The Savior is the flower and fruit of our earth and of the chosen race at the same time (Is 45:8). God led the Jewish people to a degree of human and religious maturity where the coming and teaching of Jesus would take on its full meaning.

We must understand that we are in solidarity with Christ first of all through human ties. The history of the present time, as well as the history of our families, prepares the second coming of Christ to humankind.

Jesus born of a virgin mother

(Lk 1:27)

Lk 1:27;
Mt 2:5;
2:11

•¹⁸ This is how Jesus Christ was born: Mary his mother had been given to Joseph in marriage, but before they lived together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit.

¹⁹ Then Joseph, her husband, made plans to divorce her in all secrecy. He was an upright man, and in no way did he want to discredit her.

²⁰ While he was pondering over this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, descendant of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. She has conceived by the Holy Spirit, ²¹ and now she will bear a son. You shall call him 'Jesus' for he will save his people from their sins."

1:25;
Lk 1:31;
Acts
3:16;
4:12

²² All this happened in order to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ²³ *The virgin will con-*

ceive and bear a son, and he will be called Emmanuel, which means: God-with-us. ²⁴ When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had told him to do, and he took his wife to his home. ²⁵ So she gave birth to a son and he had not had marital relations with her. Joseph gave him the name Jesus.

Is 7:14
Lk 1:31;
2:21

Wise men from the east

2 • ¹ When Jesus was born in Bethlehem, in Judea, during the days of king Herod, wise men from the East arrived in Jerusalem. ² They asked, "Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw the rising of his star in the East and have come to honor him."

Num
24:17

³ When Herod heard this he was greatly disturbed, and with him all Jerusalem. ⁴ He immediately called a meeting of all high-ranking priests and scribes, and asked them where the Messiah was to be born.

• 18. The wording of verse 16 should be noted. Jesus is not the son of Joseph. The beginning of the paragraph intends to remind us that Jesus is both a legitimate son of David through Joseph and the Son of God conceived through the Holy Spirit by a virgin-mother.

These short and almost bashful sentences do not dare to unveil the mystery of Mary, the virgin through whom life on earth touches God and offers itself as an oblation. A messenger breaks through the night and speaks with silent words: the world is open to the active presence of God.

Mary was engaged. Engagements gave to the Jewish people practically every right of marriage, especially conjugal rights. The only difference was that women continued to live under the parents' tutelage and in their parental home. The Jews were markedly a "macho" society. A woman necessarily belonged to a man, either to her father, her husband, or her son. Mary was already the wife of Joseph, but she could not be under his authority until he brought her to his home (vv. 20 and 24).

With reference to the virginity of Mary, see Luke 1:26.

The virginity of Mary was not in keeping with the Jewish mentality that gave first place

to fecundity. It was not so unusual that Joseph would accept such a situation. At this time certain Jews belonging to the party of the Essenes lived celibacy, as did the monks.

Joseph made plans to divorce her in all secrecy. The Gospel is not precise as to his reasons for so doing. In any case it is unthinkable that people might have doubted Mary's fidelity.

The intervention of the angel in the Gospel is not to reassure Joseph but to inform him of his role in the plan of God: "You shall call him 'Jesus', and you will receive him as your son." Joseph was a "descendant of David" and Jesus adopted by Joseph would be a legitimate descendant of David. Most probably Mary did not even belong to the tribe of Judah, which was that of David, but like her cousin Elizabeth, she belonged to a family of priests of the tribe of Levi.

• 2.1 From the first Christian generations there have been popular narratives trying to relate all that was not known about Jesus and not part of the Gospel. These closely resembled the Jewish stories of the childhood of Abraham and Moses. The wise men, the star and the massacre of the children of Bethlehem

Jn 7:42

Mic 5:1;
2S 5:2

⁵“In the town of Bethlehem in Judea,” they told him, “for this is what the prophet wrote: ⁶*And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, you are by no means the least among the clans of Judah, for from you will come a leader, the one who is to shepherd my people Israel.*”

⁷Then Herod secretly called the wise men and asked them the precise time the star appeared. ⁸Then he sent them to Bethlehem with the instruction, “Go and get accurate information about the child. As soon as you have found him, report to me, so that I too may go and honor him.”

⁹After the meeting with the king, they set out. The star that they had seen in the East went ahead of them and stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰The wise men were

overjoyed on seeing the star again.

¹¹They went into the house, and when they saw the child with Mary his mother, they knelt and worshiped him. They opened their bags and offered him their gifts of gold, incense and myrrh.

¹²In a dream they were warned not to go back to Herod, so they returned to their home country by another way.

Escape to Egypt

• ¹³After the wise men had left, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph and said, “Get up, take the child and his mother and flee to Egypt, and stay there until I tell you, for Herod will soon be looking for the child in order to kill him.”

¹⁴Joseph got up, took the child

Lk 2:16;
Ps 72:10;
Is 60:1-6

2:22

1:20;
2:19

have sprung directly from those stories and it is useless today to study astronomical maps to find a comet that was visible at that time.

In this chapter then, Matthew uses these stories without the slightest problem about their authenticity. He uses them to show how Jesus lived in his own way what his people had undergone. That accounts for the quotations from the Old Testament with each one repeating the phrase: “in this way... was fulfilled....” It is a way of saying that the texts should be reread. They spoke of the people, and at the same time they announced the coming of Jesus. In a way, he would live what had already been lived—journeying, searching, rejoicing, and grieving—but with him all would have a new meaning.

The *Wise Men* could have been respected priests and seers of Zoroastrian religion. Here they stand for all the non-biblical religions. While the Jewish priests, chiefs of the people of God, do not receive notice of the birth of Jesus, God communicates the news to some of his friends in the pagan world. This lesson is good for all times: Jesus is the Savior of all people, and not only of those who belong to the Church.

The star reminds us that God calls each one according to him or her own personality. Jesus calls the fishermen of Galilee after a miraculous catch of fish; the pagans who look at the stars, God calls by means of a star. God knows

how to communicate with us by means of events and through our own ideals, which guide us as stars. Whatever be the way, it will lead us to the one who is the light of God.

• 13. In relating the story about the slaughter of innocent children and the flight into Egypt, Matthew quotes two verses from the prophets Hosea and Jeremiah about the trials and sufferings of God’s people in past times. Jesus must live in exile and anguish, as did his ancestors. Persecution begins with his birth and will follow him till his death. Mary (and Joseph to a lesser degree) was associated with Jesus’ sufferings and saving mission.

Christian tradition has always held that the “Innocents” associated with the Passion of Christ without having wished it also shared in his glory without having merited it. This invites us to be mindful of the fact that the mysterious love of God envelops millions of massacred children and other hundreds of millions killed before seeing the light of day. What should we think of so many stifled possibilities? Individuals and society responsible for this disaster suffer the consequences; but God has all destinies in hand, he knows them in advance, and no one by destroying life is able to limit God’s generosity. No matter how much innocent blood the enemies of the Gospel spill, they will not be able to extinguish the Church or to block God’s plans.

Hos 11:1

and his mother, and left that night for Egypt, ¹⁵ where he stayed until the death of Herod. In this way, what the Lord had said through the prophet was fulfilled: *I called my son out of Egypt.*

¹⁶ When Herod found out that he had been tricked by the wise men, he was furious. He gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its neighborhood who were two years old or under. This was done in line with what he had learned from the wise men about the time when the star appeared.

Jer 31:15

¹⁷ In this way, what the prophet Jeremiah had said was fulfilled: ¹⁸ *A cry is heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation: Rachel weeps for her children. She refuses to be comforted, for they are no more.*

Joseph and Mary return to Nazareth

• ¹⁹ After Herod's death, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph and said, ²⁰ "Get up, take the child and his mother and go back to the land of Israel, because those who tried to kill the child are dead." ²¹ So Joseph got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel.

4:19

²² But when Joseph heard that Archelaus had succeeded his father Herod as king of Judea, he was afraid to go there. Joseph was given further instructions in a dream, and went to the region of Galilee.

• ²³ There he settled in a town called Nazareth. In this way, what was said by the prophets was fulfilled: *He shall be called a Nazorean.*

Is 11:1;
53:2;
Jdg 13:5;
Lk 2:39;
Acts 2:22

• 19. The return to Nazareth. Here we have the end of these stories that are intended to introduce us to the Gospel. They announce the mission of Christ: savior misjudged by his own, hounded by authority, he will turn towards the pagan nations. For Galilee was considered by the Jews of Judea as half-foreign and pagan (4:15). Jesus was to remain thirty years in this small village where he grew up and worked as a "carpenter" (Mk 6:3) while the world waited for salvation.

• 23. *He shall be called a Nazorean.* Matthew plays with this word that brings to mind *nezer*, or shoot (Is 11:1) and *nazorite* (Num 6). In those days there were religious groups who preached and baptized, as did John, and they were considered *nazorites*. Jesus was both *nezer* and *nazorite*.

Many people wonder what Jesus did between the ages of twelve, when he was seen in the Temple (Lk 2:41), and thirty, the approximate age of Jesus when he began his ministry. False pretenders take advantage of this Gospel's silence to speculate that Jesus went to India to learn magic and how to work miracles from the Hindu wonder workers, or even that he visited some outer-space goblins. It does not take much to imagine things!

Let us remember, first of all, that the Gospel is not a biography of Jesus, a narration of his life from birth to death. It seeks only to tell us

the most important deeds and words of Jesus by which he gives us his message. It does not tell us what Jesus looked like, whether he was tall or stout, blond or dark, and many other things that did not interest the first Christians. The Gospels of Mark and John open with Jesus' baptism by John, after which Jesus began teaching. Later on, Matthew and Luke wrote a little about Jesus' childhood to help us understand the secret of his person.

Secondly, let us read Matthew 13:54-56. The people of Nazareth, astounded by his deeds, do not say: surely Jesus has learned this in foreign countries because he was abroad so much. They wonder: what has happened to the carpenter's son? We have known him for a long time... what has happened to him?

Thirdly, we can say that to speak the word of God is at the same time to speak a word of human experience. The prophets speak words of God, not as a tape recorder, but as people who feel something and have something to cry out. Jesus could not speak the word of God if he had not acquired, as a man, an exceptional wisdom of *what is inside man* (Jn 2:25). The years Jesus spent in Nazareth were not really lost. He absorbed the culture of his people and observed events affecting his nation experiencing manual labor, human relations, feelings, suffering and oppression. Jesus had to experience all these things to be our savior, so that

John the Baptist prepares the way*(Mk 1:1; Lk 3:1; Jn 1:19)*Mk 1:1-8;
Lk 3:1-18;
Jn 1:19

3 ¹In the course of time John the Baptist appeared in the desert of Judea and began to proclaim his message, ²“Change your ways, the kingdom of heaven is now at hand!” ³It was about him that the prophet Isaiah had spoken when he said: *A voice is shouting in the desert, ‘Prepare a way for the Lord, make his paths straight!’*

Mk 1:15

Is 40:3

⁴John had a leather garment around his waist and wore a cloak of camel’s hair; his food was locusts and wild honey. ⁵People came to him from Jerusalem, from all Judea and from the whole Jordan valley, ⁶and they were baptized by him in the Jordan as they confessed their sins.

12:34;
23:33;
Lk 21:23;
Rom 1:18;
2:5;
5:9;
Eph 5:6;
Col 3:6;
Rev 6:16Jn 8:33;
Rom 4:12;
7:8

⁷When he saw several Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he baptized, he said to them, “Brood of vipers! Who told you that you could escape the punishment that is to come? ⁸Let it be seen that you are serious in your conversion, ⁹and do not think: We have Abraham for our father. I tell you that God can raise children for Abraham from these stones! ¹⁰The axe is already laid to the roots of the trees; any tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown in the fire.

7:19;
Lk 13:7;
Jn 15:6Mk 6:17;
Jn 1:26;
Acts 1:5;
11:16;

¹¹I baptize you in water for a change of heart, but the one who is

coming after me is more powerful than me; indeed I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you in Holy Spirit and fire. ¹²He has the winnowing fan in his hand and he will clear out his threshing floor. He will gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn in everlasting fire.”

13:24;
19:4;
Mt 11:3;
Jn 1:15;
1:33
Is 41:16**Jesus baptized by John***(Mk 1:9; Lk 3:2; Jn 1:29)*

¹³At that time Jesus arrived from Galilee and came to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. ¹⁴But John tried to prevent him, and said, “How is it you come to me? I should be baptized by you!”

Mk 1:
9:19;
Lk 3:
21:22;
Jn 1:29

¹⁵But Jesus answered him, “Let it be like that for now, so that we may fulfill the right order.” John agreed.

¹⁶As soon as he was baptized, Jesus came up from the water. At once, the heavens opened and he saw the Spirit of God come down like a dove and rest upon him. ¹⁷At the same time a voice from heaven was heard, “This is my Son, the Beloved; he is my Chosen One.”

Is 42:1;
Mt 12:18;
17:5**Jesus tempted in the wilderness***(Lk 4:1; Mk 1:12)*

4 ¹Then the Spirit led Jesus into the desert that he might be put to the test by the devil. ²After spending forty days and nights without food, Jesus was hungry.

Mk 1:
12:13;
Lk 4:1-13Heb 2:18;
4:15

his words would be true, weighty and valuable for all times.

• **3.1** We have just said that the real beginning of the Gospel is the preaching of John the Baptist. Here Matthew compares Jesus with John, John’s baptism with that of Jesus. See commentaries on Mark 1:1 and Luke 3.

• **13.** In this baptism Jesus identifies himself with his people, more precisely with this world of “untitled” people who went to hear a call to conversion. For him it is an occasion of

deep religious experience recalling that of the great prophets. What the voice says gives Jesus his mission. He will be Son and Servant of the Father (Ps 2 and Is 42:1).

• **4.1** The commentary of this event is partly found in Luke’s Gospel (4:1-13).

Jesus is then Son of God in the sense this word had in his time: he is sent as king, prophet and savior and he knows it. How will he live this and how will God act towards his Son? He will be put to the test in the desert. In reality Jesus would undergo this test through-

27:40 ³Then the devil came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, order these stones to turn into bread." ⁴But Jesus answered, "Scripture says: *One does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.*"

Is 52:1 ⁵Then the devil took Jesus to the holy city, set him on the highest wall of the temple, and said to him, ⁶"If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for scripture says: *God has given orders to his angels about you. Their hands will hold you up lest you hurt your foot against a stone.*" ⁷Jesus answered, "But scripture also says: *You shall not put to the test the Lord your God.*"

Dt 6:16; Mt 10:9 ⁸Then the devil took Jesus to a very high mountain, and showed him all the nations of the world in all their greatness and splendor. And he said, ⁹"All this I will give you, if you kneel down and worship me." ¹⁰Then Jesus

Dn 3:5;
Mt 2:11;
18:26;
1Cor
14:25;
Rev 4:10;
22:8

answered, "Be off, Satan! Scripture says: *Worship the Lord your God and serve him alone!*"

Dt 6:13

¹¹Then the devil left him, and angels came to serve him.

(Mk 1:14; Lk 4:14)

¹²When Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee. ¹³He left Nazareth and went to live in Capernaum, a town by the lake of Galilee, at the border of Zebulun and Naphtali.

Mk 1:
14-15;
Lk 4:14

¹⁴In this way the word of the prophet Isaiah was fulfilled: ¹⁵*Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, crossed by the Road of the Sea, and you who live beyond the Jordan, Galilee, land of pagans:*

Is 8:23—
9:1

¹⁶*The people who lived in darkness have seen a great light; on those who live in the land of the shadow of death, a light has shone.*

Lk 1:79

out his ministry: his opponents would ask for signs and miracles, and his own disciples would want him to center more on himself. It is this permanent test that is here presented in a figurative way. The Gospel intentionally places this temptation in the desert at the beginning, and affirms that Jesus defeated the evil spirit before he had begun his mission.

After spending forty days and nights without food, Jesus was hungry. This duration of forty days (which symbolically represents the forty weeks a child remains in its mother's womb in preparation for a new birth) was already present in the life of Moses and Elijah: Exodus 24:18; 1 Kings 19:8. This fast is for Jesus what the command to sacrifice his son had been for Abraham, and for Moses the rebellion of a thirsty people or the incident of the golden calf. In a moment of full lucidity, when Jesus felt physically exhausted and spiritually strengthened by his fast, the devil tried to convince him that it was impossible to carry out his mission with the means God had proposed.

Strange as it is, the Gospel presents this encounter of Jesus with the tempter (devil) as a discussion on biblical texts between masters of the Law. The purpose, no doubt, is to show us that even biblical texts may lead us astray if

we are without a spirit of obedience to God. The three temptations recall to mind those of the Hebrews in the desert (Ex 16:2; Ex 17:1; Ex 32). At the waters of Massah they grumbled against God for leading them where the going was difficult; later they put God to the test: "Could not he do something for them?" Finally they exchanged God and his Glory for another god of their own making: a golden calf. Jesus replies by quoting three texts from Deuteronomy, a book that speaks at length of the rebellion of the people of God in the desert. The perfect obedience of the Son contrasts with the infidelity of the Father's chosen people.

Jesus is victor in this trial, but after him the Church will have to confront these same temptations. She could be tempted to satisfy human desires instead of offering true salvation. Jesus teaches us to be strong against the tricks of the devil in using, as he did, the word of God.

The angels came to serve him. After rejecting the temptations, Jesus finds total peace. His purity of heart opens up for him a spiritual world hidden from human eyes, a world as real as the material things and beings surrounding him. In this spiritual world, as Son of God he is king among the spirits who are

•¹⁷ From that time on, Jesus began to proclaim his message, “Change your ways: the kingdom of heaven is near.”

Mk 1: 16-20; Lk 5:1-11; Jn 1:40
¹⁸ As Jesus walked by the lake of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. ¹⁹ He said to them, “Come, follow me, and I will make you fish for people.”

²⁰ At once they left their nets and followed him.

13:47
²¹ He went on from there and saw two other brothers, James, the son of Zebedee, and his brother John in a boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets. Jesus called them.

²² At once they left the boat and their father and followed him.

Mk 1:39; 3:7-8; Lk 4:14-15, 44; 6:17-18; Mt 9:35; 12:15; 14:35; Mk 3:7-8; 6:54
²³ Jesus went around all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing all kinds of sickness and disease among the people.

Mk 6:55
²⁴ The news about him spread through the whole of Syria, and the people brought all their sick to him,

and all those who suffered: the possessed, the deranged, the paralyzed, and he healed them all. ²⁵ Large crowds followed him from Galilee and the Ten Cities, from Jerusalem, Judea, and from across the Jordan.

Mk 3:7

The Beatitudes

(Lk 6:17)

5 •¹ When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain. He sat down and his disciples gathered around him. ² Then he spoke and began to teach them:

Lk 6: 17-23; Mk 3:13; Lk 9:1

³ Fortunate are those who are poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴ Fortunate are those who mourn, they shall be comforted.

⁵ Fortunate are the gentle, they shall possess the land.

Ps 37:11

⁶ Fortunate are those who hunger and thirst for justice, for they shall be satisfied.

Is 51:1; Sir 24:21

⁷ Fortunate are the merciful, for they shall find mercy.

18:33; Jas 2:13

⁸ Fortunate are those with a pure heart, for they shall see God.

Ps 24:4; 33:20

servants of his Father (see commentary on Dn 12:6).

• 17. *Change your ways.* The Greek word is oftentimes translated as “convert”, or “repent”. In 3:11 we put “change of heart”, which is the closest to the Greek word. This term can be understood in many ways. In the mouth of John the Baptist, “Be converted” means “turn away from your sins.” With Jesus, “conversion” means a renewal of life from inside out. The Gospel will tell us that this renewal follows the discovery of God’s mercy and is the work of his Spirit within us (see commentary on Mk 1:14).

The kingdom of heaven is near. The Jews at that time said “kingdom of Heaven” instead of “kingdom of God” (see commentary on Mt 5:1). Jesus proclaims that God comes to reign among us meaning that we receive definitive salvation.

The Ten Cities (v. 25). This is the territory also called Decapolis, where Jews and non-Jews were mixed. Let us note that Jesus’ min-

istry begins, not at the heart of Israel, but where is felt the presence of that majority of humankind who have not yet received the word of God.

• 5.1 *Jesus went up the mountain.* Matthew places this discourse somewhere in the hill country bordering the lake of Tiberias. The reason for mentioning a *mountain* is to remind us of Mount Sinai where Moses received the Law (Ex 19). In this first “discourse of Jesus” (see Introduction) Matthew presents him as a Master giving to Israel and to all humankind the new and definitive Law. The formula: *but I say to you* is repeated six times in order to highlight the contrast between the Law of Moses and the New Law.

Fortunate! This first paragraph introduces the new people of God; to them the Law is given. Let us not forget that for the Bible, the Law is not only a matter of commandments; it includes also God’s interventions and declarations which have made Israel a special people, called to a world mission. The Law had been

⁹Fortunate are those who work for peace, they shall be called children of God.

¹⁰Fortunate are those who are persecuted for the cause of justice, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹Fortunate are you, when people

insult you and persecute you and speak all kinds of evil against you because you are my followers. ¹²Be glad and joyful, for a great reward is kept for you in God. This is how this people persecuted the prophets who lived before you.

Heb 12:4;
Jas 3:18;
1P 3:14

Jas 1:2

10:22;
1P 4:14;
Heb
11:32;
Jas 5:10

given to the “children of Abraham and Israel” who were guided out of Egypt by Moses. Exclamations like these abound: How fortunate you are, Israel! Meaning: What luck to have been chosen! And How privileged you are to be God’s people among all other nations! You are indeed fortunate for it is to you that God has spoken (Dt 33:29; Ps 144:15; Bar 4:4).

Right away the Gospel speaks of a converted people of God. No longer the people of the twelve tribes, with their land, their language, their frontiers, their national ambitions, but rather those God will seek among all nations. Who are these chosen ones who surely must consider themselves overjoyed to be so called? They are *the poor, those who weep*, those who have often been tempted to curse their misfortune, their sins, and their personal conflicts.

Here Matthew gives us eight beatitudes, while Luke 6:20-26 has only four. It is not important, however, for they form but one theme. The main difference between Matthew and Luke arises from the fact that their beatitudes are addressed to two different groups.

Luke presents the Beatitudes in the way they were proclaimed by Jesus. In Luke, Jesus addresses the whole assembly of common people, speaking as one of them. Like the prophets he speaks boldly and clearly: you, the poor, are the first beneficiaries of the promises of God.

Matthew instead adapts Jesus’ words to his audience of Christian believers. The Church had already spread and Christian communities brought together all kind of people: slaves, ordinary people and wealthy ones. Matthew tells them that the Gospel is significant for each of them. It is not only by being poor that they will please God, but also by their inner attitude and way of life. He says: Fortunate are those who are spiritually poor, adding *the pure of heart, those who work for peace...*

Luke points out those to whom the Gospel gives priority: the masses who are poor, the workers, the peasants and the marginalized. Matthew for his part teaches those already within the Church how they should behave to be worthy of the God who chose them.

Those said to be “fortunate” are not so because of what they suffer: the expression would not ring true. They are fortunate because they are admitted to the Kingdom.

The kingdom of heaven is theirs (v. 3) and following immediately: *they possess the land*. There is no real contradiction, it is only apparent.

First of all we must understand the term *Heaven* as used in Jesus’ time. Being exceedingly respectful of God, the Jews would not pronounce his name, referring to him with other words like *Heaven, The Glory, The Power...* The kingdom of *Heaven* means literally the kingdom of God, like the Father of *Heaven* means simply: God the Father. On reading the word *Heaven*, remember that Jesus usually meant by this word, not the reward we will obtain after death “in heaven,” but the kingdom of God that comes to us on this earth together with Jesus.

Likewise we translated as a *great reward is kept for you in God* (v. 12) the sentence that says “is kept for you in heaven.”

The real meaning of *the land* must also be understood. This land, for the Bible, was Palestine, because it was there that God would come to save his people. The Gospel, in turn, does not oppose what is material with what is spiritual: actually, the term “spiritual” is not used at all throughout the Gospel. When God spoke through the prophets, he promised his people a world where all their needs would be satisfied: banquets with wine aplenty (Is 25:6), long life, a land well-watered, freedom from oppression, a kingdom of justice. Over and above all that, God would live among his people and to them he would communicate his Spirit: *They will be my people and I will be their God* (Ezk 37:27).

In the Beatitudes, the kingdom of God is at the same time the *land* of Palestine promised to the children of Abraham and the land where peace reigns for God is present there. Those who *hunger for justice* will be given both bread and the holiness of God, because in the Bible *justice* also signifies: being as God wishes us to be. Because of this Jesus tells us that we shall be *satisfied or consoled*. Our consolation

Salt and light

(Mk 4:21; Lk 14:34; 8:16; 11:33)

Mk 9:50;
Lk 14:
34-35;
Lev 2:13;
Num
18:19

• ¹³You are the salt of the earth. But if salt has lost its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It has become useless. It can only be thrown away and people will trample on it.

Is 49:6;
Jn 8:12;
9:5;
Phil 2:15
Lk 8:16;
11:33;
Mk 4:21

• ¹⁴You are the light of the world. A city built on a mountain cannot be hidden. ¹⁵No one lights a lamp and covers it; instead it is put on a lampstand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶In the same way your light must shine before others, so that they may see the good you do and praise your Father in heaven.

Jn 3:21;
15:8;
1Cor
10:31

More perfect law

• ¹⁷Do not think that I have come to annul the Law and the Prophets. I have not come to annul them but to fulfill them. ¹⁸I tell you this: as long as heaven and earth last, not the smallest letter or dot in the Law will change until all is fulfilled.

Rom
3:31;
10:4
Lk 16:17;
21:32;
Mt 24:35;
Jas 2:10

¹⁹So then, whoever breaks the least important of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be the least in the kingdom of heaven. On the other hand, whoever obeys them, and teaches others to do the same, will be great in the kingdom of heaven.

²⁰I tell you then, if you are not righteous in a much broader way

Rom
10:3;
Phil 3:9

on earth is to know and see that God loves us and cares for us and in spite of all, can overturn the situation of the oppressed. It is also to know that even when it seems he does not hear our prayer, our cross has meaning and purpose. Finally we must not forget that in our future life God will give us more than we could ever hope for or merit. It is certain, however, that Matthew more than Luke, has reorientated the language of Jesus, inviting us to look higher than what is immediate.

Waiting lasted until the coming of Jesus. Jesus tells us that a new age has begun: God is with us and his Kingdom is already here for those with a *clean heart*, meaning that their desires have been purified: *they will see God*.

Fortunate—the persecuted. Matthew, like Luke, develops this last beatitude, for, no matter where we are, we cannot live the Gospel without suffering persecution.

• 13. Jesus has just designated those who are called to the Kingdom. First of all he will clarify their mission: *to be the light of the world* and not merely a light in the world. This does not mean that all people are to enter the Church, but that the Church has to be *salt and light* to the world. The Bible mentions *salt* as the element that preserves food. The *covenant of salt* was the covenant of God with those who were to serve him forever (Num 18:19). So the disciples of Jesus are called *salt of the earth* because through them the world benefits from the lasting Covenant with God. They must continually enkindle in the world the de-

sire and struggle for true justice and perfection, and not allow human societies to become satisfied with mediocrity.

You are the light: Jesus does not mean “You are the best in the world,” but “God has chosen you to be a minority and through you he will make himself known.” You will experience, (both you and the Church) much that you would perhaps prefer to avoid, but which will be for the world, a sign from God.

• 14. *Children of light*: Ephesians 5:8; 1 Peter 2:12; 1 Thessalonians 5:4.

• 17. Here begins the presentation of the new Law. It is far from what is often sought in a religion: practices to observe, fasts, prayers, good works with which one wins salvation. Jesus says little about this because the Bible has dealt at length with this subject, and the study of the Bible itself shows that these laws and practices are always linked to a certain culture, and have to be adapted to the times.

Law (v. 18): At times this word indicates all the religion of Israel. *The Law and the Prophets*: was a way of indicating the whole Bible.

Not the smallest letter or dot in the Law will change until all is fulfilled (v. 18). Jesus does not refer to the commandments. Rather he affirms that the religion founded on the Old Testament’s Scripture was a temporary, yet necessary, step in the history of salvation. The prophecies had to be fulfilled; the rites and sacrifices of that religion expressed in a veiled

than the teachers of the Law and the Pharisees, you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven.

• ²¹ You have heard that it was said to our people in the past: *Do not commit murder; anyone who does kill will have to face trial.* ²² But now I tell you: whoever gets angry with a brother or sister will have to face trial. Whoever insults a brother or sister deserves to be brought before the council. Whoever calls a brother or a sister “Fool!” deserves to be

thrown into the fire of hell. ²³ So, if you are about to offer your gift at the altar, and you remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴ leave your gift there in front of the altar, go at once and make peace with him, and then come back and offer your gift to God.

²⁵ Don’t forget this: be reconciled with your opponent quickly when you are together on the way to court. Otherwise he will turn you over to the judge, who will hand you over to

Mk 11:25;
Rom 13:9

Lk 12:
58-59

20:13;
Dt 5:17;
Lk 12:57

Eph 4:26;
Jas 1:
19-20

manner the mystery of sin and mercy that would be fulfilled in the person and the work of Jesus. With him comes *the perfect and definitive* fellowship of God with humankind.

For us as well, observing the laws of the Bible is not an end in itself. They are an expression of real love and are its guidelines. In obeying them we become receptive to the Spirit who will lead us. In this way we discover a “righteousness” or perfection far superior to the canonists of the time: *the teachers of the Law and the Pharisees.*

In verse 19 Jesus is referring to the commandments.

In verse 20, *If you are not righteous in a much broader way*, Jesus refers to the spirit of the Law.

Just when he is about to teach a new way of understanding the Law of God, Jesus warns us against the temptation of the easy way. Many could misinterpret the words of Jesus and say: It would be better if religion were less demanding and easier to practice! Because of this, Jesus points out that anyone who does not intend to fulfill the entire Law will not enter the Kingdom; nor will those who have ready excuses for their laziness: these commandments are not so important! To those who obey the Law, Jesus shows the spirit of the Law. For such as these the Gospel is not a comfortable road, but the call to a more perfect life.

• 21. Here we have the beginning of the opposites: *You have heard... but now I tell you.* This formula will be repeated six times.

Jesus alludes to the reading of the Bible which takes place each Sabbath in the synagogues; just as in the Church today each week has its assigned readings. It was the Hebrew text or its Aramaic translation (the spoken language) that was used. The leaders of the syna-

gogue or visitors passing through gave a commentary. Jesus was known for speaking often in the assemblies and it is highly probable that he would have often said: *You have heard* (vv. 21, 27, 38) *and I tell you*, for he spoke *with authority* (Mt 7:29).

Jesus does not question the demands of the Bible, nor is he satisfied with a mere commentary; the law of Christ is a call for purification of heart, that is, of our intentions and our desires. It is a fresh enlightenment born of a new experience of God. When we turn towards the Father (and that is the great innovation: the imitation of God the Father: 5:48), we discover how imperfect are the human criteria of morality. Therefore, let us not call sin only that which is seen or condemned as such by people. Indeed my sins are all the bad thoughts that I keep inside and that produce evil fruits when the opportunity comes. See also Matthew 12:34.

Until you have paid the last penny (v. 26). Repairing the damage means more than just returning the money I have illegally taken. I must also question why I am so weak that I am carried away by any desire.

Often we recognize how lukewarm our love for God is and how short-lived our perseverance in doing good. This is the result of many years of wrongdoing. We are able to forget about the wrong we have done, but we fail to repair the damage caused to our whole person. Although we may feel happy and unconcerned, we carry a load within ourselves from the unsettled debts and accounts.

If we are not purified during this life, we will be during or after our death. The Church calls this painful purification “purgatory.” The transformation that should take place in us (1 Cor 15:51) is impossible unless the Spirit has completely burned out (Mt 3:11) our roots of evil.

the police, who will put you in jail.
²⁶There you will stay, until you have paid the last penny.

20:14 • ²⁷You have heard that it was said: *Do not commit adultery.* ²⁸But I tell you this: anyone who looks at a woman too lustfully has in fact already committed adultery with her in his heart.

18:8-9; Lk 17:1
²⁹So, if your right eye causes you to sin, pull it out and throw it away! It is much better for you to lose a part of your body than to have your whole body thrown into hell. ³⁰If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away! It is better for you to lose a part of your body than to have your whole body thrown into hell.

Dt 24:1; Mal 2:14-16; Mk 10:4
 • ³¹It was also said: *Anyone who divorces his wife, must give her a written notice of divorce.* ³²But what

I tell you is this: if a man divorces his wife, except in the case of unlawful union, he causes her to commit adultery. And the man who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

19:9;
 Mk 10:11-12;
 Lk 16:18;
 1Cor 7:10-11

Oaths

• ³³You have also heard that people were told in the past: *Do not break your oath; an oath sworn to the Lord must be kept.* ³⁴But I tell you this: do not take oaths. Do not swear by the heavens, for they are God's throne, ³⁵nor by the earth, because it is his footstool, nor by Jerusalem, because it is the city of the great king. ³⁶Do not even swear by your head, because you cannot make a single hair white or black. ³⁷Say *yes* when you mean *yes*, and say *no* when you mean *no*. Anything else you say comes from the devil.

20:7;
 Lev 19:12; Dt 23:22; Mt 23:16

Is 66:1; Mt 23:22; Jas 5:12

Ps 48:3

2Cor 1:17-19

• 27. *Do not commit adultery.* For many, conjugal fidelity is a burdensome and old-fashioned law, which they merely admire in others. Jesus replaces fidelity among the laws of the interior world, where God, the Faithful One is to reign.

If your right eye... Here we must underline the opposition between: *your hand, your eye, and: you.* In another place Jesus will say that we must be able to give up everything, but here he dares to add: even your physical integrity.

All of us are looking for happiness, promotion and security, but what are those criteria worth? All strive to live fully their life and enjoy without limits their own health and body, but here Jesus tells us that true life is elsewhere and that true self creates itself while accepting mutilations of the present life.

Is it only a matter of sacrificing what could drag us to "major fault and sin"? The word of Jesus goes far beyond. As much as we complain about the misery and meaninglessness of our life, we conserve it at any cost with the hope of still enjoying this world. What if real sin were to avoid any risk and self-sacrifice when God is calling?

Jesus speaks of a *hell of fire*, because there is nothing worse than this final result: a lost life that has not been fruitful, and the abortion of our eternal self.

• 31. *Anyone who divorces his wife...* See commentaries on Mark 10:1; Matthew 19:3.

Here this saying of Jesus is given as an example of the courageous decisions that a Christian may be called upon to make. God sometimes asks for heroic sacrifices. The one who does not choose the difficult way necessarily loses something of the Gospel.

Except in the case of unlawful union. These words are not found in the other quotations of this saying of Jesus. Why did Matthew put them? In fact there are two possible interpretations.

First, it can be understood that one spouse has an extra licentious relationship, and then the other is allowed to separate.

Second, it can be understood that the one entering the Church through baptism is living with an unlawful union, and then this marriage or concubinage does not tie him.

• 33. *Do not take oaths.* This sentence must not be understood: "You shall never take an oath", but: "In a general way, don't take oaths."

Many invoke the name of God on any occasion. Is it because they truly know him and have him in mind? If we use his name casually, it is because we do not experience the weight of his presence. What a lack of respect to call on God to testify to our sincerity when we do

Love of enemies*(Lk 6:29)*21:24;
Lev 24:20;
Dt 19:21

• ³⁸ You have heard that it was said: *An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.* ³⁹ But I tell you this: do not oppose evil with evil; if someone slaps you on your right cheek, turn and offer the other. ⁴⁰ If someone sues you in court for your shirt, give him your coat as well. ⁴¹ If someone forces you to go one mile, go two miles with him. ⁴² Give when asked, and do not turn your back on anyone who wants to borrow from you.

Lk 6:29;
Jn 18:22;
1Cor 6:7

Lk 6:31

Lev 19:18

• ⁴³ You have heard that it was said: *Love your neighbor and do not*

not even recognize all that is false and unclean within us!

All the rest comes from the devil, and even the preoccupation of defending and justifying oneself in the eyes of others. See also Matthew 23:16; James 5:12.

• 38. *An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.* We read this in the Bible because in the world of that time it was a wholesome maxim (Dt 19:18-21). It claimed to put a limit to the thirst for vengeance and reminded judges and the community itself of the duty to defend its members against those who abuse the weak.

Do not oppose evil with evil. Jesus asks us to approach an adversary in the same way as this adversary may be approaching us: who is the wicked one?

Offer the other cheek: be the first to be free of the web of violence. As in judo, surprise the other by making the very move he was not expecting: he may then see that he was mistaken. Jesus has no doubt that this renunciation of violence and of our own interests obliges the Father to intervene and come to our aid. Do not forget that Jesus wants us to “see God” at work in our lives.

If someone forces you to go one mile. Jesus speaks to farmers who are humiliated and oppressed by foreign armies. Many times they are obliged to carry the burden of the soldiers. Their usual reaction is resigned submission concealing hatred and desire for revenge. Would they be capable of responding to such a counsel? It is certain that had they practiced it, they might have saved their nation from destruction.

do good to your enemy. ⁴⁴ But this I tell you: love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ so that you may be children of your Father in Heaven. For he makes his sun rise on both the wicked and the good, and he gives rain to both the just and the unjust.

⁴⁶ If you love those who love you, what is special about that? Do not even tax collectors do as much? ⁴⁷ And if you are friendly only to your friends, what is so exceptional about that? Do not even the pagans do as much? ⁴⁸ As for you, be righteous and perfect in the way your heavenly Father is righteous and perfect.

Lk 6:
27-36;
Job 31:29;
Acts 7:60;
Rom
12:20;
Pro 25:21;
23:4Lev 19:2;
Dt 18:13;
1P 1:16;
Jas 1:4

• 43. *Love your neighbor.* Here we come to the last of the opposites between the Old Law and the New. The Old Testament spoke of loving a neighbor and this was a matter of solidarity among the members of the people of God. With the Gospel the word “love” is not only given a wider dimension: it introduces us into a world totally different. Solidarity within the group is supported by an instinct inscribed in nature. This love however does not cross the frontiers that separate social groups: these only exist and find their identity in opposing others.

Do not do good to your enemy: The text is not found in the Bible as it stands but its equivalent is in several places (Dt 7:2). Referring to enemies of the nation rather than to personal enemies, we are asked to be wary of them, not to help them and even to exterminate them, rather than share their errors. If in many countries today it is understood that there is no frontier for love, it must be recognized that this ideal is a fruit of the Gospel: Jesus has enlightened our minds by asking us to model the love of our neighbor on the universal love of God the Father. We have only to open a newspaper to see that this love of neighbor, whatever it be, and even if it comes from a social, national or religious group, in enmity with ours, remains incomprehensible to the majority, even in Christian countries. When we realize that there is a place for everyone in the present world and that God directs everything for the benefit of all, we see things as God does and are *perfect as the Father is perfect*.

Love your enemies: Mk 12:31; Lk 10:27; Rom 13:9; Gal 5:14; Rom 12:20; Lk 23:34; Acts 7:60; Rom 12:14; Eph 5:1.

Doing good for God alone

23:5;
Lk 16:
14-15;
Jn 5:44

Am 4:5

6[•] ¹Be careful not to make a show of your righteousness before people. If you do so, you do not gain anything from your Father in heaven. ²When you give something to the poor, do not have it trumpeted before you, as do those who want to be seen in the synagogues and in the streets, in order to be praised by the people. I assure you, they have been already paid in full.

Ps 139:
2-3

³If you give something to the poor, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴so that your gift remains really secret. Your Father, who sees what is kept secret, will reward you.

⁵When you pray, do not be like those who want to be seen. They love to stand and pray in the synagogues or on street corners to be seen by everyone. I assure you, they have already been paid in full. ⁶When you pray, go into your room, close the door, and pray to your Father who is with you in secret; and your Father who sees what is kept secret will reward you.

2K 4:33;
Dn 6:11

• Our Father...

(Lk 11:1; Mk 11:25)

⁷When you pray, do not use a lot of words, as the pagans do, for they believe that the more they say, the more chance they have of being

• **6.1** After the six opposites (“but I say to you”), Matthew gives us three examples of another secret without which we shall not see God: work for him alone without wanting anyone to know, and in such a way that we ourselves will have immediately forgotten what we have done.

Those who make a show. The expression appears three times with reference to good deeds, prayer and fasting. Jesus uses a word often translated as “being hypocrites,” which refers in a general way to those who make a show, or who are shallow, and make fun of the things of God.

It is perhaps difficult not to want to be seen by others, but it is far more difficult to do good without looking at oneself and being satisfied because: “I am good.” It is, nevertheless, the way of enabling us to enter into the secrets of God.

• **7.** The value of prayer does not lie in the quantity of words and the mere repetition of formulas, as if accomplishing a task. The value of prayer lies chiefly in our inner attitude of faith and love of God. We should try to lift our mind and heart to God as a Father and a friend, a God who loves us and is always waiting for us to share a silent moment with him. To pray is not to talk much, but to surrender our lives into God’s loving hands.

Jesus gives the *Our Father* to his disciples as the perfect prayer coming from the heart of God’s children, expressing as it does, what they should ask and the order in which the requests should be made. Actually we have two

texts of the *Our Father*; Luke’s text is shorter (11:1). Many hold that Matthew gives a slightly enlarged formula and better composed which was generally used in the first Christian generation, but this is not at all certain. In Matthew’s text there are twelve verses expressing seven petitions: two perfect numbers. Three (God’s number) that refers to God, four (earth’s number) that refers to our needs. In the language spoken by Jesus, the key word is *come*: *Your kingdom come*.

The contemporaries of Jesus used the word *Heaven* to signify God, because they would not pronounce his name. Jesus says likewise: *Father in Heaven*, meaning: God the Father.

For us the limitless sky by day and by night is the image of a wonderful world where God is everything. In calling on our Father in Heaven, we do not mean that he is far or near, above or below or inside. We only intend to raise our spirits to Him. We recognize that our words are not worthy, that our concerns are selfish and limited, when we compare them with the breadth of His thoughts and the generosity of His love. That we can address him and call him Father is not something natural, but a very special privilege. “My Father,” says Jesus; also: “Your Father.” For he is the only one, and we are adopted children, by the mercy of God who allowed us to be *born again* (Jn 3:1).

The Bible speaks of God, and also of the *Name* of God. All of creation is but a manifestation of God, and he fills this universe. He is not contained in it, nor is he in a determined

6:32; Lk 12:30 heard. ⁸Do not be like them. Your Father knows what you need, even before you ask him.

Lk 11: 1-4; Ezk 36:23; Jn 17:6; 26:39 ⁹This, then, is how you should pray:

Our Father in heaven,
holy be your name,

¹⁰your kingdom come,
your will be done
on earth as in heaven.

Pro 30:8 ¹¹Give us today our daily bread.

¹²Forgive us our debts,
just as we have forgiven those
who are in debt to us.

¹³Do not bring us to the test,
but deliver us from the evil one.

¹⁴If you forgive others their wrongdoings, your Father in heaven will also forgive yours. ¹⁵If you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive you either.

18:21;
18:35;
26:41;
Jn 17:15

Mk 11:25;
Eph 4:32;
Col 3:13;
Sir 28:
1-5

place. Because of this, we speak of his *Name* as a way of designating his active presence, radiance, and splendor which covers everything. It is rather like acknowledging that there is a distance between what we know of him and what he is.

Holy be your name! May your Name be known and proclaimed Holy! May your splendor and generosity be seen in those who become your children. May your perfection be recognized through their good works (5:16). May your presence and your riches be welcomed by those who keep your word, according to John 14:23. The Father only wants to pour out his holiness and happiness on the children he has chosen and loved. He wants to seal us with his Name so that, day and night, we will be united with him, like the Father and the Son are united by the Holy Spirit.

Your kingdom come. With the coming of Jesus, that kingdom has come near to us. God reigns in every place where people have known him through the teaching of Jesus. There he can act without danger of being misinterpreted for he is now known for what he is. The believers now perceive him, not as a God who imposes obligations, or as a Savior more powerful than the evil ones, but they recognize him in the gift of his Son, in the humiliation of the Son and in their mutual love. From this discovery, love and mercy pour forth and, in time, we will see on earth some fruits of this kingdom. The reconciled children of God are a leavening element in society, and the whole of humanity with its projects, labor, economic and political plans moves towards a common goal: everyone and everything must return to the Father.

Whether we are good, bad or indifferent, the kingdom of God will come, with or without our help, because it is actually already here.

Your will be done. These are the words of Jesus in Gethsemane (Mt 26:39). This prayer condemns many of our prayers through which we want to force God to act. Some people

consider themselves to have faith because they always wait for God to solve their problems. The children of God instead lift up their spirit to him so that God's will may be, at last, their own will.

On earth as in heaven. This applies to the previous three petitions. It reminds us that everything in this world that is created and subject to time depends on another, uncreated world, where time does not exist and which is nothing less than the mystery of God. There the Father, source of the divine being, enjoys his infinite perfection in the mutual gift of the divine persons. In him there is neither sadness nor resentment and before him are the elect: he sees them, as they will be after the resurrection. He sees the universe unified in Christ and his will fulfilled and glorified by all. We, who live in time, are in anguish because of an imperfect situation, in a world in labor where evil appears to triumph. We pray that everything may come about according to the initial plan of God, as it truly will.

We ask the Father for *the bread* he has promised to those who listen to his word. Modern people believe that their material welfare depends only on their own effort. The Bible, however, says that it depends on both God and us. Alone we can bring some economic miracles about for a while, but we may waste the accumulated riches. Only by listening to the word of God (Dt 8:3) will people have bread and be able to distribute it. A person who expects from God, not *his* or *her* bread but *our bread*, will strive to find work, to work in useful ways, and to promote justice where he is working.

What should we say? The bread "we need" or our "daily" bread or sustenance? The original text uses a difficult word that has different meanings. Many have understood that the children of God feel the need of much more than what is asked for the body and that the eucharist was already meant as it is in the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves.

Is 58:5

• ¹⁶When you fast, do not put on a miserable face as do the hypocrites. They put on a gloomy face, so that people can see they are fasting. I tell you this: they have been paid in full already. ¹⁷When you fast, wash your face and make yourself look cheerful, ¹⁸because you are not fasting for appearances or for people, but for your Father who sees beyond appearances. And your Father, who

sees what is kept secret, will reward you.

(Lk 11:34; 12:13)

23:5

• ¹⁹Do not store up treasures for yourself here on earth, where moth and rust destroy it, and where thieves can steal it. ²⁰Store up treasures for yourself with God, where no moth or rust can destroy it, nor thief come and steal it.

Lk 12:
33-34;
Jas 5:2-3;
Sir 29:11

19:21;
Col 3:1

The Our Father speaks of *debts* that we must forgive (v. 12). In verse 14, we read *wrongs*. Jesus considers debts and wrongs as the same thing. When we forgive someone who asks for forgiveness, we are not doing that person a favor, nor do we deserve any credit for doing it; we actually free ourselves from some rancor or hatred that is poisoning us. Inasmuch as we stick to our rights, we hold fast to this world. God wants to forgive us and bring us closer to him, but how can he if we remain anchored to the things of this world?

Jesus speaks to the poor who are accustomed to being burdened with debts, which many times they cannot settle. They are obliged to live together with neighbors they have not chosen. All this increases the occasions for offending one another. Many people today live very independent lives and hold as an ideal not to owe anything to anyone. This independence can make it harder for us to understand God's mercy towards us, poor as we really are before God.

Do not bring us to the test. Thus speak those who know their weaknesses and little faith.

We will be more prudent if we know that the enemy is not simply *evil*, but *the evil one*. Somebody stronger than ourselves is watching to deceive us, to make us lose faith and fall, as soon as we feel sure of ourselves and abandon the means given by Jesus for perseverance in the faith and in the Church.

See another shorter text in Luke 11:1.

• 16. Here Jesus neither justifies nor condemns fasting. He himself fasted: 4:2; 9:15; 17:21. Fasting is unworthy when done to obtain human approval rather than God's.

All religions know fasting. It is a way of calling upon God, especially when great misfortunes come upon us (Jl 2:12); it befits people who feel guilty, and want to move to compassion the One who forgives them (Jon 3:5). It

also teaches self-control and integrates our energies in preparation for divine communication (Ex 34:28).

Scripture puts limited emphasis on fasting. The prophets asserted that fasting without justice towards the neighbor is of no use: Isaiah 58; Zechariah 7:4.

From the time of Gandhi, persons and groups have also used fasting as a means of social pressure, as a political weapon to call attention to some demands. This is all right, although it is different from the religious fast of which Jesus speaks. The difference is that a religious fast is addressed to God, not to public opinion (Mt 6:18), and it entails an inner disposition of conversion and sorrow for personal sin on the part of the fasting person.

• 19. *Do not store up treasures.* The Gospel says: "Do not treasure treasures," treasures meaning those savings held in reserve rather than something that is loved. For centuries the majority of human beings rarely had personal reserves: the family or the clan took charge of the reserve in times of adversity. Today each one is in charge of his own resources; it is perhaps better, but how do we escape the obsession of a secure future? Once more Jesus invites us to believe in the Providence of the Father: if we have his interests at heart, he will look after ours.

Store up with God. The Gospel says "in Heaven", and we know that Heaven is one of the names of God.

There also your heart will be. (In the Jewish culture the heart is where judgments and decisions are made). I do not possess things but they possess me and by degrees impose on me a certain life-style.

There also your heart will be. It is this certitude that motivates any effort made towards "evangelical poverty." It is a question of being as free as possible for action and for love. Jesus calls us to disinterested action and at the

²¹For where your treasure is, there also your heart will be.

Pro 20:27;
Lk 11:
34-35;
Mt 5:15

• ²²The lamp of the body is the eye; if your eyes are sound, your whole body will be in the light. ²³If your eyes are diseased, your whole body will be in darkness. Then, if your light has become darkness, how dark will be the darkest part of you!

Set your heart on the kingdom

(Lk 12:23; 16:13)

Lk
16:13;
Ps 62:11

• ²⁴No one can serve two masters; for he will either hate one and love the other, or he will be loyal to the first and look down on the second. You cannot at the same time serve God and money.

Lk 12:
22-31

²⁵This is why I tell you not to be worried about food and drink for yourself, or about clothes for your body. Is not life more important than food, and is not the body more important than clothes? ²⁶Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow, they do not harvest and do not store food in barns, and yet your heavenly Fa-

10:31

ther feeds them. Are you less worthy than they are?

²⁷Can any of you add a day to your life by worrying about it? ²⁸Why are you so worried about your clothes? Look at how the flowers in the fields grow. They do not toil or spin. ²⁹But I tell you that not even Solomon in all his wealth was clothed like one of these. ³⁰If God so clothes the grass in the field, which blooms today and is to be burned tomorrow in an oven, how much more will he clothe you? What little faith you have!

1K 10

³¹Do not worry and say: What are we going to eat? What are we going to drink? or: What shall we wear?

³²The pagans busy themselves with such things; but your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.

6:7;
Lk 12:30

³³Set your heart first on the kingdom and justice of God, and all these things will also be given to you. ³⁴Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Is 51:1;
Wis 1:1

16:4

same time warns us against inordinate attachment to persons, to ideas and possessions: we are to be ready for anything but must never get attached to the fruits of action.

• 22. Here *eye* is the conscience. To be bright-eyed signifies generosity, to be dark-eyed signifies meanness. Jesus emphasizes what he has just said: a misinformed conscience leads us astray and turns us in on ourselves.

• 24. *No one can serve two masters.* This opening line helps us understand what follows, that Jesus wants us to be free, not of concerns but of all worries, in order to serve God.

Scripture had already taught that we must choose between God and false gods. Jesus affirms that money is a false god, because it offers happiness and security for the future, but robs us of our only riches, that is, the present time. Caught up in making money, we are unable to live truly and freely; we neglect our personal growth and family life, keep silent before

evil and lie. We ignore our neighbor and grovel before the powerful.

Why are you so worried? After worrying much because we do not have money, or because we are having a hard time, or because our work is being delayed, we are ashamed at meeting simple persons who share the little they possess with others poorer than they, without feeling sad or thinking they have done something great. Liberation is the work of God throughout history, and we, shall we have enough faith to free ourselves from so many worries?

The comparison with the flowers and the birds does not mean that we can fold our arms and be idle, because when God gave us arms and brains, it was for us to use them. Rather Jesus teaches that, if God takes care of and beautifies the smallest of creatures, how much more will he care for us that our lives may be beautiful and perfect.

Set your heart first on the kingdom. It is a matter of concrete realities: the *kingdom*

Don't be a judge

(Lk 6:37; 11:9; 6:31; 13:23)

Lk 6:
37-42;
1Cor 4:5Mk 4:24;
Jn 8:7Rom 2:1;
14:41Cor 5:12;
Jas 4:11

7 ¹Do not judge, and you will not be judged. ²In the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and the measure you use for others will be used for you. ³Why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, and not see the plank in your own eye? ⁴How can you say to your brother, 'Come, let me take the speck from your eye,' as long as that plank is in your own? ⁵Hypocrite, take first the plank out of your own eye, then you will see clearly enough to take the speck out of your brother's eye.

⁶Do not give what is holy to the dogs, or throw your pearls to the pigs: they might trample on them, and even turn on you and tear you to pieces.

⁷Ask and you will receive; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened. ⁸For everyone who asks, receives; whoever seeks, finds; and the door will be opened to him who knocks. ⁹Would any of you give a stone to your son, when he asks for bread? ¹⁰Or give him a snake, when he asks for a fish? ¹¹As bad as you are, you know how to give good things to your children. How much more, then, will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!

¹²So, do to others whatever you would that others do to you: there you have the Law and the Prophets.

¹³Enter through the narrow gate: for wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many go that way. ¹⁴How narrow is the gate that leads to life, and how

Lk 11:9;
Mt 18:19Mk 11:24;
Jn 14:1415:7;
16:23;
Jas 1:5;
1Jn 3:22;
5:14Lk 6:31;
Jas 1:17;
Rom 13:8

Lk 13:24

Acts
14:22

means the transparentness of God in our life; *his justice* is a "putting in order" under his attention of all that we are and all that we do. A risk to run for a young person, or a couple: to begin to think of the future, family and apostolic activity according to the criteria of the Gospel, no longer under pressure of Malthusian fear or the race to maintain their life-style.

7.1 No doubt when Jesus spoke these words it was with the same meaning as in 5:43. Usually those who consider themselves as good, or belonging to the group of the converted, judge and criticize those of a different standing. It is a form of pride that spiritual authors call the "fault of beginners." So strongly inscribed is it in human nature that many among the "just" of the Bible have expressed their disapproval of the "sinner" who did not observe the law of God. Contrariwise the new law tells us not to consider ourselves superior or be judges of those who take a different road, or who are led by God to do so. *Do not judge.* We must exercise good judgment in order to distinguish between the good and evil around us. Though it is a factor of success never to displease anyone, we must have the courage to tell others the wrong that they do. Here "to judge" means to condemn.

When we look at our own lives, we realize that those who helped us grow were those who supported and understood us, not those who judged and condemned us.

Do not judge. See Romans 2:1; 14:4; 1 Corinthians 5:12; James 4:11.

6. *Do not give what is holy to the dogs, or throw your pearls to the pigs.* Jesus addressed this warning to his followers living in a hostile world. They should not tell everything to everyone. God has given each of us wonderful gifts: we must not share them with everyone at once, believing that it will bring them to faith.

7. See commentary on Luke 11:9; Mark 11:24; John 14:13; 15:7; James 1:5.

13. *Enter through the narrow gate.* Maybe someone was asking Jesus: "Who will be saved?" (Mt 19:25). In no instance did Jesus say whether those who would share in eternal life would be many or few. He did say many times that *very few would be chosen from among the many called.* That means that among the many people privileged to meet him, very few would experience the Gospel's riches and bring forth fruit in themselves and for others. The *chosen* or approved

rough the road; few there are who find it.

The tree is known by its fruits

(Lk 6:43)

• ¹⁵Beware of false prophets: they come to you in sheep's clothing, but inside they are wild wolves. ¹⁶You will recognize them by their fruits. Do you ever pick grapes from thorn-bushes, or figs from thistles?

¹⁷A good tree always produces good fruit, a rotten tree produces bad fruit. ¹⁸A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, and a rotten tree cannot bear good fruit. ¹⁹Any tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown in the fire. ²⁰So you will know them by their fruit.

Wise and foolish builders

(Lk 6:46; 13:26; Mk 1:22)

• ²¹Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord! Lord!' will enter the kingdom

of heaven, but the one who does the will of my heavenly Father. ²²Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not speak in your name? Did we not cast out devils and perform many miracles in your name?' ²³Then I will tell them openly, 'I have never known you; *away from me, you evil people!*'

²⁴"So then, anyone who hears these words of mine, and acts accordingly, is like a wise man, who built his house on rock. ²⁵The rain poured, the rivers flooded, and the wind blew and struck that house, but it did not collapse because it was built on rock. ²⁶But anyone who hears these words of mine, and does not act accordingly, is like a fool who built his house on sand. ²⁷The rain poured, the rivers flooded, and the wind blew and struck that house; it collapsed, and what a terrible fall that was!"

are those who persevere and strive for perfect freedom.

For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many go that way. They stray from leading a life in which Jesus is everything for them. They waste the gifts of God entrusted to them and apparently become useless for the Kingdom. Yet, even so, they are not deprived of God's mercy.

• 15. Most probably Matthew gives us these words of Jesus for the benefit of certain believers in the early Church who considered themselves as charismatic prophets. They may well have received gifts of the Spirit but have degenerated since then. In a wider sense Jesus' words address all who encourage division, untruth and violence, even when they pretend to serve a just cause.

Prophets wore a sheepskin by way of a cloak: a wolf could hide in one. The world has always had a number of "false prophets," usually prophets of easy life, and if the Word of God condemns them, many would say that their words have been misinterpreted. It would be well however to ask ourselves why our holy and sacred liberalism tends to sow death in all domains and smothers in so many the ability to believe and hope.

Do you ever pick grapes from thorn-bushes? Jesus invites us to look at the facts before coming to conclusions. We find it hard to carefully observe the reality in which we live. We prefer to discuss and debate about ideas rather than to analyze particular situations. Jesus, accustomed to manual labor, distrusts ideas and theories.

• 21. *Many will say to me on that day.* Matthew probably quotes this sentence pointing out to the charismatic prophets who disturb his communities by not obeying precepts that are addressed to everyone.

Whether we teach or work miracles, these abilities and ministries given us for the good of the community do not assure us that we are in the grace of God. True faith works through love (Gal 5:6) and moves us to fulfill all the Law: James 2:8.

Anyone who hears these words of mine (v. 24). Jesus means those who listen to his words and are converted: they believe themselves already saved. If they do not use their initial enthusiasm to build their lives on solid foundations, such as scriptural meditation, generosity, resistance to evil inclinations, sharing in the Christian community—then everything will tumble down later.

Ezk
22:28;
2P 2:1;
Lk 6:26;
Gal 1:8
Lk 6:
43-44;
Mt 12:33;
Mk 9:40;
Lk 9:50;
Mt 10:16;
Jn 10:12;
Acts 20:29

Sir 27:6;
Jas 3:12

3:10;
Lk 3:9;
13:7;
Jn 15:6
12:33

Lk 6:46;
Rom 2:13;
Jas 1:22;
1Jn 2:17

Jer 14:14;
27:15;
Mk 9:38

Ps 6:9;
Mt 10:33;
2Tim
2:12;
Mt 13:41;
25:41

Lk 6:
47-49;
Jas 1:22

Ezk 13:
10-14

Mk 1: 21-22; Lk 4: 31-32

•²⁸When Jesus had finished this discourse, the crowds were struck by the way he taught, ²⁹because he taught with authority, unlike their teachers of the Law.

Cure of a leper
(Mk 1:40; Lk 5:12)

Mk 1: 40-45; Lk 5: 12-16; Mt 1:35; Lk 4:42

8 •¹When Jesus came down from the mountain, large crowds followed him.

²Then a leper came forward. He knelt before him and said, "Sir, if you want to, you can make me clean."

³Jesus stretched out his hand, touched him, and said, "I want to, be clean again." At that very moment the man was cleansed from his leprosy. ⁴Then Jesus said to him, "See that you do not tell anyone, but go to the priest, have yourself declared clean, and offer the gift that Moses ordered as proof of it."

Lev 14: 2-32; Mt 9:30; Lk 5:16; Mk 7:36; Lk 17:14

The faith of the centurion
(Lk 7:1; Jn 4:46)

Lk 7:1-10; Jn 4: 46-53

•⁵When Jesus entered Capernaum, an army captain approached him to ask his help, ⁶"Sir, my servant lies sick at home. He is paralyzed and suffers terribly." ⁷Jesus said to him, "I will come and heal him."

⁸The captain answered, "I am not worthy to have you under my roof.

Just give an order and my boy will be healed. ⁹For I myself, a junior officer, give orders to my soldiers. And if I say to one, 'Go!' he goes; and if I say to another, 'Come!' he comes; and if I say to my servant, 'Do this!' he does it."

¹⁰When Jesus heard this he was astonished, and said to those who were following him, "I tell you, I have not found such faith in Israel. ¹¹I say to you, many will come from east and west and sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob at the feast in the kingdom of heaven; ¹²but the heirs of the kingdom will be thrown out into the darkness; there they will wail and grind their teeth."

Lk 13: 28-29; Mt 25:10; 19:30; Mk 10:31

Lk 13:23

¹³Then Jesus said to the captain, "Go home now. As you believed, so let it be." And at that moment his servant was healed.

9:29; 15:28

¹⁴Jesus went to Peter's house and found Peter's mother-in-law in bed with fever. ¹⁵He took her by the hand and the fever left her; she got up and began to wait on him.

Mk 1: 29-31; Lk 4: 38-39; Mk 9:27; Acts 3:7

¹⁶Towards evening they brought to Jesus many possessed by evil spirits, and with a word he drove out the spirits. He also healed all who were sick. ¹⁷In doing this he fulfilled what was said by the prophet Isaiah:

Mk 1: 32-34; Lk 4: 40-41; Mk 3:10

Is 53:4; Jn 1:29

• 28. With this paragraph Matthew closes the first Discourse wherein he gathers words of Jesus that might serve as a "call to all people of good will." A new Discourse will begin in chapter 10.

• **8.1** In this new section of his gospel (8:1-9:35) Matthew has placed a collection of miracles. For him, these miracles are not only extraordinary events: they contain lessons on what a disciple of Jesus is. To begin with: the cure of a leper; on the part of Jesus this is an act of courage, and an act that openly violates the law of purity (see Mk 1:40).

Then, the faith of the centurion, a Roman officer (v. 5). Jesus speaks of the Jews who will

be excluded from the kingdom of God. That may also be the case of the new heirs of the Kingdom who are the Christians of the West.

• 5. See commentary on Luke 7:1.

The heirs of the kingdom (v. 12). These words are intended to express the Jewish term used by Jesus: the sons of the Kingdom, that is: those who belong, or: those who side with, are associated with the Kingdom. Because all of Jewish life was aimed at inheriting the kingdom promised to them.

Among the Jewish people, at that time, religion was taught by the religious community. There was no problem of personal conversion; the children of Jewish families became Jewish

He bore our infirmities and took on himself our diseases.

Mk 4:35; Lk 8:22
Lk 9: 57-60
2Cor 8:9
1K 19:20

¹⁸When he saw the crowd press around him, Jesus gave orders to cross to the other shore. ¹⁹A teacher of the Law approached him and said, "Master, I will follow you wherever you go." ²⁰Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head."

²¹Another disciple said to him, "Lord, let me go and bury my father first." ²²But Jesus answered him, "Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead."

Jesus calms the storm

(Mk 4:35; Lk 8:22)

Mk 4: 36-41; Lk 8: 23-25

²³Jesus got into the boat and his disciples followed him. ²⁴Without warning a fierce storm hit the lake, with waves sweeping the boat. But Jesus was asleep.

6:30; 8:10

²⁵They woke him and cried, "Lord save us! We are lost!" ²⁶But Jesus answered, "Why are you so afraid, you of little faith?" Then he stood up and rebuked the wind and sea; and it became completely calm.

²⁷The disciples were astonished. They said, "What kind of man is he? Even the winds and the sea obey him."

believers. The Jewish teachers did not belittle faith, but in fact they always spoke about practices and commitment.

Jesus does not belittle the practices, but it is faith that he *admires* and praises; see Matthew 9:2; 9:22; 9:28.

Many will come (v. 11). Likewise for us, practices and religious habits will not introduce us to the Kingdom. We must discover the loving presence of the Father while experiencing the power of Jesus' word and controversial deeds.

They will be thrown out into the darkness (v. 12). Let us not immediately think of hell: Jesus is using the style of the prophets. Staying with the appearance of a learned religion, one goes everywhere except where life is.

The demoniacs and the pigs

(Mk 5:1; Lk 8:26)

²⁸When Jesus reached Gadara, on the other side, he was met by two men, possessed by devils, who came out from the tombs. They were so fierce that no one dared to pass that way. ²⁹Suddenly they shouted, "What do you want with us, you, Son of God? Have you come to torture us before the time?"

³⁰At some distance away there was a large herd of pigs feeding. ³¹So the demons begged him, "If you drive us out, send us into that herd of pigs." ³²Jesus ordered them, "Go!" So the demons left and went into the pigs. The whole herd rushed down the cliff into the lake and drowned.

³³The men in charge of them ran off to the town, where they told the whole story, also what had happened to the men possessed with the demons. ³⁴Then the whole town went out to meet Jesus; and when they saw him, they begged him to leave their area.

Jesus cures a paralytic

(Mk 2:1; Lk 5:17)

9¹ Jesus got back into the boat, crossed the lake again, and came to his hometown. ²Here they

• **9.1** See commentary on Mark 2:1; Luke 5:17.

They praised God for giving such power to human beings (v. 8). This formula is rather clumsy. The crowd is astonished to see how God's saving power is manifest among people, and through a man, Jesus. Matthew has no wish to separate the Church from Christ: every Christian community received the gifts of God for healing and reconciliation. It is known that the ministers of the Church have special authority to pardon, but the grace of God also flows in many other very different channels. (1 Cor 5:3-5; 2 Cor 2:5-11). When we establish relations of mercy and trust, and accept fraternal correction humbly, when there is mutual forgiveness between spouses, Christ is the one

Mk 5:
1-20;
Lk 8:
26-39

Lk 4:34;
Acts
16:17

Mk 2:
1-12;
Lk 5:
17-26

8:6; Acts 9:33; Lk 7:48 brought a paralyzed man to him, lying on a bed. Jesus saw their faith and said to the paralytic, "Courage, my son! Your sins are forgiven."

Jn 10:33 ³Then some teachers of the Law said within themselves, "This man insults God." ⁴Jesus was aware of what they were thinking, and said, "Why have you such evil thoughts? ⁵Which is easier to say: 'Your sins are forgiven' or 'Stand up and walk'? ⁶You must know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins." He then said to the paralyzed man, "Stand up! Take your stretcher and go home." ⁷The man got up, and went home.

Dn 7:10; Jn 5:27 Acts 9:35 ⁸When the crowds saw this, they were filled with awe, and praised God for giving such power to human beings.

Jesus calls Matthew

(Mk 2:13; Lk 5:27)

Mk 2: 13-17; Lk 5: 27-32; Mt 18:12 ⁹As Jesus moved on from there, he saw a man named Matthew at his seat in the custom-house, and he said to him, "Follow me!" And Matthew got up and followed him. ¹⁰Now it happened, while Jesus was at table in Matthew's house, many tax collectors and sinners joined Jesus and his disciples. ¹¹When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why is it that your master eats with sinners and tax collectors?"

11:19; Lk 7:34; 15:1; 19:7 1Tm 1:15 ¹²When Jesus heard this, he said, "Healthy people do not need a doctor, but sick people do. ¹³Go and find out what this means: *What I want is mercy, not sacrifice.* I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

12:7; Hos 6:6

¹⁴Then the disciples of John came to him with the question, "How is it that we and the Pharisees fast on many occasions, but not your disciples?"

¹⁵Jesus answered them, "How can you expect wedding guests to mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The time will come, when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast.

¹⁶No one patches an old coat with a piece of unshrunk cloth, for the patch will shrink and tear an even bigger hole in the coat. ¹⁷In the same way, you don't put new wine in old wineskins. If you do, the wineskins will burst and the wine will be spilt. No, you put new wine in fresh skins; then both are preserved."

A woman healed, a child raised to life

(Mk 5:21; Lk 8:40)

¹⁸While Jesus was speaking to them, an official of the synagogue came up to him, bowed before him and said, "My daughter has just died, but come and place your hands on her, and she will live." ¹⁹Jesus stood up and followed him with his disciples.

²⁰Then a woman, who had suffered from a severe bleeding for twelve years, came up from behind and touched the edge of his cloak; ²¹for she thought, "If I only touch his cloak, I will be healed." ²²Jesus turned, saw her and said, "Courage, my daughter, your faith has saved you." And from that moment the woman was cured.

²³When Jesus arrived at the official's house and saw the flute players and the excited crowd, he said,

Mk 2: 18-22; Lk 5: 33-39; Mt 11:18; Lk 18:12

Rom 7:6; 2Cor 5:17

Mk 5: 21-43; Lk 8: 40-56; Mt 8:3; Mk 6:5; Lk 13:13

Lev 15:25

Acts 19:12; 3:16

Jn 11:11

who forgives and pardons, and what is forgiven among us *on earth*, is forgiven *in heaven* (Mt 18:18).

- 9. See commentary on Mark 2:13.

- 18. See commentary on Mark 5:21.

She touched the edge of his cloak (v. 20). As a good Jew, Jesus had fringes on his cloak (Num 15:38; Mt 23:5).

²⁴ “Get out of here! The girl is not dead. She is only sleeping!” And they laughed at him. ²⁵ But once the crowd had been turned out, Jesus went in and took the girl by the hand, and she stood up. ²⁶ The news of this spread through the whole area.

Mk 1:34

20:29-34

• ²⁷ As Jesus moved on from there, two blind men followed him, shouting, “Son of David, help us!” ²⁸ When he was about to enter the house, the blind men caught up with him, and Jesus said to them, “Do you believe that I am able to do what you want?” They answered, “Yes, sir!”

20:34;
8:13;
5:28

²⁹ Then Jesus touched their eyes and said, “As you have believed, so let it be.” ³⁰ And their eyes were opened. Then Jesus gave them a stern warning, “Be careful that no one knows about this.” ³¹ But as soon as they went away, they spread the news about him through the whole area.

Mk 7:36

³² When they had just left, some people brought to Jesus a man who was dumb, because he was possessed by a demon. ³³ When the demon was driven out, the dumb man began to speak. The crowds were astonished and said, “Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel.” ³⁴ But the Pharisees said, “He drives away demons with the help of the prince of demons.”

12:22-24;
Lk 11:
14-15;
12:10;
11:29Mk 7:
32-37;
9:17;
2:12

Mk 3:22

• ³⁵ Jesus went around all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and he cured every sickness and disease. ³⁶ When he saw the crowds, he was moved with pity, for they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷ Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is abundant, but the workers are only few. ³⁸ Ask the master of the harvest to send workers to gather his harvest.”

Lk 10:1;
Mt 4:23;
12:15;
Lk 4:44;
Mk 6:54;
Lk 6:17Mk 6:34;
Mt 14:14;
15:32;
1K 22:17Lk 10:2;
Jn 4:
35-38

• 27. *Two blind men followed him, shouting.* In what manner, if they were blind? Stumbling and being carried by others perhaps. When you sin, shout to the Lord and keep on looking for Christ.

• 35. With this paragraph that briefly summarizes the ministry of Jesus in Galilee, Matthew intends to show that indeed the kingdom of God is there: evil has been given a fatal blow.

He was moved with pity, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. See Numbers 27:17; Ezekiel 34:5; Zechariah 10:3; John 4:35; Mark 6:34; and Luke 10:2.

HEALINGS

God himself, in Jesus, had come down to cure humankind. Because this work would be very long and painful, it was necessary to provide some visible signs to help people believe in this almost imperceptible healing.

Jesus ought to heal sick persons and, even in our days, the Christian community should give signs of what they preach. They must cure today's world of its sicknesses. The gifts of healing are not limited to healing bodily ills and

the devil is responsible for more than individual maladies.

People seek after those who can cure their illnesses, and so great crowds followed Jesus. For him, however, sickness as well as the exploitation of the human person, hunger and war, are only fruits and signs of a deeper illness attached to our heart, which is sin. Constant work and the unity of all people of goodwill are sufficient to remedy some of our misfortunes, but the only way to eradicate evil at its roots is to restore human persons to their dignity as children of God. This requires a personal transformation that comes from God sending us his Spirit.

Jesus asks each of us to serve humankind with our own talents. He needs also *workers for the harvest* of the Kingdom, that is, to gather into the Church those who receive a call from God. “Pray,” says Jesus, “and you will perhaps hear God’s call.”

Of course, each Christian community prays to God and the Spirit brings forth the charisms and ministers and pastors that are needed. Here Jesus asks us to pray for workers in the mission field: they are and always will be too few, especially those who evangelize and build the Church among the poor.

The twelve apostles

(Mk 3:13; Lk 6:12)

10 ¹Then he called his twelve disciples to him, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits, to drive them out and to heal every disease and sickness.

²These are the names of the twelve apostles: first Simon, called Peter, and his brother Andrew;

³James, the son of Zebedee, and his brother John; Philip and Bartholomew, Thomas and Matthew, the tax collector; James, the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; ⁴Simon, the Canaanite, and Judas Iscariot, the man who would betray him.

Jesus sends out the first missionaries

(Lk 9:1; 10:1; Mk 6:7)

⁵Jesus sent these twelve on mission with the instructions: "Do not visit pagan territory and do not enter a Samaritan town. ⁶Go instead to the lost sheep of the people of Israel.

⁷Go and proclaim this message:

The kingdom of heaven is near. ⁸Heal the sick, bring the dead back to life, cleanse the lepers, and drive out demons. You received this as a gift, so give it as a gift. ⁹Do not carry any gold, silver or copper in your purses. ¹⁰Do not take a traveler's bag, or an extra shirt, or sandals, or a staff: workers deserve their living.

¹¹When you come to a town or a village, look for a worthy person, and stay there until you leave.

¹²When you enter the house, wish it peace. ¹³If the people in the house deserve it, your peace will be on them; if they do not deserve it, your blessing will come back to you.

¹⁴And if you are not welcomed, and your words are not listened to, leave that house or that town, and shake the dust off your feet. ¹⁵I assure you, it will go easier for the people of Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment, than it will for the people of that town.

4:17;
Lk 10:9

Is 55:1;
Acts 8:20

Lk 9:3;
10:4;
Num
18:31;
1Cor 9:14

Mk 6:
10:11;
Lk 9:4-5;
10:5-12

Acts
13:51;
18:6

11:24;
Gen
19:24;
2P 2:6;
Jd 1:7

• **10.1** Till then, Jesus had spoken only in the synagogues around Capernaum. Now he attracts fame and followers and begins to draw multitudes. In that moment he establishes the group of the Twelve. He needs them to prepare meetings, to spread his doctrine, to multiply the miraculous signs effected among the sick.

At the same time, Jesus is planning his Church and wants to give it a head: this will be the group of the apostles. They will be the witnesses of Jesus among people, so he teaches them a way of living a common life that will serve as a pattern for the Church.

These are the names of the twelve. The Jewish nation was integrated into twelve tribes. This is why Jesus calls twelve apostles: he wants them to understand that they are the foundation of the new people God will form (Ps 102:19). See Luke 22:30; Revelation 21:14.

He called those he wanted (Mk 3:13). These, in turn, will call others. In the Church everyone can do "apostolic work," but no one makes himself into an apostle, an official wit-

ness of Christ: one has to be called to this responsibility.

Regarding these *twelve*, see commentary on Mark 3:16.

• 5. From the paragraph beginning in 9:35, Matthew was preparing this third "Jesus' discourse" (see Introduction). Jesus has begun his mission; he forms and sends out missionaries.

Apostles means "sent" and "mission" also means "being sent." The Father has sent his Son to earth, and the Son, in turn, sends his apostles. The Father sends messengers of his word, but he also sends his Spirit to touch the hearts and minds of those who listen. Through the Spirit they recognize the word of God in the poor preaching of these messengers who have received no great instruction. The Spirit will give signs: healings and astounding graces supporting the witness of the missionaries.

The successors of the apostles will be missionaries like them. They will not be primarily the administrators of an established Church, but living poorly among the poor, they will es-

Mk 13: 9-13; Lk 21: 11-19; Acts 20:29; Rom 16:19; 24:9
You will be persecuted
(Lk 12:11; Mk 13:9; 8:38)

• ¹⁶Look, I send you out like sheep among wolves. You must be as clever as snakes and as innocent as doves. ¹⁷Be on your guard with people, for they will hand you over to their courts, and they will flog you in their synagogues. ¹⁸You will be brought to trial before rulers and kings because of me, so you

may witness to them and the pagans.

• ¹⁹But when you are arrested, do not worry about what you are to say, or how you are to say it; when the hour comes, you will be given what you are to say. ²⁰For it is not you who will speak, but the Spirit of your Father in you.

²¹Brother will hand over brother to death, and a father his child; children

Lk 12: 11-12

4:10; Jn 15:26; Acts 4:8

Mic 7:6

establish new Churches (see 1 Cor 3:10; 12:28). This new chapter will speak of a mission, the major responsibility of a Christian community. In the first part (vv. 5-16) Jesus addresses the first missionaries of Galilee. In the second part (vv. 17-42) we find Jesus' words pronounced in different circumstances that Matthew adapts for his readers at the very time in which the Church begins to be persecuted in the Roman world.

See commentary on Mark 6:7 and Luke 10:1.

Do not visit pagan territory. Let us not forget that many pagan communities were established in Galilee together with the Jewish ones. Jesus follows his Father's plan of salvation as described in the Bible. The Savior should first gather the *strayed sheep of Israel*, and then bring salvation to all the *pagan nations*: Isaiah 49:6; 60:1-10; Zechariah 14:16; Matthew 15:24.

Whoever welcomes you (v. 40). To reject the messengers is to ignore the call of the Father and to lose the greatest opportunity of one's life.

• 16. THE MARTYRS

Matthew here puts advice that Jesus gave to his witnesses on how to confront persecution. Jesus himself spent long weeks hidden away and his first missionaries probably had to take similar precautions. In relating these instructions Matthew has perhaps adapted them a little to the situation of Christians of his time; he has not invented them.

We have just spoken of witnesses, and martyr in Greek means: witness. Some of these martyrs were before long glorified, but the majority remain unknown. They have often been disfigured by calumny (5:11; Lk 21:17) isolated even from the Christian community and later eliminated. In certain cases entire Christian communities were massacred as in the time of the Roman empire. Today in certain

countries such atrocities continue without the media even mentioning it. In many other cases, persons or Christian groups became martyrs that had assumed a risky position. When Stephen was assassinated (Acts 7) the apostles were not pursued, and many may have taken Stephen to be a fanatic. When the young Christian women of the Roman Empire were persecuted for having decided to remain virgins many said: Why do they flout their family duties? When the Catholics of England, France or China refused to form national churches separated from communion with Rome, were they not rebelling against the laws of their nation?

Maybe we must recognize that martyrdom is a grace and is not given to everyone. Many would be ready to give their life for Christ, but confronted with situations of violence or corruption, they do not see the necessity to expose a scandal and so submit in order to avoid the worst. Others, on the contrary, understand that God is asking them to witness (v. 18) to the Good News that is opposite to what is imposed. In so doing they face the repression by which Society defends itself. Revelation affirms that the murder of witnesses advances Salvation History.

• 19. *Brother will hand over brother to death...* (v. 21) you will be hated by all. This is usual in a climate of terror. Without going so far, witnesses to Christ may find themselves unappreciated by a majority, in their own Church, while perhaps their persecutors are acclaimed (Lk 6:26). In time the Holy Spirit will reveal the truth, but the majority of those witnesses, the lowly, often those who suffer most and are the greatest, will remain unknown until the day when Jesus himself will *acknowledge them before his Father* (v. 32).

In reality, Jesus does not only speak of those who are massacred. Far more numerous and

24:9, 13 will turn against parents and have them put to death. ²²Everyone will hate you because of me, but whoever stands firm to the end will be saved.

16:28; 24:27; 25:31; 26:64; Mk 13:26
 • ²³When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next. I assure you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.

Lk 6:40; Jn 13:16; 15:20
 • ²⁴A student is not above his teacher, nor a slave above his master. ²⁵A student should be glad to become like his teacher, and the slave like his master. If the head of the family has been called Beelzebul, how much more the members of the family! So, do not be afraid of them.

Lk 12: 2-7; Mt 5:15; Lk 8:17; 11:33
 • ²⁶There is nothing covered that will not be uncovered, and nothing hidden that will not be made known.

²⁷What I am telling you in the dark, you must speak in the light. What

you hear in private, proclaim from the housetops.

• ²⁸Do not be afraid of those who kill the body, but have no power to kill the soul. Rather be afraid of him who can destroy both body and soul in hell. ²⁹For only a few cents you can buy two sparrows, yet not one sparrow falls to the ground without your Father knowing. ³⁰As for you, every hair of your head has been counted. ³¹Do not be afraid: you are no less worthy than many sparrows!

• ³²Whoever acknowledges me before others I will acknowledge before my Father in heaven. ³³Whoever rejects me before others I will reject before my Father in heaven.

• ³⁴Do not think that I have come to establish peace on earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a

1P 3:14;
Rev 2:10;
Jas 4:12

1S 14:45;
Acts
27:34
6:26;
12:12

Mk 8:38;
Lk 12:
8-9;
9:26;
2Tim 2:12;
Rev 3:5

Lk 12:
51-53;
2:34;
22:36

doubtless nearer to us are those who have had to conquer fear (26; 28; 31) of being his witnesses on the streets, in schools and in every area of this perverted and evil world. (Gal 1:4; Phil 2:15).

Do not worry. The witnesses of Jesus do not work on their own, and the more they are identified with Jesus in persecution and in prison, the more they are assisted by the Spirit. By worrying while preparing their legal case, they would hinder the freedom of the Spirit and also lose the peace that the Spirit grants the persecuted.

• 23. *You will not have gone through...* Possibly this sentence would have been better placed in the first part of the speech, which is about the mission in Galilee. But it may refer also to Christians of Jewish origins who were persecuted by the Pharisees at the time Matthew wrote his Gospel.

Matthew gives this sentence a broader meaning: though people may cast out the future missionaries, they will never be short of work until the second coming of Jesus.

• 28. *We are cowards and Jesus is aware of this.* He has already said, "Do not fear," when he invited us not to look for security in

money. Now, dealing with the fear of repression, he adds, "If you cannot free yourselves from cowardice, consider where the greater threat comes from, from God or people?"

This is the only time Jesus refers to "fear of God." When the Old Testament mentioned fear of God, it generally meant giving due respect to God. Respect is far from fear. Respect is an attitude proper to a free person. God does not threaten to throw us into hell; rather he reminds us that to lose him is to lose ourselves also, and this is hell.

• 32. *Whoever acknowledges me.* After stressing the sovereign power of his Father, Jesus puts himself on the same level: He will decide our eternal fate. Jesus refers not only to recognizing him in the ultimate sense, that is, by not denying our Christian faith before others; his words also convey a day-by-day demand. We must not be ashamed to act or talk as people of faith, to go public about our Christian convictions when necessary.

• 34. *Do not think that I have come to establish peace.* The peace of the believer comes from the certainty of being loved by God: the angels of Bethlehem said so: Luke 2:14.

Mic 7:6 sword. ³⁵For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. ³⁶Each one will have as enemies those of one's own family.

Lk 14: 26-27; Mk 8:34; Lk 9:23; 12:9; Dt 33:9
³⁷Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me. And whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.

16:24-25
³⁸And whoever does not take up his cross and come after me is not worthy of me. ³⁹Whoever finds his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

Mk 8: 34-35; Lk 9: 23-24; 17:33; Jn 12:25
⁴⁰Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes him who sent me.

Mk 9:37; Lk 9:48; Jn 12: 10:16; 44-45; Gal 4:14
⁴¹The one who welcomes a prophet as a prophet will receive the reward of a prophet; the one who welcomes a just man, because he is a just man, will receive the reward of a just man.

1K 17:9; 2K 4:8
⁴²And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones, because he is my disciple, I assure you, he will not go unrewarded.”

Mk 9:41; 9:38; Lk 9:49; 11:23

Jesus and John the Baptist

(Lk 7:18; 16:16; 10:13)

11 ¹When Jesus had finished giving his twelve disciples these instructions, he went on from there to teach and to proclaim his message in their towns. ²When John the Baptist heard in prison about the activities of Christ, he sent a message by his disciples, ³asking him, “Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?”

⁴Jesus answered them, “Go back and report to John what you hear and see: ⁵the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are made clean, the deaf hear, the dead are brought back to life, and good news is reaching the poor; ⁶and how fortunate is the one who does not take offense at me!”

⁷As the messengers left, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: “When you went out to the desert, what did you expect to see? A reed swept by the wind? ⁸What did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? People who wear fine

Lk 7: 18-28

Is 26:19; 35:5-6; 42:18; 61:1

13:57; 26:31; Jn 6:61

21:32; Mk 9:13; Lk 16:16

Jesus gives no peace to the world, because the rest of the world is made up of confusion, half-truths, people who live midway between greed and fear of risking. The peace of the world, whether in a family or in society, veils unjust conditions imposed by the strongest, or a shared mediocrity. The Gospel awakens everywhere a critical spirit; so that the presence of only one Christian living by the truth is enough to worry many persons: John 3:20; 15:18.

The Gospel moves us to make decisions with greater freedom, disregarding the criticism of those close to us whenever we are convinced that they cannot understand the Gospel values which motivate us. Take, for example, a pregnant girl resisting her parents' advice to obtain an abortion. Christians have been persecuted in many countries for teaching that divine law is above parental authority, which was considered the supreme authority. Thus it happened with the ancient Romans and, more recently, in Korea and China.

Moreover, the devil stirs up persecutions

against every person who becomes converted, in order to scare her and make her turn away.

He is not worthy... (v. 37). Jesus addresses this to others besides missionaries or persons with an exceptional mission. Each one must break away from forms of dependency within the family, which do not nurture the human and spiritual growth of the members. One who loves Christ finds a thousand and one opportunities to free himself from activities, entertainments and worries about his own family, which keep both him and the family at a mediocre level.

• **11.1** See commentary on Luke 7:18.

Jesus has sent the first missionaries: for Matthew it is the time to show how the Kingdom comes—the coming of which they have proclaimed. The visit of the disciples of John will help us to understand what Jesus brings and what cannot be expected of him.

The paragraph which follows in 11:25 will show in its way that what is all-important in the Kingdom is the person of Jesus himself.

14:5; 21:26; Lk 1:76; Dt 18:15; Jn 1:15; 6:14
 Mal 3:1; 23:20
 clothes live in palaces. ⁹What did you really go out to see? A prophet? Yes, indeed, and even more than a prophet. ¹⁰He is the man of whom Scripture says: *I send my messenger ahead of you to prepare the way before you.*

Lk 16:16; Mk 5:18
 I tell you this: no one greater than John the Baptist has come forward from among the sons of women, and yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. ¹²From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven is something to be conquered, and violent men seize it.

Mal 3:23; Mk 9:11; Lk 1:17; Jn 1:21; Rev 2:7
 Up to the time of John, there was only prophesy: all the prophets and the Law. ¹⁴And if you believe me, John is that Elijah, whose coming was predicted. ¹⁵Let anyone with ears listen!

Lk 7:31-35
 Now, to what can I compare the people of this day? They are like children sitting in the marketplace, about whom their companions complain: ¹⁷‘We played the flute for you, but you would not dance. We sang a funeral song, but you would not cry!’

¹⁸For John came fasting, and people said, ‘He is possessed.’ ¹⁹Then the Son of Man came, he ate and drank, and people said, ‘Look at this man! A glutton and drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ Yet the outcome will prove Wisdom to be right.”

• ²⁰Then Jesus began to denounce the cities, in which he had performed most of his miracles, because the people there did not change their ways. ²¹“Alas for you Chorazin and Bethsaida! If the miracles worked in you had taken place in Tyre and Sidon, the people there would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. ²²But I assure you, for Tyre and Sidon it will be more bearable on the day of judgment than for you. ²³And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to heaven? You will be thrown down to the place of the dead! For if the miracles which were performed in you had taken place in Sodom, it would still be there today! ²⁴But I tell you, it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you.”

Lk 11:5;
Mt 3:4;
9:14
9:11;
Lk 15:1;
Mt 19:17

Lk 10:
13-15;
Mt 13:58;
Jn 15:24;
12:37

Mk 6:6;
Is 23:
1-18;
Ezk
26-28;
Am 1:9;
Zec 9:2;
Est 4:1

Jl 3:4

Is 14:
13, 15;
Gen 19;
2P 2:6

10:15

Good news is reaching the poor... (v. 5). Jesus’ message includes a preferential love of God for the poor and for those who share with them in their poverty. The Gospel is not for them *also*, but for them *first*.

EVANGELIZATION OF THE POOR AS A PRIORITY

Good news is reaching the poor (v. 5). This text is to be read together with Luke 1:52; 4:18; 6:20; 10:23.

It would be wrong to interpret this text as thinking that God only asks of us to catechize less instructed people, or those of lower condition in life. In the time of Jesus the Pharisees already thought their duty was to teach simple and uneducated people; Jesus instead sent his apostles, poor among the poor, to enable them to discover the presence and working of God the Father. The concrete life of the rural and urban poor is the context in which funda-

mental experiences occur that will renew the world and the spiritual life of everyone.

Verse 6. See another way of translating this sentence in Luke 7:23.

Verse 11. *No one greater than John the Baptist has come forward*. This verse refers to a prophet or to a political leader.

Verse 12. This sentence could also be translated: “The kingdom of heaven is advancing forcefully.” The kingdom of God is the moving force that makes history progress, taking advantage of both gentle and violent changes in human life. The believers are called to participate actively in this constant transformation. Death and resurrection are at work among us and all over the world.

• 20. Chorazin and Bethsaida: these two cities were the seats of higher schools of religion but had not received the Gospel. *Tyre and Sidon*: two pagan cities, cursed by the prophets.

Take my yoke upon you

(Lk 10:21)

Lk 10:
21-22;
Jn 7:
48-49;
1Cor 1:
17-29

•²⁵ On that occasion Jesus said, “Father, Lord of heaven and earth, I praise you, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to simple people. ²⁶ Yes, Father, this is what pleased you.

28:18;
Jn 3:35;
13:3;
17:2;
Phil 2:9;
Wis 2:13;
Jn 1:18;
10:15

²⁷ Everything has been entrusted to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son, and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

Sir 24:19

²⁸ Come to me, all you who work hard and who carry heavy burdens, and I will refresh you. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble of heart and you will find rest. ³⁰ For my yoke is good, and my burden is light.”

Jer 31:25;
Hos 10:11;
Pro 3:17;
Jer 6:16

1Jn 5:3;
Gal 5:1;
Acts
15:10

Jesus, Lord of the Sabbath

(Mk 2:23; 3:1; Lk 6:1; 14:1)

Mk 2:
23-28;
Lk 6:1-5;
Dt 23:26

12 • ¹ It happened that Jesus walked through the wheat fields on a Sabbath. His disciples were hungry, and began to pick some heads of wheat and crush them to eat the grain. ² When the Pharisees noticed this, they said to Jesus, “Look at your disciples! They are doing what is prohibited on the Sabbath!”

20:10;
Dt 15:14

³ Jesus answered, “Have you not read what David did, when he and his men were hungry? ⁴ He went into the house of God, and they ate the bread offered to God, though neither he nor his men had the right to eat it, but only the priests. ⁵ And have you not read in the Law, that on the Sabbath the priests in the Temple break the Sabbath rest, yet they are not guilty?”

1S 21:
2-7;
Lev 24:
5-9

Num
28:9

• 25. Jesus’ prayer impressed the disciples. In this text it is a short prayer, prompted by the most recent events; events and daily life are also a source of prayer.

You have hidden these things. Intelligent people are not excluded from the faith, of course, but it is the glory of God that faith should not seem to be the privilege of the wise and the intelligent; human wisdom never gives what is essential and often hides it. There were in Palestine at the time some wise people and many others who pretended to be so, but they were rarely seen among the disciples of Jesus.

Everything has been entrusted to me. God does what is needed for people to have always and in all places thousands of ways of knowing him. In this life it is only through Jesus that we have the revelation of the Father.

Must we translate “learn from me for I am...” or “learn from me that I am...”? The humility of Jesus reveals to us the humility of God who never seeks to put us down or intimidate us, but instead always wants to raise us to him. Such humility does not prevent him from being God, and he may exact everything from us because he does not use external force: his influence reaches to the depths of our heart. See Luke 10:21.

Come to me: I will not relieve you of your load but by placing my yoke on you, I give you the means of carrying the load.

Jesus plays with the two words *yoke* and *load*, for the Jews used to call “load” the divine teachings imparted to pupils, and yoke the balancing of the teacher’s sentences, which should be learned by heart.

Jesus, the patient and humble teacher, enables us to see the mercy of God in our lives and in our own cross. He shows us the love of God even in the requirements of the Law. Only God is Good; and good is the authority of Christ.

• **12.1** This chapter records the conflicts of Jesus with the Pharisees regarding the Sabbath. Why does the gospel make so much of these conflicts? Perhaps because at the time of Jesus the heavy load of religious obligations was a formidable obstacle for those searching for God. It may have been also because the Christians lost no time making new laws to which they gave an exaggerated importance. If Jesus deliberately violated the most sacred of the laws given by God to Moses, what about our ecclesiastical laws not guaranteed by the Word of God? In the name of man-made laws, adapted to a context that is not ours, Christian communities have at times been paralyzed and we let millions of people look for churches where they have the communities and pastors they have been deprived of.

12:41; Lk 11:31
9:13; Hos 6:6
⁶I tell you, there is greater than the Temple here. ⁷If you really knew the meaning of the words: *It is mercy I want, not sacrifice*, you would not have condemned the innocent.

Jn 5: 16-17
⁸Besides, the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.”

Mk 3:1-6; Lk 6:6-11
⁹Jesus then left that place and went into one of their synagogues.

Lk 14:3
¹⁰A man was there with a paralyzed hand, and people who wanted to bring a charge against Jesus asked him, “Is it permitted to heal on the Sabbath?”

¹¹But he said to them, “What if one of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath? Will you not take hold of your sheep and lift it out? ¹²Is a human being less worthy of help than a sheep? It is therefore permitted to do good on the Sabbath.” ¹³Then Jesus said to the man, “Stretch out your arm.” He stretched it out and it was completely restored, as sound as the other one.

6:26; 10:31; Lk 12:7; 13:16; Jn 7:23
Jn 5:9; 9:14
27:1; Mk 11:18; Jn 5:16
Lk 6:17; Mt 14:35
¹⁴Then the Pharisees went out, and made plans to get rid of Jesus. ¹⁵As Jesus was aware of their plans, he left that place. Many people followed him, and he cured all who were sick.

8:4; 9:30; Mk 3:12; 7:36
¹⁶Then he gave them strict orders not to make him known.

¹⁷In this way Isaiah’s prophecy was fulfilled:

Is 42:1-4
¹⁸*Here is my servant whom I have chosen, the one I love, and with*

whom I am pleased. I will put my Spirit upon him and he will announce my judgment to the nations.

¹⁹*He will not argue or shout, nor will his voice be heard in the streets. ²⁰The bruised reed he will not crush, nor snuff out the smoldering wick. He will persist until justice is made victorious, ²¹and in him all the nations will put their hope.*

The unforgivable sin

(Mk 3:22; Lk 11:15)

• ²²Then some people brought to him a possessed man, who was blind and who could not talk. Jesus healed the man, who was then able to speak and see. ²³All in the crowd were amazed and wondered, “Could he be the Son of David?” ²⁴When the Pharisees heard this, they said, “It is by Beelzebul, prince of the devils, that this man drives out devils.”

²⁵Jesus knew their thinking, so he said to them, “Every kingdom that is divided by civil war will fall apart, and every city or family that is divided cannot last. ²⁶So if Satan drives out Satan, he is divided: how then can his reign endure? ²⁷And if it is by Beelzebul that I drive out devils, by whom do your own people drive them out? They themselves will give you the answer.

²⁸But if it is by the Spirit of God that I drive out devils, then the king-

Lk 11:
14-30;
Mt 9:
32-34

Mk 3:22

Acts
10:38

- 22. See commentary on Mark 3:22.

Your own people (v. 27). Jesus refers here to the Jewish exorcists who cast out demons with prayers and formularies, as told in Acts 19:13.

Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. This means attributing to the devil the good actions of the Spirit, as we see in Mark 3:30.

Either in this age or in the age to come (v. 32). This is a Jewish idiom meaning that this sin cannot be forgiven, by God or people. How can God forgive one who puts himself out of reach of the forgiving God?

If you have a sound tree (v. 33). This is an-

other application of the sentence read in 7:16. It deals here with the accusation against the Pharisees: they slander whatever is good because they have an evil heart.

Your own words will declare you either innocent or guilty (v. 37). See Luke 19:22. Not only the isolated acts of our life are to be judged. Throughout the years we have built up a practical philosophy and a vision of existence. Beginning with that we judge all which in other people questions our own choices. It is that itself, these words with which we justify ourselves and condemn others, that deserve to be condemned.

dom of God has already come upon you. ²⁹How can anyone break into the strong man's house and make off with his belongings, unless he first ties him up? Only then can he plunder his house.

Is 49:24;
Jn 12:31

³⁰The one who is not with me is against me, and the one who does not gather with me scatters.

Mk 9:38;
Lk 9:49;
Mk 9:40;
Lk 9:50

³¹And so I tell you this: people can be forgiven any sin and any evil thing they say against God, but blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. ³²The one who speaks against the Son of Man, will be forgiven; but the one who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.

10:19;
Mk 8:38;
Lk 9:26;
21:14;
1Tim
1:13;
Lk 12:10

³³If you have a sound tree, its fruit will be sound; if you have a rotten tree, its fruit will be rotten. You can know a tree by its fruit. ³⁴You brood of vipers, how can you say anything good, when you are so evil? For the mouth speaks of what fills the heart. ³⁵A good person produces good things from his good store, and an evil person produces evil things from his evil store.

7:16-20;
Lk 6:
43-45

3:7;
23:33;
Lk 3:7

15:18;
Mk 7:21

³⁶I tell you this: on the day of judgment people will have to give an account of any unjustified word they have spoken. ³⁷Your own words will declare you either innocent or guilty."

Jas 3:1

Jesus criticizes his own generation

(Mk 8:11; Lk 11:16)

• ³⁸Then some teachers of the Law and some Pharisees spoke up, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from you." ³⁹Jesus answered them, "An evil and unfaithful people want a sign, but no sign will be given them except the sign of the prophet Jonah. ⁴⁰In the same way that Jonah spent three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so will the Son of Man spend three days and three nights in the depths of the earth.

Mk 8:
11-12;
Lk 11:16;
11:29-32;
Mt 16:
1-4;
1Cor 12:2;
Lk 12:54;
12:1

Jon 2:1

⁴¹At the judgment, the people of Nineveh will rise with this generation and condemn it, because they reformed their lives at the preaching of Jonah, and here there is greater than Jonah. ⁴²At the judgment, the Queen of the South will stand up and condemn you. She came from the ends of the earth to listen to the wisdom of Solomon, and here there is greater than Solomon.

1K 10:
1-10

⁴³When an evil spirit goes out of a person, it wanders over arid wastelands looking for a place to rest, but it cannot find one. ⁴⁴Then it says to itself: 'I will go back to my house which I had to leave.' So it goes back and finds the house empty, clean, and in order. ⁴⁵Off it goes again to bring back with it, this time, seven spirits, more evil than itself. They move in and settle there, so that this person is finally in a worse state than

Lk 11:
24-26

Mk 5:9;
Lk 8:2;
Jn 5:14;
2P 2:20

• 38. Jesus did not perform any miracle that day, because the experts in religion were demanding an account of him, instead of listening to him.

An evil and unfaithful people. The text of the Gospel says in fact: "evil and adulterous". This expression in the Bible means the unfaithful believer who, without denying God in words, keeps other gods to himself.

The story of the unclean spirit, meaning the devil, is directed towards the contemporaries of Jesus. They accepted John's call to conver-

sion and for a while changed their way of life. Theirs was not a real experience of God, neither did they discover the inner power that would have enabled them to persevere, and so their blindness remained.

The Ninevites: see Jonah 3:5.

The Queen of the South: 1 Kings 10.

The sign of Jonah is the resurrection of Jesus. The similarity seen in the three days that Jonah was in the belly of the fish and the time Jesus spent in the tomb is somewhat forced.

he was at the beginning. This is what will happen to this evil generation.”

Mk 3:
31-35;
Lk 8:
19-21;
Jn 2:12;
Acts 1:14

• ⁴⁶ While Jesus was still talking to the people, his mother and his brothers wanted to speak to him, and they waited outside. ⁴⁷ So someone said to him, “Your mother and your brothers are standing outside; they want to speak with you.”

⁴⁸ Jesus answered, “Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?” ⁴⁹ Then he pointed to his disciples and said, “Look! Here are my mother and my brothers. ⁵⁰ Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is for me brother, sister, or mother.”

Lk 2:
49-50

The parable of the sower

(Mk 4:1; Lk 8:4; 10:23; 13:20)

Mk 4:1-9;
Lk 8:4-8;
5:1

13 • ¹ That same day Jesus left the house and sat down by the lakeside. ² Many people gathered around him, so he got in a boat, and sat down, while the crowds stood on the shore; ³ and he spoke to them in parables about many things.

• ⁴⁶. *His mother and his brothers.* If they were true brothers of Jesus, sons of Mary, the Gospel would say: “his mother and the sons of his mother,” for this was the Jewish manner of speaking. See commentary on Mark 3:31.

• **13.1** Here we have the beginning of the third “discourse of Jesus” in Matthew’s Gospel (see Introduction). Jesus had his apostles proclaim the coming of the Kingdom; the first signs were seen: healings and victories over demons but opposition was not wanting and it would seem that on the whole, people did not respond. What must we think of this “Kingdom of God” which changes very little of real life? Matthew replies with the following seven parables.

Jesus uses comparisons just as simple country folk and working people usually do. Proverbs and parables have always been an effective way of teaching wisdom. But we must observe that a parable is not just any comparison; its characteristic is to awaken in the listeners an awareness of their present situation and oblige them to make a decision.

⁴ Jesus said, “The sower went out to sow and, as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and ate them up. ⁵ Other seeds fell on rocky ground where there was little soil, and the seeds sprouted quickly because the soil was not deep. ⁶ But as soon as the sun rose, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no roots. ⁷ Again other seeds fell among thistles, and the thistles grew and choked the plants. ⁸ Still other seeds fell on good soil and produced a crop: some a hundredfold, others sixty, and others thirty. ⁹ If you have ears, then hear!”

11:15;
13:43;
Mk 4:23;
Lk 14:35;
Rev 2:7

• ¹⁰ Then his disciples came to him and said, “Why do you speak to them in parables?”

Mk 4:
10-12;
Lk 8:9-10

¹¹ Jesus answered, “To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but not to these people. ¹² For the one who has, will be given more and he will have in abundance. But the one who does

1Cor 4:1;
Eph 3:3;
6:19;
Col 2:2

25:29;
Lk 19:26

For those listening to Jesus, the reign of God signified first of all a liberation of his oppressed people, and this called for clear explanation. Jesus, for his part, could only give an answer to those who accompanied him; for the Kingdom is one of those things that cannot be seen as long as one has no belief in it. Jesus will only speak of it in images and we will understand according to the degree of our experience of that Kingdom which is developing throughout the world.

For this parable of the Sower which gives the general direction of this chapter, see the commentary of Mark 4:1 and Luke 8:4.

• ¹⁰. *To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom.* To you who took Christ’s call seriously and decided to follow him. Because you came to be the co-workers of Christ, the Father will reveal to you his secrets.

The quotation from Isaiah that follows may shock us due to the fact of our not fully understanding Hebrew expressions. Does Jesus speak in parables because the audience does not want to understand, or so that they will not

not have will be deprived of even what he has. ¹³That is why I speak to them in parables, because they look and do not see; they hear, but they do not listen or understand.

Is 6:9-10;
Jn 12:40;
Acts 28:
26-27

¹⁴In them the words of the prophet Isaiah are fulfilled: *However much you hear, you do not understand; however much you see, you do not perceive.*

¹⁵*For the heart of this people has grown dull. Their ears hardly hear and their eyes dare not see. If they were to see with their eyes, hear with their ears and understand with their heart, they would turn back, and I would heal them.*

Lk 10:
23-24

¹⁶But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears, because they hear.

Eph 3:5;
1P 1:12

¹⁷For I tell you that many prophets and upright people have longed to see the things you see, but they did not see them, and to hear the things you hear, but they did not hear them.

Mk 4:
13-20;
Lk 8:
11-15

¹⁸Now listen to the parable of the sower.

understand? It could be both at the same time (compare vv. 13 and 15, and also 35). See the commentary on Mark 4:11.

For the one who has will be given more. Here *has* means produce, bear as does the tree that “has” fruit. It will be given to those who are fruitful.

The kingdom of heaven. We already said that “Heaven” was a Jewish expression referring to God. The kingdom of heaven is the kingdom of God, as the Father of Heaven is God the Father. Not realizing this, many have mistakenly thought that the Gospel announced only the kingdom of God in Heaven after our present life. Actually Jesus came to tell us that God had come to rule among us.

Kingdom or Reign of God? See commentary on Luke 8:10.

• 18. Who will welcome the Word of God? This has nothing to do with intelligence or ability to reflect, or interest in religious things: those who are open to hope receive the Word.

¹⁹When a person hears the message of the Kingdom, but does not take it seriously, the devil comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed that fell along the footpath.

²⁰The seed that fell on rocky ground stands for the one who hears the word, and accepts it at once with joy. ²¹But such a person has no roots, and endures only for a while. No sooner is he harassed or persecuted because of the word, than he gives up.

²²The seed that fell among the thistles is the one who hears the word, but then the worries of this life and the love of money choke the word, and it does not bear fruit.

Lk 12:
16-21;
1Tim 6:9

²³As for the seed that fell on good soil, it is the one who hears the word and understands it; this seed bears fruit and produces a hundred, or sixty, or thirty times more.”

Jn 15:
8, 16;
Gal 5:22

The parable of the weeds

• ²⁴Jesus told them another parable, “The kingdom of heaven can be compared to a man who sowed good

Those along the footpath are those not interested in the word they have received, perhaps because they cannot see further than their own interests (they are selfish), or perhaps they have taken another direction in life.

Next come those who do not dare to face contradiction and are easily discouraged and cowed: these are *soon burnt*. Yet to hope means to be firm despite any obstacle. If God puts us on a road in life, this road will lead somewhere. Hope is courage and endurance.

Next are those *that fell among the thistles*. They are believers, but the fruits to be harvested along the difficult path seem not to satisfy them. They want to “save their lives,” to serve God and Money at the same time. They are dragged down by their aim of winning material success, and hope in the kingdom of God becomes but a flimsy desire for them.

• 24. With the parable of the *weeds*, Jesus answers those who are scandalized at seeing evil everywhere. Good and bad will be mixed

seed in his field. ²⁵While everyone was asleep, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away.

²⁶When the plants sprouted and produced grain, the weeds also appeared. ²⁷Then the servants of the owner came to him and said, 'Sir, was it not good seed that you sowed in your field? Where did the weeds come from?'

²⁸He answered them, 'This is the work of an enemy.' They asked him, 'Do you want us to go and pull up the weeds?' ²⁹He told them, 'No, when you pull up the weeds, you might uproot the wheat with them. ³⁰Let them just grow together until harvest; and at harvest time I will say to the workers: Pull up the weeds first, tie them in bundles and burn them; then gather the wheat into my barn.'

Jn 15:6

The mustard seed and the yeast

(Mk 4:30; Lk 13:18)

• ³¹Jesus offered them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, that a man took and sowed in his field.

Mk 4: 30-32; Lk 13: 18-19

³²It is smaller than all other seeds, but once it is fully grown, it is bigger than any garden plant; like a tree, the birds come and rest in its branches."

17:20; Lk 17:6; Ezk 17:23; 31:6; Dn 4: 9, 18

³³He told them another parable, "The kingdom of heaven is like the yeast that a woman took, and hid in three measures of flour, until the whole mass of dough began to rise."

Lk 13: 20-21; 1Cor 5:6; Gal 5:9

• ³⁴Jesus taught all this to the crowds by means of parables; he did not say anything to them without using a parable. ³⁵So what the Prophet had said was fulfilled: *I will*

Mk 4: 33-34

Ps 78:2

till the end of the world. Good and evil will always be found together in persons and institutions.

God respects people. He knows that temptation is often stronger than their good intentions and they need time to find and to choose steadily what is good.

God is patient. The reconciliation of so many contradictory groups, forces and cultural currents active in the world will be attained only at the end of time. In the meantime we are not to label any of them as "the" good ones and "the" bad ones.

Jesus himself commented on this parable: see verse 36.

• 31. With the parable of the *mustard seed* Jesus shows us that the kingdom of God must be a sign; it has to be something very noticeable in the world.

Any spiritual aspiration, cultural innovation or revolutionary movement must be expressed concretely, through one or several institutions, to make it a clearer and more visible entity. Likewise Jesus projects his Church as the bearer (not the owner) of the kingdom of God. *Church* means: "Assembly of those called together." Two of the characteristics of this Church are indicated here:

– first it must be very visible and fruitful for the world, like a tree giving shade to birds;

– secondly, it must be immersed in human reality.

Believers are not to separate themselves from those who do not believe, for they are the yeast of the world.

Jesus does not want an "invisible Church," that is an emotional fellowship and spiritual communion among all those in the whole world who believe in him. He wants a gigantic tree (in another place Jesus says: a city built on a hill), so that everyone can recognize that the seed was good and full of life. We need organized Christian communities, and ties between these communities, a hierarchy... Nevertheless the believers are not to enclose themselves in their chapels or little communities or to spend all their energies working for "their" Church. They must be useful and fruitful in the world together with all people of goodwill.

Let them be yeast for the dough, not small separate and finer dough. The yeast transforms human history, not by bringing all people into the Church, but by infusing into human activity the spirit that gives life to humankind.

• 34. *Jesus taught all this to the crowds by means of parables.* On reading Matthew 13:12, we might think that Jesus speaks in parables in order to hide his teaching. Here we find another explanation that corrects and

speak in parables. I will proclaim things kept secret since the beginning of the world.

15:15;
Mk 4:10

• ³⁶ Then he sent the crowds away and went into the house. And his disciples came to him, saying, “Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field.” ³⁷ Jesus answered them, “The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. ³⁸ The field is the world; the good seed are the people of the Kingdom; the weeds are those who follow the evil one. ³⁹ The enemy who sows the weeds is the devil; the har-

1Jn 3:10

Jn 8:44

vest is the end of time, and the workers are the angels.

⁴⁰ Just as the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so will it be at the end of time. ⁴¹ The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom all that is scandalous and all who do evil. ⁴² And these will be thrown in the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ⁴³ Then the just will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. If you have ears, then hear.

3:10;
7:19;
Jn 15:6;
Rev
14:15

Zep 1:3;
Dn 3:6;
Rev
21:8;
Mt 8:12;
13:50;
22:13;
24:51;
25:30

Dn 12:3

completes the first. Jesus spoke in parables because that was the best method to convey a teaching relevant for all times.

I will speak in parables. These are the first words of Psalm 78, as adapted by the evangelist. He means that the secrets of the kingdom of God revealed by Jesus answer the most important questions of humankind.

From the beginning of civilization, people were confronted with problems and challenges they could not solve on their own, and Jesus offers the key to these contradictions. Science has discovered many elements of human destiny; we have still to discover who we are.

Jesus’ answer is not given as a theory and it upsets the “little intellectuals” who are used to the language of books. He gives us something much richer with these images or enigmas which require some creativity and to which we have to return. Each of us will have to ponder them as long as we live, and humankind as long as history. Only with time shall we discover all that they mean.

• *36. The field is the world.* This parable does not refer to what happens within each of us, or only in the Church, as described in *the net* (v. 47). Rather it teaches that the kingdom of God exists and grows in the world, in all dimensions of the secular world. Sacred history is more than an ancient history in the land of Jesus; it is the entire human story of which the risen Christ is Lord.

So will it be at the end of time. Jesus speaks to us of a judgment. The expectation of God’s judgment on the world was an essential element of prophetic teaching. Let us not only see in it a desire for vengeance on the part of honest people who suffered. To know for certain that our life will be judged by one

who knows us through and through is one of the bases of the Christian vision of existence. This enables us to understand the tragic character of the decisions we make from day to day directing us either to the truth or a refusal of the light.

This certitude shocks many of our contemporaries just as in the past it terrified the majority of people. It is for that reason they have often taken refuge in metempsychosis—a series of existences. The faults of the present life could be rectified in the one that followed. The importance of our choices is doubted, and the sense of sin is blurred just as is the sense of the presence of God. Before long we could doubt the unique value of our life and of the human person.

While reaffirming the judgment, this short parable contains an extremely revolutionary element: the judgment is God’s secret and up to the end of the world, both good and evil are in each of us, as well as in institutions. When we read the Bible, we are perhaps shocked to see that not only in the Old Testament but also even in the New, the world is constantly divided between the good and the wicked. It seems to us that it should not be: the inner being of a person is a deep mystery. There isn’t a group of the good (we, of course, and those who believe in God, and those who observe the same morality that we observe...) and then the others. Why then does Jesus divide humans?

Our quick reply is that Jesus has spoken as the prophets spoke. To speak of the good and the wicked was a simple way, suitable to the mentality of people less developed than ourselves, to show that each one of us, in each of our acts, takes a step in one of two opposed directions. For centuries women and men have

The treasure, the pearl and the net

Pro 2:4;
4:7

•⁴⁴ The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field. The one who finds it buries it again; and so happy is he, that he goes and sells everything he has, in order to buy that field.

⁴⁵ Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a trader who is looking for fine pearls. ⁴⁶ Once he has found a pearl of exceptional quality, he goes away, sells everything he has and buys it.

•⁴⁷ Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a big fishing net let down into the sea, in which every kind of fish has been caught. ⁴⁸ When the net is

full, it is dragged ashore. Then they sit down and gather the good fish in buckets, but throw the worthless ones away. ⁴⁹ That is how it will be at the end of time; the angels will go out to separate the wicked from the just, ⁵⁰ and to throw the wicked into the blazing furnace, where they will weep and gnash their teeth."

⁵¹ Jesus asked, "Have you understood all these things?" "Yes," they answered. ⁵² So he said to them, "You will see that every teacher of the Law, who becomes a disciple of the kingdom of heaven, is like a householder, who can produce from his store things both new and old."

13:42

felt themselves interpreted by this way of speaking: it is still effective and pedagogic for us on many occasions. It is very important to understand that Jesus is not duped by images. For the majority of us, the separation is not made, even if after a conversion or two, until we have taken decisive steps.

The *servants* represent the believers, but especially the "supervisors" of the Church. Their zeal for repressing those they judge as straying in order to preserve what seems good to them may well be tainted interiorly. They would like to suppress all the errors. Rather they rely too much on force, or on authority. If the "masters" of the faith were not to give the faithful the possibility to think for themselves and make mistakes, the Church would be without life.

God prefers to let matters clarify: he wants people to learn from experience. Evil is part of the mystery of the cross; in doing what is good and living in the light we defeat evil (Rom 12:21).

• 44. The parables of *the treasure* and *the pearl* invite us not to let opportunities pass by, when the kingdom of God comes to us.

Some have been waiting for years for that word, or person or sign of hope that would give new meaning to their lives. One day they found it. Sometimes it was found through simple things: a forgiving word, a friendly smile, a first commitment offered to them and accepted. Then they understood that this was the way to gain all they were waiting for, and they entered the Kingdom happily.

The parable says: *he hides it again*. Ordinarily it is God who hides the treasure again

after having shown it to us, for it will be really ours when we have worked for it and persevered.

Everything must be sold. We have to divest ourselves of all those habits, pleasures... that occupy our hearts without filling them. When trials come upon us like a frosty, icy night, we should not forget the treasure we have once seen, until we recover it. Plato, the great pagan philosopher, said, "It is during the night that it is beautiful to believe in the light."

"The pearl" is, in a certain sense, Christ himself. He alone gives meaning to all the sacrifices of a Christian life. These are not really "sacrifices," but the search for a love that has already been proven.

EVIL IN THE CHURCH

• 47. The Church has given the Kingdom to those who entered, but some of them belong to the visible family of the chosen ones, without having the spirit of the Kingdom.

By speaking of the net, Jesus reminds us that the first activity of the Church must be mission: "to catch people." Many of them surely will not persevere, but a Church that closes itself would die.

How we would like to have a perfect Church made of upright persons, in which each one would discover the gifts of God! Christ, however, did not want a Church like that, nor is that the way for the Church to save the world.

HELL

They will throw the wicked into the blazing furnace. This affirmation which we have already seen (v. 30) only confirms what the

•⁵³When Jesus had finished these parables, he left that place. ⁵⁴He went to his hometown and taught the people in their synagogue. They were amazed and said, “Where did he get this wisdom and these special powers? ⁵⁵Isn’t he the carpenter’s son? Isn’t Mary his mother and aren’t James, Joseph, Simon and Judas his brothers? ⁵⁶Aren’t all his sisters living here? How did he get all this?” ⁵⁷And so they took offense at him.

Jesus said to them, “The only place where prophets are not welcome is their hometown and in their

own family.” ⁵⁸And he did not perform many miracles there because of their lack of faith.

John the Baptist beheaded

(Mk 6:14; Lk 9:7)

14 • ¹At that time the news about Jesus reached king Herod. ²And he said to his servants, “This man is John the Baptist. John has risen from the dead, and that is why miraculous powers are at work in him.”

³Herod had, in fact, ordered that John be arrested, bound in chains

whole Bible says: we shall be judged and the plenitude of life offered to those who will be “in” God will have as counterpart the despairing lot of those who have refused life.

The Church has always spoken, according to the terms of the Bible, of an eternal hell. She has also adopted towards the twelfth century the word “purgatory” to designate the painful purification the saved will experience, unless they have already known on earth the terrible burning of the pure love of God.

The affirmation of purgatory shocks those who have not experienced divine holiness which is never without a burning of everything that belongs to us; have they ever really pondered what “becoming God in God” exacts of us? Hell does not hurt less. We know, of course, that fire is only a figure of speech and we should not interpret it as a vengeance of God: it is the “damned” who are unable to renounce the harrowing solitude in which they have enclosed themselves; it is at the same time their enjoyment and their torture. However, we no longer accept the idea of pain that has no end and we readily support this with philosophic argument.

Certainly Jesus spoke the language of his time, not ours. This division of the world into good and bad was present in all culture. It is also certain that Jesus had deep and true knowledge of God and human beings. Had he found in this punishment something contrary to the infinite goodness of God he would have said so without any concern of scandal. He has spoken as he did because the infinite love of God does not take away our freedom to escape him and defy him.

However it is to be noted that Jesus does not only speak of condemnation for some hor-

rible crimes: loss or salvation is an option for all. We must also recognize that he does not speak according to our categories of hell and purgatory: Gehenna (Mt 5:22; 10:28), or fire (Mk 9:42) are imprecise terms that can designate both at the same time. The “fire of hell” is said to be “eternal” in several places (Mk 9:47; Mt 18:8; Mt 25:41), but this word has not exactly the meaning we give it: it could be something that goes beyond our experience of time.

We can then ask questions, but we must also question ourselves on two matters. Firstly, to speak of what God should or should not do is rather like asking him to be just. But “justice” is not something that exists in itself: it is only an aspect of the mystery of God. What do we know of his mystery? Then let us not teach him justice. We must also reply to this question: if Jesus wanted to say that certain people go to unending suffering, how must he say it in order that we may not doubt it?

The mystery remains. If we understood to what God invites us—and for an eternity in its truest sense, and that life is unique and that here below we shall give our response and finally give birth to our eternity—are there words too strong for someone who has lost everything?

• 53. Compare with Luke 4:14. See commentary on Mark 3:31.

• 14.1 For chapters 14 and 15 see commentaries on Mark 6 and 7.

It would seem that this series of narratives that occupy chapters 14 and 15 and the beginning of chapter 16 formed a collection dating from the first years of the Church; an iden-

Mk 6: 1-6; Lk 4: 16-24; Jn 7:15

Lk 3:23; Jn 6:42

Jn 4:44

Mk 6: 14-29; Lk 9:7-9

16:14

Lk 3: 19-20

and put in prison, because of Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip.

⁴For John had said to Herod, "It is not right for you to have her as your wife."

⁵Herod wanted to kill John but he did not dare, because he feared the people, who regarded John as a prophet.

⁶On Herod's birthday the daughter of Herodias danced among the guests; she so delighted Herod ⁷that he promised under oath to give her anything she asked for. ⁸The girl, following the advice of her mother, said, "Give me the head of John the Baptist here on a dish."

⁹The king was very displeased, but because he had made this promise under oath in the presence of his guests, he ordered it to be given to her. ¹⁰So he had John beheaded in prison, ¹¹and his head brought on a dish and given to the girl. The girl then took it to her mother.

¹²Then John's disciples came and took his body and buried it. Then they went away to bring the news to Jesus.

First miracle of the loaves

(Mk 6:32; Jn 6)

• ¹³On hearing this, Jesus set out by boat for a secluded place, to be alone. But the people heard of it, and they followed him on foot from their towns. ¹⁴When Jesus went ashore,

he saw the crowd gathered there and he had compassion on them. And he healed their sick.

¹⁵Late in the afternoon, his disciples came to him and said, "We are in a lonely place and it is now late. You should send these people away, so they can go to the villages and buy something for themselves to eat."

¹⁶But Jesus replied, "They do not need to go away; you give them something to eat." ¹⁷They answered, "We have nothing here but five loaves and two fishes." ¹⁸Jesus said to them, "Bring them here to me."

¹⁹Then he made everyone sit down on the grass. He took the five loaves and the two fishes, raised his eyes to heaven, pronounced the blessing, broke the loaves, and handed them to the disciples to distribute to the people. ²⁰And they all ate, and everyone had enough; then the disciples gathered up the leftovers, filling twelve baskets. ²¹About five thousand men had eaten there, besides women and children.

Jesus walks on the water

(Mk 6:45; Jn 6:16)

• ²²Immediately Jesus obliged his disciples to get into the boat and go ahead of him to the other side, while he sent the crowd away.

²³And having sent the people

tical collection is found in Mark and a part in Luke. As in all these texts that have been passed on orally over a time, there were general ideas and keywords that helped them to be linked to each other. Here *bread* must have been one of the common themes.

Do not forget that bread was by far the main food and *to eat bread* signified to have a meal (15:2).

On the other hand there were few needs besides food and clothing, so religion gave much importance to everything related to food and cooking. That explains the questions presented in these chapters and the answers given by Jesus. Even the *bread of the children* (15:26)

gave the opportunity to complete the teaching about the eucharist that was drawn from the two miracles of the loaves.

• 13. See commentary on Mark 6:35 and John 6.

• 22. See commentary on Mark 6:45.

They were terrified: thinking that it was a ghost. The apostles shared the same fears and superstitions that their kinsfolk had. Only in time would they reach mature faith which drives away these paralyzing beliefs.

Command me to come to you (v. 28). Matthew is not interested in emphasizing

Lev
18:16;
20:21

Jn 11:41;
17:1

2K 4:43

Mk 6:
32-44;
Jn 6:1-13;
Mt 15:
32-38

9:36

Mk 6:
45-52;
Jn 6:
15-21

Lk 6:12;
9:28

away, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. At nightfall, he was there alone. ²⁴Meanwhile, the boat was very far from land, dangerously rocked by the waves, for the wind was against it.

²⁵At daybreak, Jesus came to them walking on the sea. ²⁶When they saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, thinking that it was a ghost. And they cried out in fear. ²⁷But at once Jesus said to them, "Courage! Don't be afraid. It's me!" ²⁸Peter answered, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you walking on the water."

²⁹Jesus said to him, "Come!" And Peter got out of the boat, and walked on the water to go to Jesus. ³⁰But seeing the strong wind, he was afraid and began to sink; and he cried out, "Lord, save me!" ³¹Jesus immediately stretched out his hand and took hold of him, saying, "Man of little faith, why did you doubt?"

³²As they got into the boat, the wind dropped. ³³Then those in the boat bowed down before Jesus, saying, "Truly, you are the Son of God!"

³⁴They came ashore at Genesareth. ³⁵The local people recognized Jesus and spread the news throughout the region. So they brought all the sick to him, ³⁶begging him to let them touch just the hem of his cloak. All who touched it became perfectly well.

Peter's doubt, but his faith. Peter alone dared to attempt something that seemed to be reserved for Jesus, and after joining his companions again in the boat he was, though soaked, the happiest of them all.

Mark of little faith (v. 31). Once more Jesus' reproaches are addressed to his best disciples (as in 6:30; 8:26; 16:8; 17:20)—in order to convince future disciples, like us, that much is still lacking in our faith.

- **15.1** See commentary on Mark 7:1. They don't wash their hands. The Phar-

God's command and human tradition
(Mk 7:1)

15 • ¹Then some Pharisees and teachers of the Law who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus. And they said to him, ²"Why don't your disciples follow the tradition of the elders? In fact, they don't wash their hands before eating."

³Jesus answered, "And you, why do you break God's command for the sake of your traditions? ⁴For God commanded: *Do your duty to your father and your mother*, and: *Whoever curses his father or his mother is to be put to death*. ⁵But you say that anyone may say to his father or mother, 'What you could have expected from me, I have reserved for the Temple.' ⁶In this case, according to you, a person is freed of his duty to his father and mother. And so, you have nullified the command of God for the sake of your traditions.

⁷Hypocrites! Isaiah rightly prophesied of you when he said: ⁸*This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me*. ⁹*The worship they offer me is worthless, for they only teach human rules.*"

Washing hands and cleanness of heart
(Mk 7:14; Lk 6:39)

• ¹⁰Jesus then called the people near him, and said to them, "Listen and understand: ¹¹What enters into the mouth does not make a person

issues uphold something that is excellent and which we ourselves practice. Jesus' vision, however, goes further: all these good customs and religious practices (feasts and meditations included) easily become a smoke screen, hiding the essential from us: a constant readiness to listen to God's call, a simple trust in his mercy which alone can save us.

- 10. See commentary on Mark 7:14. Using only human criteria, human societies are not able to distinguish good from evil. For the Jewish people, the worship of God

Mk 7: 1-13

Gal 1:14; Col 2:8; Lk 11:38

20:12; Dt 5:16; 21:17; Lev 20:9; Eph 6:2

Is 29:13; Ps 78:36

Mk 7: 14-23

Lk 24:37

Jn 21:7

8:25-26

Mk 4:39

16:16; 26:63; 27:54;

Mk 14:61;

15:39;

Lk 22:70;

Jn 1:49

9:27;
20:30;
Mk 10:47

unclean. What defiles a person is what comes out of his mouth.”

¹²After a while the disciples gathered around Jesus and said, “Do you know that the Pharisees were offended by what you said?” ¹³Jesus answered, “Every plant which my heavenly Father has not planted shall be uprooted. ¹⁴Pay no attention to them! They are blind leading the blind. When a blind person leads another, the two will fall into a pit.”

23:16;
Lk 6:39;
Rom 2:19

¹⁵Peter said to him, “Explain this sentence to us.” ¹⁶Jesus replied, “So even you, too, are dull? ¹⁷Do you not see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach, and then out of the body? ¹⁸But what comes out of the mouth comes from the heart, and that is what makes a person unclean.

1Cor 5:10;
6:9;
Eph 5:3;
Col 3:5;
1Tim 1:9;
2Tim 3:2;
Rev 21:8;
22:15

¹⁹Indeed, it is from the heart that evil desires come: murder, adultery, immorality, theft, lies, slander. ²⁰These are the things that make a person unclean; but eating without washing the hands does not make a person unclean.”

The faith of the Canaanite woman
(Mk 7: 24)

Mk 7:
24-30

²¹Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon.

²²Now a Canaanite woman came from those borders and began to cry out, “Lord, Son of David, have pity on me! My daughter is tormented by a demon.” ²³But Jesus did not answer her, not even a word. So his disciples approached him and said, “Send her away! See how she is shouting after us.”

²⁴Then Jesus said to her, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the nation of Israel.”

²⁵But the woman was already kneeling before Jesus, and said, “Sir, help me!” ²⁶Jesus answered, “It is not right to take the bread from the children and throw it to the puppy dogs.”

Lk 16:21

²⁷The woman replied, “That is true, sir, but even the puppy dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their master’s table.” ²⁸Then Jesus said, “Woman, how great is your faith! Let it be as you wish.” And her daughter was healed at that moment.

8:10;
8:13;
9:29

Second miracle of the loaves
(Mk 7:31)

²⁹From there Jesus went to the shore of Lake Galilee, and then went up into the hills, where he sat down.

Mk 7:31

³⁰Great crowds came to him, bringing the dumb, the blind, the lame, the crippled, and many with other in-

5:1

was everything and they felt very much concerned about exactly who and what things were worthy of being part of this worship. Thus they made a distinction between the clean and the unclean. Jesus shows that true purity is that of *the heart*.

It could be that the code for correct behavior in our society and its numerous goodwill institutions be just a modern way of distinguishing the pure and the impure. In the Church itself, in past centuries, there has been a tendency to attribute to sacred ministers a “purity” that reserved to them the handling of sacred things. It is one of the reasons why in the Middle Ages Communion was not given in the hand, as had been the custom for over ten centuries.

• 29. On two occasions Jesus multiplied bread. It is one of his miracles that most impresses us.

The word “miracle” is often devalued. The Bible uses different words to denote what clearly appears as an act of God: sign, wonder, work of power. Miracle in its full meaning is all that at the same time: a sign by which God makes us discover his will or the invisible order of the world, a wonder that disconcerts our limited vision, a work which God alone is capable of doing.

The multiplication of loaves is the kind of miracle which most shocks our contemporaries and their absolute faith in the “laws of nature” that God himself would not have the power to surpass, or which he could not ignore

firmities. The people carried them to the feet of Jesus, and he healed them. ³¹All were astonished when they saw the dumb speaking, the lame walking, the crippled healed, and the blind able to see; and they glorified the God of Israel.

³²Jesus called his disciples and said to them, "I am filled with compassion for these people; they have already followed me for three days and now have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them away fasting, or they may faint on the way." ³³His disciples said to him, "And where shall we find enough bread in this wilderness to feed such a crowd?" ³⁴Jesus said to them, "How many loaves do you have?" They answered, "Seven, and a few small fish."

³⁵So Jesus ordered the people to sit on the ground. ³⁶Then he took the seven loaves and the small fish and gave thanks to God. He broke them and gave them to his disciples, who distributed them to the people.

³⁷They all ate and were satisfied, and the leftover broken pieces filled

seven wicker baskets. ³⁸Four thousand men had eaten, besides women and children. ³⁹Then Jesus sent away the crowd, got into the boat and went to Magdala.

The Pharisees ask for a sign

(Mk 8:11; Lk 11:16; 12:54)

16 • ¹The Pharisees and Sadducees appeared. They wanted to put Jesus to the test and asked him for some heavenly sign.

²Jesus answered, "(When evening comes, you say, 'It will be a good day, for the sky is red.' ³And in the morning you say, 'Stormy weather today, for the sky in the east is red.' If you know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, why can't you interpret the signs of the times?) ⁴An evil and unbelieving people want a sign, but no sign will be given them except the sign of Jonah."

And Jesus left them and went away.

• ⁵When the disciples went to the other side, they forgot to take bread. ⁶It was then that Jesus said to them,

Mk 8:
11-13;
Lk 11:
16, 29;
Mt 12:
38-39;
Lk 11:16;
Jn 6:30;
1Cor 1:22

Lk 12:
54-56

Mk 8:
14-21;
Lk 12:1

without contradicting himself. Many do not openly deny the testimony of the apostles, but they avoid taking any stand and say for example: "The miracle is still more beautiful if we imagine that Jesus merely invited the people to share their individual snacks, so that finally there was enough for everyone: a miracle of solidarity!"

Here the Gospel is not praising solidarity: it wishes rather to celebrate the absolute freedom of God and of Christ: nature itself must be silent, because here the dead are raised to life. For a Christian, creation is not a huge machine that God has passed on to people as he abdicated; it is a reflection of God where the laws—shadows of the wisdom, the order and the justice that are in God—never exclude his freedom.

Throughout all Christian history the Lord has multiplied and continues to multiply bread, items of food and even canned food for those who have given everything or risked all for him: many are able to witness to this.

• **16.1** *They asked for some heavenly sign.* They want a miracle that will undoubtedly be the work of God.

No sign will be given them. Jesus refuses to prove his authority by multiplying miracles. People who love truth and seek what is right will recognize the seal of God in the deeds of Jesus—and of his followers—no matter how many speak ill of them.

The sign of Jonah is the resurrection of Jesus (see 12:40). Yet this resurrection that is the most decisive sign, will be understandable only to the believers. Thus people who demand miracles before they will believe, receive no answer.

Verses 2-4: the sentences we put in parenthesis are lacking in the oldest manuscripts.

• 5. The Gospel has kept very little of all that would have been exchanged between Jesus and his apostles over the long months of their life together. How fortunate that at least they recorded here one of the many stupid

“Beware, and do not trust the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees.”⁷ But the disciples said to one another, “He means the bread we did not bring.”

⁸ Jesus was aware of this, so he said to them, “You of little faith! Why do you speak about the bread you don’t have? ⁹ Do you still not understand? Do you not remember the five loaves for the five thousand and how many baskets you gathered? ¹⁰ Or the seven loaves for the four thousand and how many wicker baskets you took up?”

¹¹ How can you fail to understand that I was not talking of bread when I told you: Beware of the yeast of the

Pharisees and Sadducees?”¹² Then they understood that he was not talking of yeast for bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

Peter’s faith; Jesus’ promises

(Mk 8:27; Lk 9:18; Jn 6:69)

• ¹³ After that, Jesus came to Caesarea Philippi. He asked his disciples, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?”¹⁴ They said, “For some of them you are John the Baptist, for others Elijah, or Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.”

¹⁵ Jesus asked them, “But you, who do you say I am?”¹⁶ Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the

Mk 8:
27-30;
Lk 9:
18-21

things uttered in his presence! If they misunderstood his warning, it was that they were very much worried about those “necessary” things that it would be better to leave in the hands of God.

Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees. See commentary on Mark 8:11.

Very often the Gospel associates these two names. We have already seen that the Sadducees were the party of the chief priests. They were by family right, responsible for the national and religious life of the people of God. The Pharisees for their part were a party devoted to defending the law of God. They were enemies of the Sadducees. Let us not say: “They were perverse people.” Opposition to Jesus came quite naturally from the civil and religious authorities of his people. How could God visit his people and be welcomed by the majority of its leaders, if they feel and act as owners of their titles, of their authority, of their own merits?

• 13. One parable of the kingdom of God already foretold the Church (Mt 13:31-33). This present text openly refers to the Church:

- it tells us what its foundation is: faith in Jesus, the Christ and Son of God;
- it focuses on the primacy of Peter among all the apostles;
- it suggests that the Church will always need a visible head. This is the successor of Peter, the pope.

Faith in the Son of God, which Peter, among the apostles is the first to proclaim, really comes from God. This faith is not a human

opinion, or a sentimental attachment. It does not come from *flesh and blood*, an expression that for the Jews meant what is purely human, what a human being does and understands by his own capacity. The words with which Jesus greets Peter, *it is well for you Simon Barjona*, are true for all the believers. For it is *the Father* who has chosen us and has brought us to Christ: see John 6:37; 6:44.

Next the primacy of Peter is emphasized. His name was Simon, but Jesus gave him this surname of Rock, foreseeing that he would be for his Church a foundation rock (Jn 1:40). This change of his name attests that a mission is given to him as happened to Abraham and Jacob (Gen 17:5 and 32:19). Other texts attest to the leadership and faith of Peter: Matthew 10:2; 14:28; 17:25; Luke 5:8-10; 22:32; John 6:68; 21:15-19.

Is what Jesus tells Peter true also of his successors? No one can deny that even in the Old Testament God wanted his people to have a visible head. Jerusalem and the nation had as their center the Temple and the kings, sons of David. When God chose David, the first king of Israel, he promised him that his sons would rule the Kingdom of God forever: this promise was fulfilled in Christ. Now Jesus chooses Peter to be forever the visible foundation of the building. In the future his successors will be for the Church, what Peter was in the early Church.

For the Jews, *to bind and to unbind* (v. 19) meant to state what is forbidden and what is allowed. So Peter and his successors will have the last word about what is, or is not, the faith of the Church. The history of the primitive

Son of the living God.”¹⁷ Jesus replied, “It is well for you, Simon Barjona, for it is not flesh or blood that has revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven.

¹⁸ And now I say to you: You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church; and never will the powers of death overcome it.

¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven: whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you unbind on earth shall be unbound in heaven.”

²⁰ Then he ordered his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Christ.

Jesus predicts his death

(Mk 8:31; Lk 9:22; 12:9; 14:27)

• ²¹ From that day Jesus began to make it clear to his disciples that he

must go to Jerusalem; that he would suffer many things from the Jewish authorities, the chief priests and the teachers of the Law; and that he would be killed and be raised on the third day.

²² Then Peter took him aside and began to reproach him, “Never, Lord! No, this must never happen to you!”

²³ But Jesus turned to him and said, “Get behind me, Satan! You are an obstacle in my path. You are thinking not as God does, but as people do.”

²⁴ Then Jesus said to his disciples, “If you want to follow me, deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me. ²⁵ For whoever chooses to save his life will lose it, but the one who loses his life for my sake will find it. ²⁶ What will one gain by winning the whole world if he destroys his soul?

18:18;
Rev 3:7

17:9;
Mk 9:9

Mk 8:
31-33;
Lk 9:22;
Mt 17:12;
20:17-19;
Lk 2:38

Mk 8:
34—9:1;
Lk 9:
23-27

10:38;
Mk 8:35;
Lk 14:25;
17:33;
Jn 12:25

4:8

Church shows that already in the first centuries the local churches were conscious of the supreme authority of the bishop of Rome, successor of Peter. His role could not but develop in the course of history, which was all the more necessary because of the growing tensions between Christians, and diverse continents and cultures endlessly divided in their religious expressions. In spite of the fact that as humans Peter’s successors can commit mistakes, Christ does not ignore what they ultimately decide on: *whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven*.

The recognition of this mission of Peter’s successor, however, does not mean that his word drowns all other voices in a silent Church, or that his authority justifies a structure that might crush life.

This text does not contradict other statements of the Gospel that are equally important, where the basis of the Church is a “college” of apostles, where nothing is done without dialogue. Peter is the “door keeper” (Mk 13:34) but he is neither “master” nor “Father” (Mt 23:9).

His authority is only genuine in a Church where all have the right to express themselves, where the leaders are not only imposed, but also accepted.

The powers of death (v. 18). The text says “the gates of Hades.” “Gates” here signifies

“Power”; as for Hades, it designates the netherworld, the world of the dead and demonic powers. Even if deathly strength tried to crush the Church, or sow there the seed of corruption it would not be prevented from accomplishing its mission of salvation. A part of Revelation (Rev 12–17) depicts such a confrontation.

The fact that Peter is the foundation of the Church does not contradict other verses that say that its basis is the Twelve Apostles (Eph 2:20 and Rev 21:14). They also receive the power to bind or loose in John 20:21, but in this case it refers clearly to the forgiveness of sins.

Upon reading the narratives in Mark 8:27 and Luke 9:18, some questions regarding Peter’s faith arise: see commentary on Luke 9:18.

Jesus, Rock and Foundation: Mark 12:10; 1 Corinthians 3:11; 1 Peter 2:6.

- 21. See commentary on Mark 8:31.

Get behind me, Satan... (v. 23). When Peter stands in front of Jesus to block the way to the cross, Jesus recognizes in his words the same spirit that tempted him in the desert. Jesus calls him Satan, meaning tempter. Let Peter get behind Jesus and follow him as is proper for a disciple.

Whoever chooses to save his life will lose it. Jesus draws attention to the great option of every human life: we cannot discover God; we

There is nothing you can give to get back your soul.

25:31-46;
2Thes
1:7;
Ps 28:4;
62:13;
Rev 22:12

²⁷ Know that the Son of Man will come in the glory of his Father with the holy angels, and he will reward each one according to his deeds. ²⁸ Truly, I tell you, there are some here who will not die, before they see the Son of Man coming as king."

10:23;
20:21

The transfiguration of Jesus

(Mk 9:2; Lk 9:28)

Mk 9:2-8;
Lk 9:
28-36;
2P 1:
16-18;
Mt 4:8;
28:16
28:3

17 • ¹ Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John, and led them up a high mountain, where they were alone. ² Jesus' appearance was changed before them: his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became bright as light. ³ Just then Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Jesus.

⁴ Peter spoke and said to Jesus, "Master, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah."

40:35;
Mt 24:30;
Dt 18:15;
Is 42:1;
Mt 12:18;
Mk 1:11

⁵ Peter was still speaking, when a bright cloud covered them with its shadow, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, the Beloved, my Chosen One. Listen to him."

⁶ On hearing the voice, the disciples fell to the ground, full of fear. ⁷ But Jesus came, touched them and said, "Stand up, do not be afraid."

⁸ When they raised their eyes, they no longer saw anyone except Jesus.

Mk 9:9-13

⁹ And as they came down the mountain, Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone what they had just seen,

until the Son of Man be raised from the dead.

¹⁰ The disciples then asked him, "Why do the teachers of the Law say that Elijah must come first?" ¹¹ And Jesus answered, "So it is: first comes Elijah to set everything as it has to be. ¹² But I tell you, Elijah has already come, but they did not recognize him, and treated him as they pleased. And they will also make the Son of Man suffer."

16:14;
Mal 3:23;
Sir 48:10

¹³ Then the disciples understood that Jesus was referring to John the Baptist.

16:21;
17:22

11:14;
Lk 1:17

Jesus heals an epileptic boy

(Mk 9:14; Lk 9:37)

• ¹⁴ When they came to the crowd, a man approached Jesus, knelt before him and said, ¹⁵ "Sir, have pity on my son, who is an epileptic and suffers terribly. He has often fallen into the fire, and at other times into the water. ¹⁶ I brought him to your disciples but they could not heal him."

Mk 9:
14-29;
Lk 9:
37-43

¹⁷ Jesus replied, "You faithless and disoriented people! How long must I be with you? How long must I put up with you? Bring him here to me."

Dt 32:5

¹⁸ And Jesus commanded the evil spirit to leave the boy, and the boy was immediately healed.

¹⁹ The disciples then gathered around Jesus and asked him privately, "Why couldn't we drive out the spirit?" ²⁰ Jesus said to them, "Because you have little faith. I say to you: if only you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you could tell that mountain to move from here to

Mk 11:
22-23;
Lk 17:6;
Mt 21:21;
1Cor 13:2

cannot make a success of life without sacrificing it. All the rest is idle talk. The option terrifies us in the same measure that life for us seems promising. It is also the reason why marriage and family frighten many.

Christian freedom and happiness are found only in the joyous acceptance of the will of

God which invites us to listen to his Son and follow him down the road and paths that he traveled.

• **17.1** See commentaries on Mark 9:2 and Luke 9:28.

• **14.** See commentary on Mark 9:14.

there, and the mountain would obey. Nothing would be impossible to you. ²¹(Only prayer and fasting can drive out this kind of spirit.)”)

Mk 9: 30-32; Lk 9: 44-45
16:21; 17:12; 20:17-19

• ²²While Jesus was in Galilee with the Twelve, he said to them, “The Son of Man will be delivered into the hands of men, ²³and they will kill him. But he will rise on the third day.” The Twelve were deeply grieved.

The Temple tax

30:13 • ²⁴When they returned to Capernaum, the Temple tax collectors came to Peter and asked him, “Does your master pay the Temple tax?” ²⁵He answered, “Certainly.”

Peter then entered the house, and immediately Jesus asked him, “What do you think, Simon? Who pay taxes or tribute to the kings of the earth: their sons or the other people?” ²⁶Peter replied, “The other people.” And Jesus told him, “The sons, then, are tax-free. ²⁷But so as not to offend

these people, go to the sea, throw in a hook, and open the mouth of the first fish you catch. You will find a coin in it. Take the coin and let it pay for you and for me.”

Who is the greatest? Scandals

18 • ¹At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked him, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”

²Then Jesus called a little child, set the child in the midst of the disciples, ³and said, “I assure you that, unless you change and become like little children, you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven. ⁴Whoever becomes lowly like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, ⁵and whoever receives such a child in my name receives me.

⁶If any of you should cause one of these little ones, who believe in me, to stumble and fall, it would be better for you to be thrown into the depths of the sea with a great millstone around your neck.

Mk 9: 30-32; Lk 9: 46-47; 22:24-26

19:13-14; 20:26; Mk 10:15; Lk 18:17; Jn 3:5

20:26

10:40; Mk 9:37; Lk 9:48; 10:16; Jn 13:20

Mk 9:42; Lk 17: 1-2; Mt 5:29

Verse 21 is lacking in many old texts: compare with Mark 8:28-29.

• 22. Several times Jesus announced his death: see 16:21; 20:17. Never did he present it as a misfortune that might counteract his mission. John will say that Jesus looked for it as the means for giving glory to his Father and reconciling humankind (Jn 17). Jesus speaks of himself in the third person: *the Son of Man*, because he looks at his destiny as an outsider. This is the will of his Father, and he is not concerned about himself.

• 24. All the Jews paid a tax for the maintenance of the Temple.

The collectors approach Peter as owner of the house where Jesus also lives.

Jesus observes the Law, but takes this opportunity to give a hint as to who he is: the collectors do not realize they are addressing “the Son.” Notice how the Lord has control over all creatures even fish, and see also his intimate solidarity with Peter.

The coin mentioned in 27 was worth the

Temple tax. Matthew may have had a special interest for this story because at the time he wrote Christians of Jewish origins were wondering whether they should be still paying this tax.

• **18.1** Here we have the beginning of the fourth Discourse of Matthew’s Gospel, not very consonant but centered on the life of the community. Those who say “Our Father” are not isolated. In place of the nation of Israel, Jesus offers them his Church, which is first of all community of communities.

6-11: concern for the *little ones*;

12-14: care for those who have strayed;

15-20: a fraternal community in the presence of Christ;

21-35: a community of pardon.

For the commentary on verses 1–5 see Mark 9:33.

THE LITTLE ONES

With verse 5 we pass from the *children* to the *little ones*, that is, simple people (*such a child* refers perhaps to the lowly one). They

⁷Woe to the world because of so many scandals! Scandals necessarily come, but woe to the one who causes a scandal.

5:29-30;
Mk 9:
43-47

⁸If your hand or foot drags you into sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life without a hand or a foot, than to be thrown into eternal fire with your two hands and two feet. ⁹And if your eye drags you into sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye, than to be thrown into the fire of hell with your two eyes.

Acts
12:15;
Heb 1:14

¹⁰See that you do not despise any of these little ones, for I tell you: their angels in heaven continually see the face of my heavenly Father.

Lk 19:10

¹¹(The Son of Man has come to save the lost).

• ¹²What do you think of this? If someone has a hundred sheep and one of them strays, won't he leave the ninety-nine on the hillside, and go to look for the stray one? ¹³And I tell you: when he finally finds it, he is more pleased about it than about the ninety-nine, that did not get lost. ¹⁴It is the same with your Father in heaven: your Father in heaven doesn't want even one of these little ones to be lost.

Living together in the Church

(Lk 17:3)

• ¹⁵If your brother has sinned against you, go and point out the fault, when the two of you are in private, and if he listens to you, you have won your brother. ¹⁶If he doesn't

Lk 17:3

Lev
19:17;

are little, because they do not count for much in society.

Woe to the one who causes a scandal. Must we recall the real meaning of the word "scandal"? "Scandalon" in Greek is the little pebble that when unnoticed causes a fall: scandal is not something that makes noise or causes a stir in society but which leads consciences astray and causes those who seemed honest to fall.

Jesus then speaks (v. 7) of the harm caused by social pressures. Many times the little ones strive to raise their standard of living and become more self-reliant, better educated and able to earn more. Often enough, society puts obstacles in the way of anyone who does not want to play dirty and who refuses to imitate the lifestyle of selfish persons. Because of this, the *little ones* will have to give up, to accept failure, to *lose an eye* before losing the most important thing, which is to live in the sight of God.

It is better for you to enter life without a hand or a foot. Jesus stresses the incomparable value of eternal life. At times, to gain the Kingdom we will have to sacrifice even our job, our security and our life.

Woe to the one who causes a scandal (v. 7). Sometimes it is an individual who leads others to sin; at other times it is society itself with its corruption, violence and unjust social structures. Jesus invites us to be aware of sin, personal and social: the bad structures will be destroyed, no matter how, by tears and blood (Lk 23:28).

Scandals necessarily come. Jesus lived in a world of violence, but apparently he did not complain about the situation. He did not encourage us to dream of paradise on earth. While some Christian communities aspire to be a flock of sheep meekly surrounding their shepherd, Jesus has a different vision of Christian life.

The real world, the one God is saving, was not created to be an oasis of happiness, but a place where free persons grow through their struggles. Scandals are part and parcel of this world, but the power of evil does not diminish in any way the glory that God will receive in the end. Through suffering and hunger for justice God will awaken love and make it grow.

Verse 10: See commentary on Daniel 12:6.

• 12. The parable of the *one hundred sheep* is also found in the Gospel of Luke (15:1). It teaches us several things: Jesus' special concern for sinners and those who stray and, therefore, the missionary dimension of his apostolate. In fact, Jesus came "to seek and save the lost" (Lk 19:10), "I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners" (Mt 9:13). This attitude should impel our parishes and Christian communities to constantly reach out to the un-churched and marginalized, instead of just working with those who already are in touch with the Church.

• 15. *If your brother has sinned...* Jesus had told Peter before: Whatever you tie on

listen to you, take with you one or two others, so that *the case may be decided by the evidence of two or three witnesses*.¹⁷ And if he refuses

to listen to them, tell it to the assembled Church. But if he does not listen to the Church, then regard such a one as a pagan, or a publican.

¹⁸I say to you: whatever you bind on earth, heaven will keep bound; and whatever you unbind on earth, heaven will keep unbound.

¹⁹In like manner, I say to you: if, on earth, two of you are united in asking for anything, it will be granted to you by my heavenly Father; ²⁰for where two or three are gathered in my Name, I am there among them.”

•²¹ Then Peter asked him, “Lord, how many times must I forgive the

offenses of my brother or sister? Seven times?”²² Jesus answered, “No, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.

The unmerciful servant

•²³ This story throws light on the kingdom of Heaven: A king decided to settle the accounts of his servants.²⁴ Among the first was one who owed him ten thousand pieces of gold.²⁵ As the man could not repay the debt, the king commanded that he be sold as a slave with his wife, his children and all his goods, as repayment.

²⁶ The servant threw himself at the feet of the king and said, ‘Give me time, and I will pay you back everything.’²⁷ The king took pity on him,

earth will be tied in Heaven. He declares it now for the whole Church. The believers must attempt to settle their suits among themselves, knowing that Christ is among them, as signified in his name Emmanuel: God-with-us.

The text of 18:15 is doubtful. Perhaps it was written *if your brother or sister has sinned, go ...* in which case it would refer to the effort of the Christian community to correct one who has gone astray.

Gathered in the name of Jesus (v. 20). The prayer of the community, of the apostolic group, of the Christian couple.

Have we noticed that this chapter on the Church is so short? Yet Matthew is the one who is most concerned about the Church of Jesus, whether in the parables of the kingdom or in Peter’s profession of faith.

Jesus does not seem to have said anything whatsoever to his apostles about structures that would emerge (or even disappear): nothing but a community spirit. Welcome for the poor and lowly, never-ending forgiveness and acceptance of others, prayer of a community that has apostolic ambitions and cries to God to give what is asked of him; there we have the sum total of the wisdom and means the Church has in order to confront all that challenges its evangelization.

While we participate in the common activities, overcoming unavoidable conflicts, and persevering in apostolic work, we grow as children of God in truth, thus knowing the Father

in truth. The Church, therefore, is that sacred place where we find God, and to express this reality we say that the Church is “the sacrament of God.”

We also speak of several “sacraments”: baptism, eucharist... Some people want to receive the sacraments without having any commitment to the Church; they forget that religious rites confer the grace of God because they are gestures of the Church, which is “the” sacrament of God. God is not contained inside things, but rather reveals himself through the family of Christ, where he wants us to find him: *Whatever you tie on earth...* Our faithfulness within the Christian community, even if we have to dissent from it, is a sign that we are in the grace of God.

• 21. *Seventy-seven times*. Compare with Genesis 4:24. Forgiveness must replace the thirst for revenge.

This is about the forgiveness of one who returns repentant: see Luke 17:1.

• 23. THE PARDON

The offenses we suffer from our *companions* are nothing compared with our offenses against God. While God *forgives all*, we do not even give others enough breathing space. God does not demand his rights, but we, in demanding them, behave like *wicked servants* (see Mt 5:43).

This parable goes beyond personal prob-

25:19

Lk 7:42

and not only set him free, but even canceled his debt.

²⁸When this servant left the king's presence, he met one of his companions, who owed him a hundred pieces of silver. He grabbed him by the neck and almost choked him, shouting, 'Pay me what you owe!' ²⁹His companion threw himself at his feet and begged him, 'Give me time, and I will pay everything.' ³⁰The other did not agree, but sent him to prison until he had paid all his debt.

³¹Now his fellow servants saw what had happened. They were extremely upset, and so they went and reported everything to their lord.

³²Then the lord summoned his servant and said, 'Wicked servant, I forgave you all that you owed when you begged me to do so. ³³Weren't you bound to have pity on your companion, as I had pity on you?' ³⁴The lord was now angry, so he handed his servant over to be punished, until he had paid his whole debt."

³⁵Jesus added, "So will my heavenly Father do with you, unless you sincerely forgive your brothers and sisters."

5:25;
Lk 12:58

6:15;
Mk
11:25;
Eph 4:32;
Col 3:13

Jesus speaks about divorce

(Mk 10:2; Mt 5:31; Lk 16:18)

19 ¹When Jesus had finished this teaching, he left Galilee and arrived at the border of Judea, on the other side of the Jordan River. ²A great crowd was with him and there, too, he healed their sick.

³Some Pharisees approached him. They wanted to test him and asked, "Is a man allowed to divorce his wife for any reason he wants?"

⁴Jesus replied, "Have you not read that in the beginning the Creator *made them male and female*, ⁵and he said: *Man has now to leave father and mother, and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one body?* ⁶So they are no longer two, but one body. Let no one separate what God has joined."

⁷They asked him, "Then why did Moses command us to write a bill of dismissal in order to divorce?"

⁸Jesus replied, "Moses knew the hardness of your hearts, so he allowed you to divorce your wives; but it was not so in the beginning. ⁹Therefore I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, unless it be for pros-

Mk 10:
1-12

16:1;
Lk 11:54;
Jn 8:6

Gen 1:27

Gen 2:24;
Eph 5:31;
1Cor 6:16

Dt 24:1

5:32;
Lk 16:18;
1Cor 7:10

lems. The world needs, above everything else, the forgiveness of God, and those who want a more just society will not achieve it through accusations and hatred.

The parable helps us understand much better another verse in the Bible: *Revenge is mine, says the Lord; I will pay each one according to his own conduct.* God will not demand an account regarding his own rights, (what we owe him), but regarding the rights of the *little ones* who, unable to pay, were deprived of them. He will also demand an accounting regarding those who were sorry for their sins but were not forgiven by others.

The fourth Discourse of Matthew's Gospel ends with this parable on the duty to forgive. The Church has not always been as holy as she should have been. Yet nobody can deny that, at all times, in the Church the mercy of God has been preached and people have learned to forgive.

• **19.1** See commentary on Mark 10:2; Matthew 5:31.

Every human society has had its laws on marriage, and it was the same for Israel. There was then a law on divorce, in harmony with the difference of status accorded by society to man and woman; it was in Scripture (Dt 24:1). Jesus does not want to be involved in the discussions of teachers and interpreters of the Law: he opposes this law with another word of Scripture which presents God's point of view regarding human attitudes which he tolerates.

In doing this Jesus shows how he brings the Law to "perfection" (5:17), but clearly this "law of God" can only be heard by those who have received the Spirit from Jesus, a fact that is emphasized in the reaction of the disciples (v. 10).

Better not to marry (v. 10). Jesus does not apologize for these demanding words. He only

titution, and marries another, commits adultery.”

¹⁰The disciples said, “If that is the condition of a married man, it is better not to marry.” ¹¹Jesus said to them, “Not everybody can accept what you have just said, but only those who have received this gift. ¹²There are eunuchs born so from their mother’s womb. Some have been made that way by others. But there are some who have given up the possibility of marriage for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let the one who can accept it, accept it.”

Jesus and the children

(Mk 10:13; Lk 18:15)

¹³Then little children were brought to Jesus that he might lay his hands on them and pray. But the disciples scolded those who brought them. ¹⁴Jesus then said, “Let them be! Do not stop the children from coming to me, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to people such as these children.” ¹⁵So Jesus laid his hands on them and went his way.

The rich young man

(Mk 10:17-22; Lk 18:18-23)

• ¹⁶It was then that a young man approached him and asked, “Master, what good work must I do to receive eternal life?” ¹⁷Jesus answered, “Why do you ask me about what is good? One only is good. If you want to enter eternal life, keep the commandments.” ¹⁸The young man said, “Which commandments?” Jesus replied, “Do not kill, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not bear false witness, ¹⁹honor your father and mother, and love your neighbor as yourself.”

²⁰The young man said to him, “I have kept all these commandments. What is still lacking?” ²¹Jesus answered, “If you wish to be perfect, go and sell all that you possess and give the money to the poor, and you will become the owner of a treasure in heaven. Then come back and follow me.”

²²On hearing this answer, the young man went away sad, for he was a man of great wealth.

Mk 10:17-22;
Lk 18:18-23;
10:25

Lev 18:5;
Lk 10:28

20:12-16;
Dt 5:16-20;
Rom 13:9

Lev 19:18

6:20;
19:29;
Ps 62:11;
Mk 14:5;
Lk 12:33;
Jn 12:5;
Acts 2:45;
4:34

1Cor 7:1,
7-8;
7:32-34

Mk 10:
13-16;
Lk 18:
15-17

Lk 9:47;
1P 2:1-2

proposes something more difficult to understand. He praises those to whom have been given to choose celibacy as a way of life for love of the Kingdom.

• 16. See commentary on Mark 10:17.

Jesus faces a question. He discloses three aspects and gives three answers:

One only is good (v. 17). This man has been captivated by the personality of Jesus, and Jesus, as always, directs him to the Father. There is, in fact, a distortion to Christian faith, dangerous as it is subtle: to speak only of Jesus: “Jesus sees you...” “Jesus loves you...” “Jesus is love...” as if we were not living for God. Love of the Father means wanting to be perfect as the Father is and working for his Kingdom. First of all it needs to be free, and the rich can only be free through voluntary poverty.

This man also wanted to know how to receive eternal life (the text says in Hebrew style “to have in heritage”) and Jesus will clearly state at the end, that even if we obey the com-

mandments, we do not “merit” eternal life: salvation is always a gift of God.

Finally there is the question that bothers us most for all that touches money affects us deeply, and it is there that the Gospel shocks us: *it is easier for a camel...*

The call of the rich young man has always been considered the model of the religious, apostolic vocation. Without effective, voluntary poverty a person will never attain union with God that is the goal of the true religious. Besides, as long as the apostles share the life of comfortable people, they will be able to be their friends but they will never have deep conversions nor will they during this time reach the immense world of the poor.

The problem of poverty is also at the heart of the family in today’s world: for the greater number, believers or non-believers, the joys and blessings that God showers on a large family will only be given to those who have ceased to evaluate everything according to the criteria of money and security.

Mk 10:
23-27;
Lk 18:
24-27

²³ Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Truly I say to you: it will be hard for one who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven. ²⁴ Yes, believe me: it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for the one who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven.”

Lk 13:23

²⁵ On hearing this the disciples were astonished and said, “Who, then, can be saved?” ²⁶ Jesus looked steadily at them and answered, “For human beings it is impossible, but for God all things are possible.”

Job 42:2;
Gen
18:14;
Lk 1:37

Mk 10:
28-31;
Lk 18:
28-30

²⁷ Then Peter spoke up and said, “You see we have given up everything to follow you. What will be our lot?”

Lk 22:30;
Wis 8:8;
Dn 7:9;
Mt 20:21;
1Cor 6:2;
Rev 3:21

²⁸ Jesus answered, “You who have followed me, listen to my words: on the Day of Renewal, when the Son of Man sits on his throne in glory, you also will sit on twelve thrones to judge the twelve tribes of Israel. ²⁹ As for those who have left houses, brothers, sisters, father, mother, children or property for my Name’s sake, they will receive a hundredfold, and be given eternal life. ³⁰ Many who are now first will be last, and many who are now last will be first.

7:13;
8:11-12;
25:10-12;
Lk 13:30;
Mt 20:16

The workers in the vineyard

20 • ¹ This story throws light on the kingdom of Heaven: A landowner went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. ² He agreed to pay each worker the usual daily wage, and sent them to his vineyard.

21:28

³ He went out again at about nine in the morning, and seeing others idle in the town square, ⁴ he said to them, ‘You also, go to my vineyard, and I will pay you what is just.’ ⁵ So they went.

The owner went out at midday, and again at three in the afternoon, and he did the same. ⁶ Finally he went out at the last working hour—the eleventh hour—and he saw others standing there. So he said to them, ‘Why do you stay idle the whole day?’ ⁷ They answered, ‘Because no one has hired us.’ The master said, ‘Go and work in my vineyard.’

⁸ When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, ‘Call the workers and pay them their wage, beginning with the last and ending with the first.’ ⁹ Those who had come to work at the eleventh

Lev
19:13;
Dt 24:
14-15

• 20.1 THE MASTERS

Many are surprised at this parable. They find it unfair to give the same reward to everyone, without taking into account the labor and sacrifices of everyone.

Without doubt Jesus wanted to shock us and shatter the idea we obstinately cling to: that we have merits that God must recognize. However we should pay closer attention to the story: Jesus makes a comparison, not of several laborers, but of several groups of laborers. Each group represents a nation or a social class, and while some of them have long ago received the word of God, others have just become believers.

All throughout history, God has been calling different people to work in his vineyard. He called Abraham first and placed his descendants in charge of his work in the world. Later on, during the time of Moses many others

joined his group in order to leave Egypt and that has continued throughout history. The elders never cease to claim their right to receive better treatment than the others. Actually the vineyard has not been confided to them exclusively.

Then, with the coming of Christ, the Gospel was brought to other nations that were until then pagan. They came into the Church and shaped Christianity. They also claimed to be owners of the kingdom of God and the Church.

To this day, there are also social groups that are amazed when the Church criticizes their demand for privileges and does not assign them the first benches in the temple for they had always believed that the Church was theirs.

In this parable, all are treated on equal terms and receive one silver coin each. Let them be happy for having been invited to work, as they were unemployed.

hour turned up, and were each given a silver coin. ¹⁰When it was the turn of the first, they thought they would receive more. ¹¹But they, too, each received a silver coin. So, on receiving it, they began to grumble against the landowner.

¹²They said, ‘These last hardly worked an hour, yet you have treated them the same as us, who have endured the heavy work of the day and the heat.’ ¹³The owner said to one of them, ‘Friend, I have not been unjust to you. Did we not agree on one silver coin per day? ¹⁴So take what is yours and go. I want to give to the last the same as I give to you. ¹⁵Don’t I have the right to do as I please with what is mine? Why are you envious when I am kind?’

¹⁶So will it be: the last will be first, the first will be last.”

Third prophecy of the passion
(*Mk 10:32; Lk 18:31*)

¹⁷When Jesus was going to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside and said to them, ¹⁸“See, we are going to Jerusalem. There the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the Law, who will condemn him to death. ¹⁹They will hand him over to the foreigners, who will mock him, scourge him and crucify him. But he will be raised to life on the third day.”

The mother of James and John asks for the first seats
(*Mk 10:35*)

• ²⁰Then the mother of James and John came to Jesus with her sons, and she knelt down, to ask a favor. ²¹Jesus said to her, “What do you want?” And she answered, “Here you have my two sons. Grant that they

may sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, when you are in your kingdom.”

²²Jesus said to the brothers, “You do not know what you are asking. Can you drink the cup that I am about to drink?” They answered, “We can.” ²³Jesus replied, “You will indeed drink my cup, but to sit at my right or at my left is not for me to grant. That will be for those, for whom my Father has prepared it.”

²⁴The other ten heard all this, and were angry with the two brothers. ²⁵Then Jesus called them to him and said, “You know that the rulers of the nations act as tyrants over them, and the powerful oppress them. ²⁶It shall not be so among you: whoever wants to be more important in your community shall make himself your servant. ²⁷And if you want to be the first of all, make yourself the servant of all. ²⁸Be like the Son of Man who has come, not to be served but to serve, and to give his life to redeem many.”

²⁹As they left Jericho, a great crowd followed them on the way. ³⁰Two blind men were sitting by the roadside, and when they heard that Jesus was passing by, they began to call out, “Son of David, have mercy on us!” ³¹The people told them to keep quiet. But they shouted even louder, “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!” ³²Jesus stopped, called out to them and asked, “What do you want me to do for you?” ³³They said, “Lord, open our eyes.”

³⁴Jesus was moved with compassion and touched their eyes. Immediately they recovered their sight, and they began to follow Jesus.

26:39;
Jn 18:11

Mk 10:
41-45;
Lk 22:
25-27

18:1-4;
23:11;
Mk 9:35;
Lk 9:46;
18:14

26:28;
Phil 2:7-8;
1Tim 2:6;
Rom 5:6

Mk 10:
46-52;
Lk 18:
35-43
9:27;
15:22

Mk 10:
32-34;
Lk 18:
31-33

16:21;
17:12;
Lk 9:22;
24:7;
1Cor 15:4

Mk 10:
35-40

Lk 22:30

• 20. See commentary on Mark 10:35. Compare Matthew 20:23 and Mark 10:46.

Jesus enters Jerusalem*(Mk 11:1; Lk 19:28; Jn 12:12)*Mk 11:
1-11;
Lk 19:
12-38;
Jn 12:
12-16

21 ¹When they drew near Jerusalem and arrived at Bethphage, on the mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples, ²saying, "Go to the village in front of you, and there you will find a donkey tied up, with its colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. ³If anyone says something to you, say that the Lord needs them, and that he will send them back immediately."

Is 62:11;
Zec 9:9;
Gen
49:11;
Mt 11:29

⁴This happened in fulfillment of what the prophet said: ⁵*Say to the daughter of Zion: See, your king comes to you in all simplicity, riding on a donkey, a beast of burden, with its colt.*

1K 1:
33-34

⁶The disciples went, as Jesus had instructed them, ⁷and they brought the donkey with its colt. Then they threw their cloaks on its back, and Jesus sat on them.

2K 9:13

⁸Many people also spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut leafy branches from the trees and

spread them on the road. ⁹The people who walked ahead of Jesus, and those who followed him, began to shout, "*Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!*"

Ps 118:
25-26;
Mt 23:39

¹⁰When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was disturbed. The people asked, "Who is this man?" ¹¹And the crowd answered, "This is the Prophet Jesus from Nazareth of Galilee."

Jesus expels the dealers*(Mk 11:11; Lk 13:35; Jn 2:14)*

¹²Jesus went into the Temple, and drove out all who were buying and selling in the temple area. He overturned the tables of the money-changers, and the stools of those who sold pigeons. ¹³And he said to them, "*It is written: My house shall be called a house of prayer. But you have turned it into a den of thieves.*"

Mk 11:
11...17;
Lk 19:
45-46;
Jn 2:
14-16Is 56:7;
Jer 7:11

¹⁴The blind and the lame came to him in the Temple, and Jesus healed them.

2S 5:8

• **21.1** See commentary on Mark 11. Matthew, Mark and Luke place the incident about those selling in the Temple at the time of Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem. John, on the other hand, situates this event at the beginning of Jesus' mission. Once more we see how each of the evangelists disposes of events following the plan he has chosen to develop the mystery of Salvation. Their aim is not to draw up a life of Jesus where events would be placed in the exact order in which they occurred.

Besides, there are several details in this triumphant entrance of Jesus that remind us more of the Feast of the Tabernacles (which was celebrated in September), than of the days before the Passover:

– The joyous spirit of the people is more appropriate to that feastday, which was the most popular of all.

– The branches and palms, as in the procession of the feastday, on the way to the fountain of Siloe, while singing Psalm 118: "Blessed be he who comes in the name of the Lord!" and shouts of "Hosannah!" (that is: Save us!).

– Mention of the Mountain of Olives, where

tents of branches and leaves were erected for the feast.

See, in this respect, Zechariah 14 that refers to this feastday (14:16) and foretells the purification of the Temple.

Very possibly, the evangelists placed the entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem on the eve of the Passover for the simple reason that they only related one trip of Jesus to Jerusalem.

They arrived at Bethphage. The small village of Bethphage was the entrance to the district of Jerusalem towards the east. According to the Law, the Passover should be celebrated in Jerusalem, but the city was not big enough to accommodate more than a hundred and fifty thousand pilgrims for the festival. So it was necessary to enlarge the juridical limits of Jerusalem, embracing therefore some small villages like Bethphage. During those days, Jesus also used to lodge in Bethany (21:17).

• 12. See commentary on Mark 11:15.

Jesus cleanses the Temple, fulfilling the prophecy of Zechariah 14:21. Malachi 3 also foretold this event: The Lord would come to

Jn 12:19 ¹⁵The chief priests and the teachers of the Law saw the wonderful things Jesus had just done, and the children shouting in the temple area, “Hosanna to the Son of David!”

Ps 8:3 ¹⁶They became angry and said to Jesus, “Do you hear what they say?” Jesus answered them, “Yes. But have you never read this text: *From the mouths of children and infants you have got perfect praise?*”

Lk 21:37 ¹⁷So leaving them, he went out of the city and came to Bethany, where he spent the night.

Jesus curses the fig tree

(Mk 11:12; Lk 13:6)

Mk 11: 12...24;
Lk 13: 6-9
¹⁸While returning to the city early in the morning, Jesus felt hungry. ¹⁹He noticed a fig tree by the road, went up to it and found nothing on it but leaves. Then he said to the tree, “Never again bear fruit!” And immediately, the fig tree withered.

²⁰When the disciples saw this, they were astonished and said, “How did the fig tree suddenly dry up?”

17:20;
Lk 17: 5-6;
1Cor 13:2;
Jas 1:6
²¹Jesus told them, “Truly, I say to you: if you had faith and did not doubt, not only could you do what I have done with the fig tree, but you could even say to that mountain, ‘Go, and throw yourself into the sea!’ and it would be done. ²²Whatever

you ask for in prayer, full of faith, you will receive.”

7:7-11;
18:19;
Jn 14:13

Jesus' response to the authorities

(Mk 11:27; Lk 20:1)

²³Jesus had entered the Temple and was teaching, when the chief priests, the teachers of the Law and the Jewish authorities came to him, and asked, “What authority have you to act like this? Who gave you authority to do all this?”

Mk 11: 27-33;
Lk 20: 1-8;
Jn 2:18

²⁴Jesus answered them, “I will also ask you a question, only one. And if you give me an answer, then I will tell you by what authority I do these things. When John began to baptize, was it a work of God, or was it merely something human?”

²⁵They reasoned out among themselves, “If we reply that it was a work of God, he will say, ‘Then why did you not believe him?’ ²⁶And if we say, ‘The baptism of John was merely something human’, we’ve got to beware of the people, for all hold John as a prophet.” ²⁷So they answered Jesus, “We do not know.”

Jn 1:6;
3:27

And Jesus said to them, “Neither will I tell you by what right I do these things.”

21:32;
Lk 3:12;
7:29-30

The parable of the two sons

²⁸Jesus went on to say, “What

Is 5:1-7

purify his people and his temple. Jesus comes as a prophet to demand respect for God. Also, as God, he inaugurates the new era of religion in spirit and in truth. That is how John also understood this event in John 2:21, where he speaks of the new Temple, Christ.

You have got perfect praise (v. 16). These words of Psalm 8 were addressed to God, but Jesus applies them to himself, as he did with some other Scriptural texts.

• 18. This incident helps us understand the strange behavior of Jesus in looking for figs out of season and then *cursing the tree* as if it were responsible. Jesus behaved this way for a purpose: to call something to the attention of

the apostles, through a teaching method used by the prophets. The fig tree is a figure of the Jewish people, who did not produce the fruits expected by God.

• 23. Jesus is what we would call today a simple layman. He respects the priests of the people of God and their high priest. He shows however that if they want others to be accountable, for their part they must be ready to take a stand on the things of God when the people need this. They had been and were unwilling to give such a response in the case of John the Baptist.

• 28. This parable refers to the refusal of

do you think of this? A man had two sons. He went to the first and said to him, 'Son, go and work today in my vineyard.'²⁹ And the son answered, 'I don't want to.' But later he thought better of it and went.³⁰ Then the father went to his other son and gave him the same command. This son replied, 'I will go, sir,' but he did not go.

^{22:6} ^{11:7; Lk 16:16} ³¹ Which of the two did what the father wanted?" They answered, "The first." And Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you: the publicans and the prostitutes are ahead of you on the way to the kingdom of heaven.³² For John came to show you the way of goodness, and you did not believe him; but the publicans and the prostitutes did. You were witnesses of this, but you neither repented nor believed him.

The parable of the tenants

(Mk 12:1; Lk 20:9)

^{Mk 12: 1-12; Lk 20: 9-19} ³³ Listen to another example: There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a fence around it, dug a hole for the winepress, built a watchtower, leased the vineyard to tenants, and then went to a distant country.³⁴ When harvest time came, the landowner sent his servants to the tenants to collect his share of the harvest.³⁵ But the tenants seized his servants, beat one, killed another, and stoned a third.

³⁶ Again the owner sent more servants, but they were treated in the same way.

³⁷ Finally, he sent his son, thinking, 'They will respect my son.'³⁸ But when the tenants saw the son, they thought, 'This is the one who is to inherit the vineyard. Let us kill him, and his inheritance will be ours.'³⁹ So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

⁴⁰ Now, what will the owner of the vineyard do with the tenants when he comes?"⁴¹ They said to him, "He will bring those evil men to an evil end, and lease the vineyard to others, who will pay him in due time."

⁴² And Jesus replied, "Have you never read what the Scriptures say? *The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This was the Lord's doing, and we marvel at it.*⁴³ Therefore I say to you: the kingdom of heaven will be taken from you, and given to a people who will yield a harvest.

⁴⁴ (Whoever falls on this stone, he will be broken to pieces; on whom ever this stone falls, he will be ground to dust.)"

⁴⁵ When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard these parables, they realized that Jesus was referring to them.⁴⁶ They would have arrested him, but they were afraid of the crowd, who regarded him as a prophet.

The wedding feast

(Lk 14:15)

22 • ¹ Jesus went on speaking to them in parables:

the chief priests to recognize John the Baptist as a messenger of God.

A good number of sinners were converted by John's preaching and confessed their sins. Such people were well disposed to receive the message of Jesus that opened for them the kingdom of God and showed them the true face of God the Father. Because of that, they were ahead of the priests, who were indifferent to John's call, for they felt neither the de-

sire nor the need to change.

Every parish that carries out a mission experiences the same thing: many uncommitted Christians will neither work as missionaries, nor receive them, believing they do not need conversion.

• 22.1 THE BANQUET

This parable contains two parts.

In the first part, God invites us to a banquet

Jn 3:16

Gal 3:16;
4:7;
Heb 1:2;
13:12Ps 118:
22-23;
Is 28:16;
Acts
4:11;
1P 2:4-7Acts 13:5;
Rom
11:1114:5;
16:14;
21:11;
21:26;
Lk 7:16;
Jn 4:19Lk 14:
15-24;
Pro 9:
1-6

21:34

²“This story throws light on the kingdom of heaven: A king celebrated the wedding of his son. ³He sent his servants to call the invited guests to the wedding feast, but the guests refused to come.

⁴Again he sent other servants, ordering them to say to the invited guests, ‘I have prepared a banquet, slaughtered my fattened calves and other animals, and now everything is ready. Come to the wedding!’ ⁵But they paid no attention and went away, some to their fields, and some to their work. ⁶Others seized the servants of the king, insulted them and killed them.

⁷The king became angry. He sent his troops to destroy those murderers and burn their city. ⁸Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding ban-

quet is prepared, but the invited guests were not worthy. ⁹Go instead to the crossroads, and invite every-one you find to the wedding feast.’

¹⁰The servants went out at once into the streets and gathered every-one they found, good and bad alike, so that the hall was filled with guests.

¹¹The king came in to see those who were at table, and he noticed a man not wearing the festal garment.

¹²So he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you get in without the wedding garment?’ But the man remained silent.

¹³So the king said to his servants, ‘Bind his hands and feet and throw him into the dark, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

• ¹⁴Know that many are called, but few are chosen.”

Rev 19:7

13:47

Rev 19:8

8:12;
25:30;
Lk 13:28

Mk 12:
13-17;
Lk 20:
20-26

where there is a place for everyone. All through history he has been sending his prophets to preach justice, the mercy of God and trust in him. The Jewish nation, however, did not heed God’s call through these prophets and now will pay even less heed to Jesus. God’s plan will not fail. He will send his apostles to preach the Gospel in foreign nations (*go to the crossroads*) so that non-Jews, too, may enter the Church. Some Jews, however, the *selected few among so many called*, will be the first members of the Church.

The king *celebrates the wedding of his son*, Christ, who deserves to be called “the bridegroom” of humankind (Mk 2:19), because he has become one body with it. All throughout history the Risen Christ gathers together mortal and divided human beings. The Spirit of God will transform and raise them from the dead, so that they may *sit at the table* of the living, according to the parable.

The only table of Christ that Christians usually know is the Eucharist. While taking part in it, we must not forget what has been said above. Our meeting in the Mass should remind us that God calls us to prepare, in our daily lives, for the banquet reserved by him for all humankind. Ours is the task of uniting and reconciling all people.

What if we do not answer? Then, little by little, the life of the holy and universal Church will be withdrawn from our assemblies of com-

fortable Christians, and others will be called to take charge of the work of God: *invite to the wedding*.

The second part of the parable points this out: You, Christians, who are already inside the Church, do you wear the new garment—a life of justice, honesty and trustworthiness?

Let us not believe that the surprised guest who was not properly dressed for the occasion was some kind of poor person. No, for it was customary during those times to supply all guests with the robe they should wear at the banquet. This one could have put on the robe but did not, so he had nothing to answer.

• 14. *Many are called* (v. 14). Some are disturbed upon reading this: does it mean that only a few persons will be saved?

If we associate this sentence with the first part of the parable, it means that, of those first invited, few will enter the banquet. These guests were the Jews and very few, indeed, entered the Church of Jesus. Interpreted in connection with the second part of the parable, it would mean that few of those entering the Church have the necessary dispositions, so the majority would be condemned at the time of judgment. This contradicts what was related in the parable, because only one of the guests was thrown out.

It is better not to associate this saying too much with the parable of the banquet, because

Paying taxes to Caesar

(Mk 12:13; Lk 20:20)

•¹⁵ The Pharisees went out and considered how they could trap Jesus by his own words. ¹⁶ They then sent out their disciples, with members of Herod's party, for this purpose.

They said to Jesus, "Master, we know that you are an honest man and truly teach God's way. You are not influenced by others nor are you afraid of anyone. ¹⁷ So tell us what you think: is it against the Law to pay taxes to Caesar or not?"

¹⁸ But Jesus understood their bad intentions, and said to them, "Hypocrites, why are you testing me? ¹⁹ Show me the coin with which you pay the taxes."

They showed him a silver coin, ²⁰ and Jesus said to them, "Whose head is this, and whose name?"

²¹ They answered, "Caesar's." Then Jesus replied, "So give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and give to God what is God's."

²² Astonished by his answer, they left him and went away.

The resurrection of the dead

(Mk 12:18; Lk 20:27)

•²³ That same day, some of the Sadducees came to Jesus. Since they claim that there is no resurrection, they questioned him in this way:

²⁴ "Master, Moses said that if a man dies without any children, his brother must take the wife and have a child, who will be considered the child of the deceased man. ²⁵ Now, there were seven brothers. The first mar-

ried a woman, but he died; since he had no children, he left his wife to his brother. ²⁶ The same thing happened to the second brother, and to the third, until the seventh. ²⁷ Then, last of all, the woman also died. ²⁸ Now, in the resurrection of the dead, to which of the seven will she be wife, for they all had her as a wife?"

²⁹ Jesus answered, "You are totally wrong, because you understand neither the Scriptures nor the power of God. ³⁰ First of all, in the resurrection of the dead, neither men nor women will marry, but they will be like the angels in heaven. ³¹ As for the resurrection of the dead, have you never reflected on what God said to you: *32 I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?* He is God, not of the dead but of the living."

³³ The people who heard him were astonished at his teaching.

³⁴ When the Pharisees heard how Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they came together. ³⁵ One of them, a teacher of the Law, tried to test him with this question, ³⁶ "Teacher, which is the most important commandment in the Law?"

³⁷ Jesus answered, "*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.* ³⁸ This is the first and the most important of the commandments. ³⁹ But after this there is another one very similar to it: *You shall love your neighbor as yourself.* ⁴⁰ The whole Law and the Prophets are founded on these two commandments."

we find it also in other places in the Gospel. Here Jesus advises us (as in 7:13) that only a few discover through the Gospel true freedom and new life. Then, are they saved? Yes and no—because salvation, for Jesus, does not mean to escape from the punishment of hell, but to reach perfection.

• 15. See the commentary in Mark 12:13.

• 23. See the commentary in Mark 12:18.

In verse 24 the text reads: "take as a wife the sister-in-law and raise a descendant to his brother."

3:6

7:28;
13:54Mk 12:
28-31;
Lk 10:
25-28

Dt 6:5

Lev 19:18;
Mt 5:43;
Rom
13:10;
Gal 5:14

7:12

Mk 12:
18-27;
Lk 20:
27-40;
Acts 23:8Dt 25:
5-6;
Gen 38:8

The Messiah, Son of God

(Mk 12:35; Lk 20:41)

⁴¹As the Pharisees were gathered there, Jesus asked them, ⁴²“What do you think of the Messiah? Whose son is he?” They answered, “David’s.”

⁴³Jesus then asked, “Why did David, inspired by God, call the Messiah Lord? For he says in a psalm:

44 The Lord said to my Lord: Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet. ⁴⁵If David calls him Lord, how can he be his son?”

⁴⁶No one could answer him, not even a word. From that day on, no one dared question him anymore.

Do not imitate the teachers of the Law

(Lk 20:45; Mk 12:38)

23 ¹Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples,

²“The teachers of the Law and the Pharisees have sat down on the

chair of Moses. ³So you shall do and observe all they say, but do not do as they do, ⁴for they do not do what they say. They tie up heavy burdens and load them on the shoulders of the people, but they do not even raise a finger to move them. ⁵They do everything in order to be seen by people: they wear very wide bands of the Law around their foreheads, and robes with large tassels. ⁶They enjoy the first places at feasts and reserved seats in the synagogues, ⁷and they like being greeted in the marketplace, and being called ‘Master’ by the people.

⁸But you, do not let yourselves be called *Master*, because you have only one Master, and all of you are brothers and sisters. ⁹Neither should you call anyone on earth *Father*, because you have only one Father, he who is in heaven. ¹⁰Nor should you be called *Leader*, because Christ is the only Leader for you. ¹¹Let the greatest among you be the servant

• **23.1** The fifth Discourse of Matthew’s Gospel begins here. Only a few days separate us from Jesus’ departure from this world and it is here that Matthew places the words and parables of Jesus that enlighten the disciples on the attitude to adopt in face of the times to come. Scarcely born, the Church will have to face the formidable opposition of Jewish power, especially that of the Pharisees. She will therefore follow her own way and separate herself from the Jewish communities. This is the main theme of chapter 23. Chapter 24 declares that God will confirm this separation through the ruin of the Jewish nation. The Church, then, should turn towards the future and await the return of Christ. Let her not waste time in waiting for the end of the world but be always ready in active vigilance: this is chapter 25.

• **2. RELIGIOUS AUTHORITIES**

Jesus was not from the tribe of Levi, to which the priests and those in charge of religious activities belonged. He did not, likewise, belong to any religious association, as the Pharisees did. He was on the side of the peo-

ple and saw how the leaders of God’s people and the organized religious elite acted.

Obviously Matthew wants the words of Jesus to fall on the ears of important personages in the communities. Jesus judges in advance the authorities of the Church and more especially any group that sees itself the better, the more aware and the more efficacious. The Pharisees pretended to be just that, and in a sense they were.

The teachers of the Law and the Pharisees have sat down on the chair of Moses. The Gospel says it with more precision: *they have seated themselves in the chair of Moses.* This rather ironic formula suggests that the ambitious appropriate to themselves the authority over the people of God and that to a certain point God tolerates it. Matthew, in recording these words of Jesus, wants to preserve in the Church fundamental equality. It is the whole Church that enjoys the Holy Spirit, and the heads or *doctors* will have no authority unless they are deeply rooted in the community’s life.

Paul will speak of Christ and the Church using the comparison of the head and the body

Mk 12: 35-37; Lk 20: 41-44; 2S 7:16

Ps 110:1; Acts 2:34; 1Cor 15:25; Heb 1:13

Mk 12: 38-39; Lk 20: 45-47; 11:39

Rom 2:17

11:30; Lk 11:46

6:1; Num 15:38

Lk 14:7

20:26; Lk 22:26

Lk 1:52; Job 22:29; Pro 29:23; Ezk 21:31; Lk 14:11 of all. ¹²For whoever makes himself great shall be humbled, and whoever humbles himself shall be made great.

Seven woes for the Pharisees

(Lk 11:39)

Lk 11:39...52 • ¹³Therefore, woe to you, teachers of the Law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the door to the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor do you allow others to do so.

¹⁴Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You devour widows' houses, even while for a pretense you make long prayers; therefore you shall receive greater con-

demnation. ¹⁵Woe to you, teachers of the Law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel by sea and land to win a single convert, yet once he is converted, you make him twice as fit for hell as yourselves.

¹⁶Woe to you, blind guides! You say: To swear by the Temple is not binding, but to swear by the treasure of the Temple is binding. ¹⁷Blind fools! Which is of more worth: the gold in the Temple, or the Temple which makes the gold a sacred treasure? You say: ¹⁸To swear by the altar is not binding, but to swear by the offering on the altar is binding. ¹⁹How blind you are! Which is of more value: the offering on the altar,

5:33;
15:14;
Rom 2:19

(Eph 5:25). Likewise in the Church the authority of the bishop goes hand in hand with fidelity to the Church that he governs. He has accepted the Church as it is and does not seek to impose his own projects.

Do all they say. The bad example of the authorities does not discredit the word of God. Nor does it lessen the principle of authority. Their bad attitude discredits only their pretense at being superior to others. They cannot renounce their authority on the pretext of humble service and then carry out what the majority has decided.

Jesus speaks of the form of authority. *Do not be called master or father.* Do not be called "master," the one "who knows" and before whom one is silent; neither must you be called "father," the one who is venerated and imitated, forgetting to look directly at the One who alone is good. No one in the Church should eclipse the only "Father."

Doubtless everyone will say that the word "Father" is simply the expression of respectful affection but Jesus affirms that the word has perverse effects.

The purity of faith, which submits to God alone, always suffers because of the cult of personality. The Church should be a community of free persons able to speak frankly.

• 13. *You shut the door to the kingdom of heaven* (v. 13). Do not forget that "*the kingdom of heaven*" means the kingdom of God. Many teachers of the people of God are obstacles on the path leading to the true knowledge of God the Father. Even in the

smallest village, the Jews had teachers of the Law but in fact, crowds came to Jesus to ask for what those priests and teachers did not give them. How can we forget that even in the Church religious education is often limited to moral compartment and keeping within religious norms? Hearing and constantly meditating on the Word of God would have favored the awakening of great ambitions: the search for God and apostolic creativity.

You say: To swear by the treasure of the Temple (vv. 16-22). Jesus refers to the common practices in his time. Some teachers found ways to get around certain oaths. In that manner, clever people could swear falsely and deceive their opponents by swearing firmly without promising much.

THE DEFENDERS OF THE FAITH

How could Jesus call such men hypocrites when they were so versed in the knowledge of the Bible?

In the language of Jesus, the word "hypocrite" equally denotes what is superficial as well as the one who makes light of what is of God. Obviously not all the Pharisees were hypocrites; but Jesus denounces a frequent deformation in the religious elite. He calls us to be wary of those institutions born of possessors of wealth and culture who aspire to direct others—and the Church—without having learned from the poor or practiced true humility.

The mystery of God is so deep that no one can present himself as his lieutenant. The Pharisees trained, taught and gained many fol-

29:37 or the altar which makes the offering sacred? ²⁰Whoever swears by the altar, is swearing by the altar and by everything on it. ²¹Whoever swears by the Temple is swearing by the Temple and by God who dwells in the Temple. ^{5:33}²²Whoever swears by heaven is swearing by the throne of God, and by him who is seated on it.

Lev 27:30; Mic 6:8; Am 5:21 ²³Woe to you, teachers of the Law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You do not forget the mint, anise and cumin seeds when you demand the tenth of everything, but then you forget what is most fundamental in the Law: justice, mercy and faith. These you must practice, instead of neglecting them. ²⁴Blind guides! You strain out a mosquito, but swallow a camel.

Mk 7:4 ²⁵Woe to you, teachers of the Law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You fill the plate and the cup with theft and violence, and then pronounce a blessing over them. ²⁶Blind Pharisee!

Purify the inside first, then the outside too will be purified.

Acts 23:3 ²⁷Woe to you, teachers of the Law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, beautiful in appearance, but inside there are only dead bones and uncleanness. ^{Lk 16:15}²⁸In the same way, you appear religious to others, but you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness within.

• ²⁹Woe to you, teachers of the Law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You build tombs for the prophets, and decorate the monuments of the righteous. ³⁰You say: Had we lived in the time of our ancestors, we would not have joined them in shedding the blood of the prophets. ³¹So, you yourselves confess to be the descendants of those who murdered the prophets. ³²And now, finish off what your ancestors began!

Acts 7:52 ³³Serpents, race of vipers! How can you escape condemnation to hell? ^{Lk 3:7}³⁴Therefore, indeed, I send

1Thes 2:15

lowers in the faith but their fasts and alms were already rewarded. Pride and love of money were given their place.

THE PROPHETS

• 29. We have on one side “the prophets” and on the other those who “kill the prophets.” The Bible shows us that the prophets meet with much opposition among the people of God and especially among its leaders.

There is a people of God and this people has necessarily its institutions which help it to be faithful to its mission. In fact this people follows their reflexes and social prejudices, and the whole institution, even if born of the Spirit, becomes heavy and hardens with time. Prophets are readily condemned when they challenge peace and unity in mediocrity or even unfaithfulness to the word of God.

The Jewish people, harassed by foreigners, closed ranks around the Temple, religious practice and the Pharisee group. Moved by fear, the Jews did what any society would do when threatened: they became fanatically conservative and felt secure in the institutions God had given them in the past. (We are at present experiencing the same phenomenon. Our gen-

eration suddenly finds itself facing, in all areas, crises and threats for which it was not prepared; all our certitudes are questioned, and because of this we see emerging in all religions fundamentalist groups offering an appearance of safety by enclosing themselves in structures and systems of thought—or no thought—inherited from the past.)

The defenders of the Jewish community were not ready to listen to their prophet. It was one thing to honor the prophets of the past and keep the sacred books, another to accept the criticism addressed to them by God, not in the sacred books, but from the lips of Jesus, the carpenter.

Thus it was that the prominent Jews let the moment when *God visited them* slip by—following the path that would lead their nation to ruin.

The example of the Jewish nation must serve as a warning to us. Are our Christian communities, confronted today by a major crisis, able to build a poorer and more demanding Church? Will they be less preoccupied with their personal survival rather than giving the Gospel to the world?

prophets, wise men and teachers to you; but some you will murder and crucify, some you will flog in your synagogues, some you will drive from one city to the next.

³⁵Because of this, you will be accountable for all the innocent blood that has been shed on the earth, from the blood of upright Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the altar and the sanctuary. ³⁶Truly I say to you: the present generation will pay for all this.

• ³⁷Jerusalem, Jerusalem! You murder the prophets and stone those sent to you by God. How often would I have gathered your children together, just as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you refused! ³⁸Now you will be left with an empty Temple. ³⁹I tell you that you will no longer see me until you say: *Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!*

10:23;
27:25;
Rev 16:6;
Gen 4:8;
Heb 11:4;
24:20-22

Lk 13:34;
Jer 7:14;
1K 9:7;
Tb 14:4;
Ezk
11:23

Ps
118:25;
Mk 11:10

The ruin of Jerusalem and the end of the world

(Mk 13; Lk 21; 17:23; 12:36)

24 • ¹Jesus left the Temple, and as he was walking away, his disciples came to him and pointed out to him the imposing Temple buildings. ²But he said, “You see all this? Truly I say to you: not one stone will be left upon another here. All will be thrown down.”

³Later when Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples approached him privately and asked, “Tell us when this will take place. What sign will be given us before your coming and the end of the world?”

⁴Jesus answered, “Be on your guard and let no one mislead you. ⁵Many will come, claiming my title and saying: ‘I am the Messiah,’ and they will mislead many people. ⁶You will hear about war and threats of war, but do not be troubled, for these

Mk 13:
1-23;
Lk 21:
5-24

Lk 19:44

13:39

Jn 5:43

• 37. How harshly Jesus speaks! Jerusalem was destroyed in the year 587 B.C. If we read the prophets, we find that Jerusalem’s destruction was a punishment for its crimes. Now, Jesus announces another destruction of wider historical consequences: *the blood of the prophets, the blood of Christ, the blood of the first Christians killed by the Jews.*

You will be left with an empty Temple. The presence of God in his Temple would leave them once more and be established among the converted pagans, as in Ezekiel 8. There will be no further intervention by God to establish his Kingdom in Israel among the Jewish people until the day they welcome the Christ.

• **24.1** With reference to this great discourse see commentary on Mark 13.

In this discourse the Gospel uses the style of apocalyptic books (see the Introduction to Revelation). In this kind of literature signs announced great events. Hence the question of those closest to Jesus: “What will be the sign of your coming at the end of time?”

The discourse that follows comprises words pronounced by Jesus in very diverse circum-

stances. Jesus refuses speculation and reminds us that Christian history is one of persecution; he encourages us to be faithful.

In paragraph 24:4-28 Jesus speaks of the *days of trial* (vv. 21 and 29) that will conclude with the destruction of Jerusalem that Jesus’ listeners will witness. It will be possible to run away before the disaster occurs (vv. 15-20).

The idol of the invader. The Gospel repeats an expression of Daniel (9:27) to indicate on this occasion, the taking over of the Temple by the Roman troops (see commentary on Mk 13:14).

It will be a time for evangelization, a time for persecutions and for Christians’ testimony before the Jewish and pagan worlds (vv. 9-14). The Jewish people, who did not recognize Jesus as their Savior, will let other saviors, or messiahs, stir them up against the Romans.

In paragraph 26-28, Jesus shows that this general confusion about the true savior is very far removed from what will happen when he returns at the end of time.

In paragraph 29-31 Jesus talks about his glorious coming. Then Jesus again asserts two things: the events and signs that refer to the end of Jerusalem will take place in the present

things must happen; but it is not yet the end. ⁷Nations will fight one another, and kingdom oppose kingdom. In some places there will be famines and earthquakes, ⁸but all this is only the beginning, the first pains of childbirth.

⁹Then they will arrest you, and they will torture and kill you. All nations will hate you, for you bear my name. ¹⁰In those days, many will stumble and fall. They will betray one another and become enemies.

¹¹False prophets will appear and mislead many, ¹²and because of such great wickedness, love in many people will grow cold. ¹³But the one who holds out to the end will be saved. ¹⁴The Good News of the Kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the world for all the nations to know; then the end will come.

¹⁵When you see what the prophet Daniel spoke about, *the idol of the invader set up in the Temple* (let the reader understand!), ¹⁶then let those in Judea flee to the mountains.

¹⁷If you are on the housetop, do not come down to take anything with you. ¹⁸If you are in the field, do not turn back to fetch your coat. ¹⁹How hard it will be for pregnant women, and for mothers with babies at the

breast! ²⁰Pray that it may not be in winter, or on a sabbath, that you flee; ²¹for there will be great tribulation, such as was never known from the beginning of the world until now, and is never to be known again. ²²And if that time were not to be shortened, no one would survive. But God will shorten it for the sake of his chosen ones. ²³Then, if anyone says to you, 'Look! The Messiah is here! He is there!', do not believe it. ²⁴For false Messiahs and false prophets will appear, and perform signs and wonders so great, that they would deceive even God's chosen people, if that were possible. ²⁵See, I have told you everything ahead of time.

²⁶So, if anyone tells you, 'He is in the desert,' do not go. If they say, 'He is in such a secluded place,' do not believe it. ²⁷For the coming of the Son of Man will be like lightning, which flashes from the east even to the west. ²⁸Wherever the body is, the vultures will gather.

The coming of the Son of Man

(Mk 13:28; Lk 17:20)

²⁹And later, after that distress, *the sun will grow dark, the moon will not give its light, the stars will fall from the skies, and the whole uni-*

Dn 12:1;
Jl 2:2;
Rev 7:14

Mk 13:21;
Lk 17:22

1Jn 2:18;
Dt 13:2;
2Thes 2:9;
Rev 13:13

Lk 17:37

Mk 13:
24-32;
Lk 21:
25-33;
Am 8:9;
Is 13:10;
Ezk 32:8;
Jl 3:4

generation (vv. 32-35). *The day of Jesus* (vv. 36 and 42) will come much later.

The comparison of the *two men (or women)* working together means that, upon the coming of Jesus, the Judgment will take place, and there might be a separation within the same social or family group: some headed towards the Lord, others to be condemned (vv. 37 and 41).

Why is it that the Gospel draws a parallel with the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of time? Simple, because Matthew addresses Christians who have just experienced the first event and are awaiting the second. It is the moment when there emerges the Christian vision of the history of these two great stages.

First, we have the time of the Old Testa-

ment. God taught the people of Israel and nurtured their development in order that their history and experiences be enlightening for other peoples. At the end of this period, Jesus came during a national crisis to give them the full knowledge of their mission as a people of God. A minority believed, but the nation did not convert and crashed.

The message is then presented to other nations, and thus began the time of the New Testament. The Church teaches all peoples who must mature as nations and Christians. The Bible implies that New Testament times are leading up to a universal crisis where the Gospel will more than ever be a reality: "Believe or you will die." It is then that both the New Testament and history will end.

verse will be shaken. ³⁰Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven. As all the nations of the earth beat their breasts, *they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven* with divine power and the fullness of glory. ³¹He will send his angels to sound the trumpet, and to gather the chosen ones from the four winds, from one end of the earth to the other.

³²Learn a lesson from the fig tree: when its branches grow tender and its leaves begin to sprout, you know that summer is near. ³³In the same way, when you see all that I have told you, know that the time is near, even at the door. ³⁴Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have happened. ³⁵Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

³⁶But as for that Day and that Hour, no one knows when it will come, not even the angels of God, nor the Son, but only the Father.

³⁷At the coming of the Son of Man, it will be just as it was in the time of Noah. ³⁸In those days before the Flood, people were eating and drinking, and marrying, until that day when Noah went into the ark. ³⁹Yet they did not know what would happen, until the flood came and swept them away. So will it be at the coming of the Son of Man: ⁴⁰of two men in the field, one will be taken and the other left; ⁴¹of two women grinding wheat together at the mill, one will be taken and the other left.

Be on the alert

⁴²Stay awake then, for you do not know on what day your Lord will come. ⁴³Obviously, if the owner of the house knew at what time the thief was coming, he would certainly stay up and not allow his house to be broken into. ⁴⁴So be alert, for the Son of Man will come at the hour you least expect.

⁴⁵Imagine a capable servant, whom his master has put in charge of his household, to give them food at the proper time. ⁴⁶Fortunate indeed is that servant, whom his master will find at work when he comes. ⁴⁷Truly I say to you, his lord will entrust that one with everything he has.

⁴⁸Not so with the bad servant, who thinks, 'My master is delayed.' ⁴⁹And he begins to ill-treat his fellow servants, while eating and drinking with drunkards. ⁵⁰But his master will come on the day he does not know, and at the hour he least expects. ⁵¹He will dismiss that servant, and deal with him as with the hypocrites. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

The ten bridesmaids

(Mk 13:35; Lk 13:25)

25 ¹This story throws light on what will happen in the kingdom of heaven: Ten bridesmaids went out with their lamps to meet the bridegroom. ²Five of them were careless, and the others were sensible.

³The careless bridesmaids took their lamps as they were, and did not

25:13;
Lk 12:
39-40;
Mk 13:33

Lk
12:22;
1Thes
5:2;
2P 3:10;
Rev 3:3

Lk 12:
42-46

19:28;
25:21

8:12;
13:42

Lk 12:
35-38

• 25.1 FAITHFULNESS

The three parables that follow tell us how to await the return of Christ, being alert and active. The first, "the ten bridesmaids" is the most beautiful parable on fidelity. The ten girls followed the custom of waiting through the night for the bridegroom who will be accompanied to his house. The bridegroom is late,

something that should astonish no one. The bride is not mentioned: perhaps they will discover at the end that there was no other than themselves.

They fell asleep. Once the sun has set, all is dark and nothing more can be done (Jn 9:4). No further work except fidelity of heart (Dt 5:2): oil will be needed to keep the flame alive.

bring extra oil. ⁴But those who were sensible, brought with their lamps flasks of oil. ⁵As the bridegroom delayed, they all grew drowsy and fell asleep.

⁶But at midnight, a cry rang out, 'The bridegroom is here, come out and meet him!' ⁷All the maidens woke up at once, and trimmed their lamps. ⁸Then the careless ones said to the sensible ones, 'Give us some oil, for our lamps are going out.' ⁹The sensible ones answered, 'There may not be enough for us and for you. You had better go to those who sell, and buy some for yourselves.'

¹⁰They were out buying oil when the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went with him to the wedding feast, and the doors were shut.

7:13;
8:11;
Lk 13:24;
Rev 19:7

¹¹Later the other bridesmaids arrived and called out, 'Lord, Lord, open to us!' ¹²But he answered, 'Truly I do not know you.'

¹³So stay awake, for you do not know the day nor the hour.

Lk 13:25

Mk
13:35

The parable of the talents

(Lk 19:12; Mk 4:25; 13:34)

^{• 14}Imagine someone who, before going abroad, summoned his servants to entrust his property to them. ¹⁵He gave five talents of silver to one servant, two talents to another servant, and one talent to a third, to each according to his ability; and he went away.

Lk 19:
11-27

¹⁶He who received five talents went at once to do business with the money, and gained another five. ¹⁷The one who received two talents did the

Here as in other places, the Gospel shows us that more than conversion and enthusiasm is needed: it is necessary to last (7-24). Being sure of having a reserve of oil is to take the means that enable us to persevere in our vocation.

Some will say that Matthew has placed this parable here for the benefit of the first Christians, for after having awaited the return of Christ, they saw that nothing happened. Error! Jesus speaks to the believers of all times. For them one day or another fidelity becomes burdensome: "I did not know to what I was committing myself." There lies the grandeur of fidelity. It cannot be known in advance; giving one's hand to God is a jump into the unknown. Only through this perseverance can we be saved (Mt 24:13), in other words, find ourselves.

The Lord demands faithfulness and perseverance from those he has chosen: this is how we save a world that seeks truth everywhere and does not know to which Lord to surrender.

• 14. TO WORK—TO TRUST ONESELF

During the time of Jesus, a talent was an amount, thirty kilograms of precious metal, but in this parable when Jesus spoke of talents he referred to the abilities given by God to each of us. Since then, people came to understand the word "talent" in this sense.

Good and faithful servant (v. 21). *Faithful*: it would be better translated: "reliable." We do not find any word of religious vocabulary in this parable.

God sees the way one has used his talents, and the sin is to have kept for self what one has received. What condemnation of a society where it is usual to enjoy and consume what has been received: a better human formation and knowledge inherited from the homeland which should be transmitted to one's descendants, the blessings and benefits of a family where the parents knew how to sacrifice themselves for their children, and perhaps the Word of God to be carried out in order to realize God's great plan for the world.

I will entrust you with much more. What we achieve on earth is not definitive but only the scaffolding: quite other will be the riches that God will distribute to those who will live in him.

You know that I reap where I have not sown (v. 26). As in Luke 18:1, Jesus is aware of our unavowed defiance towards God and takes us at our word. If we do not aspire to the place that the husband reserves for a wife (25:1), let us try at least not to be useless servants.

There are many opportunities for us to take initiatives, but we often are afraid to put ourselves forward: "I am not the most qualified." What if those who are qualified have not

same, and gained another two.¹⁸ But the one who received one talent dug a hole, and hid his master's money.

¹⁹After a long time, the master of those servants returned and asked for a reckoning. ²⁰The one who had received five talents came with another five talents, saying, 'Lord, you entrusted me with five talents, but see, I have gained five more.'²¹ The master answered, 'Very well, good and faithful servant, since you have been faithful in a few things, I will entrust you with much more. Come and share the joy of your master.'

²²Then the one who had received two talents came and said, 'Lord, you entrusted me with two talents; with them I have gained two more.'

²³The master said, 'Well, good and faithful servant, since you have been faithful in little things, I will entrust you with much more. Come and share the joy of your master.'

²⁴Finally, the one who had received one talent came and said, 'Master, I know that you are a hard man. You reap what you have not sown, and gather what you have not scattered.'²⁵ I was afraid, so I hid your money in the ground. Here, take what is yours!' ²⁶But his master replied,

'Wicked and worthless servant, you know that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered; ²⁷so you should have deposited my money in the bank, and on my return you would have given it back to me with interest.

²⁸Therefore, take the talent from him, and give it to the one who has ten. ²⁹For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who are unproductive, even what they have will be taken from them. ³⁰As for that useless servant, throw him out into the dark, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

The last judgment

(Lk 9:26)

• ³¹When the Son of Man comes in his glory with all his angels, he will sit on the throne of his glory. ³²All the nations will be brought before him, and as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, ³³so will he do with them, placing the sheep on his right hand and the goats on his left.

³⁴The King will say to those on his right, 'Come, blessed of my Father! Take possession of the kingdom pre-

budget? Then, *take the talent from him and give it to someone else.*

• 31. THE UNIVERSAL JUDGEMENT

We know that Christians are a minority in the world. As we do now, the Jews wondered about the majority of nations in the world, who were not among the Chosen People and did not know about God or his promises. The Jews envisioned a huge multitude, ready to "devour them," a restless world where God should one day impose his Law. They used to call them: the nations.

Jesus goes beyond these narrow perspectives and shows us how he will judge everyone, making no distinctions based on origins when he comes as King of all nations. All those who, without knowing Christ, have shared in the

common destiny of humankind, will be judged by him. In fact, he never abandoned them, but placed at their side "those little ones who are his brothers and sisters," as his representatives.

See, Christ reveals the innumerable human deeds that have built what is best in our civilization, and people brought before him look with amazement at the God whom they loved or despised in the person of their neighbor. Although the majority of them never thought of the afterlife, the kingdom of God is presented to them with its only law: Love.

There is no neutral place. The fire means the torment of those who condemned themselves by closing and freezing their hearts so that they became incapable of love: now the splendor of God, who is love, burns and pains them.

19:28;
24:47;
Lk 16:10;
Jn 15:10

Jn 4:
37-38

13:12;
Mk 4:25;
Lk 8:18;
19:26

Zec 14:5;
Rev 3:21;
20:11

Ezk
34:17;
Lk 12:32

Lk 22:30;
Rom
8:17;
Eph 1:4

Is 58:7

pared for you from the beginning of the world. ³⁵For I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty, and you gave me something to drink. ³⁶I was a stranger, and you welcomed me into your house. I was naked, and you clothed me. I was sick, and you visited me. I was in prison, and you came to see me.'

³⁷Then the good people will ask him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry, and give you food; thirsty, and give you something to drink; ³⁸or a stranger, and welcome you; or naked, and clothe you? ³⁹When did we see you sick, or in prison, and go to see you?' ⁴⁰The King will answer, 'Truly I say to you: whenever you did this to these little ones who are my brothers and sisters, you did it to me.'

Pro
19:17;
Mk 9:41;
Lk 10:16;
Acts 9:5

7:23;
Mk 9:48;
Rev
20:10

⁴¹Then he will say to those on his left, 'Go, cursed people, out of my sight into the eternal fire, which has been prepared for the devil and his angels! ⁴²For I was hungry, and you did not give me anything to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave me nothing to drink; ⁴³I was a stranger, and you did not welcome me into your house; I was naked, and you did not clothe me; I was sick, and in prison, and you did not visit me.'

⁴⁴They, too, will ask, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry, thirsty, naked or a stranger, sick or in prison, and did not help you?' ⁴⁵The King will answer them, 'Truly I say to you: whatever you did not do for one of these little ones, you did not do it for me.'

⁴⁶And these will go into eternal

Dn 12:2;
Jn 5:29

Whenever you did this to these little ones who are my brothers and sisters (v. 40). Jesus speaks of looking after our neighbor, be he friend or foe, not of serving the community, or a class, or a nation in general, because using these words, we often exclude a group of our brothers and sisters, who do not belong to our nation or to our class. On the other hand, one who really loves acknowledges his sisters and brothers without giving too much importance to any labels: it is the person who exists and lives for God.

And these will go into eternal punishment (v. 46). There is something that shocks us today in the division of the good and the wicked, and it seems to us to be an outdated view (see commentary on Mt 13:36). In one sense it is true. Up to the recent times people were mainly "of one idea." It did not take long for youth to see what were the options in life, rarely did a person find more than one religion in the local milieu and she would choose either the "right" road or the "wrong" road. Some conversions for better or worse would follow (Ezk 8), but humanity seemed to be divided between the good and the evil. Today it is quite different: the choices we make are extremely complex and it takes time to discern clearly. All of life or much of it today may be lived by a person who has within the self a good and an evil being at the same time.

Let us understand then that Jesus spoke the

language of the prophets, schematizing options. In fact Jesus denounces, not heinous crimes but selfishness in daily life as is found in each of us, and he depicts, like a father to his children the end towards which we are heading. It is to be hoped that the great majority will not reject the truth; certain persons consciously choose their own ruin and unfortunately are capable of continuing in their choice to the bitter end.

To say that God is so good that he will save them at the last moment is to affirm something that Jesus never intended to say. It would mean that all that a person lived through was of slight importance and that our freedom was no more than a game.

What Jesus says about judging non-Christian people likewise applies to us. But we would be mistaken if we repeatedly presented this parable as expressing the totality of Christian duties. What the world needs above all is not bread and water and clothing, but the truth and the hope that God entrusted to his chosen people. Christians would be unfaithful to their mission if they confined themselves to merely talking about assistance, housing and the like and forgot what is really life for humankind—first, the knowledge and love of their Lord. He will always be first and we need him to be so for us. He takes as done to himself all that we do for our sisters and brothers but does not want to be confused with them.

punishment, but the just to eternal life.”

Mk 14:
1-2;
Lk 22:
1-2;
12:1-14

26 ¹When Jesus had finished all he wanted to say, he told his disciples, ²“You know that in two days’ time it will be the Passover, and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified.”

Jn 11:47;
Acts 4:
25-27

³Then the chief priests and the Jewish authorities gathered together at the palace of the High Priest, whose name was Caiaphas, ⁴and they agreed to arrest Jesus and kill him. ⁵But they said, “Not during the feast, lest there be an uprising among the people.”

The anointing at Bethany

(Jn 12; Mk 14:9)

Mk 14:
3-9;
Jn 12:
1-8;
Lk 7:
36-50

⁶While Jesus was in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper, ⁷a woman came up to him, carrying an alabaster jar of expensive perfume. She poured it on Jesus’ head as he was at table. ⁸Seeing this, the disciples became indignant and said, “What a useless waste! ⁹The perfume could have been sold for a large sum, and the money given to the poor.”

¹⁰But Jesus was aware of this, and said to them, “Why are you troubling this woman? What she has just done for me is indeed a good work.

Dt 15:11

¹¹You always have the poor with you, but you will not have me forever.

¹²She was preparing for my funeral, when she anointed my body with this perfume. ¹³Truly I say to you: wherever the Gospel is proclaimed, all over the world, what she has done will be told in praise of her.”

Jn 11:57

¹⁴Then one of the Twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, ¹⁵“How much will you give me if I hand him over to you?” They promised to give him thirty pieces of silver, ¹⁶and from

Zec
11:12;
Gen
37:28;
Mt 27:3

then on, he kept looking for the best way to hand Jesus over to them.

The last supper

(Mk 14:12; Lk 22:7; Jn 13:1)

¹⁷On the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, the disciples came to Jesus and said to him, “Where do you want us to prepare the Passover meal for you?” ¹⁸Jesus answered, “Go into the city, to the house of a certain man, and tell him, ‘The Master says: My hour is near, and I will celebrate the Passover with my disciples in your house.’”

¹⁹The disciples did as Jesus had ordered, and prepared the Passover meal.

²⁰When it was evening, Jesus sat at table with the Twelve. ²¹While they were eating, Jesus said, “Truly I say to you: one of you will betray me.”

²²They were deeply distressed, and they asked him, one after the other, “You do not mean me, do you, Lord?”

²³He answered, “*The one who dips his bread with me will betray me.* ²⁴The Son of Man is going as the Scriptures say he will. But alas for that one who betrays the Son of Man: better for him not to have been born.” ²⁵Judas, who was betraying him, also asked, “You do not mean me, Master, do you?” Jesus replied, “You have said it.”

²⁶While they were eating, Jesus took bread, said a blessing and broke it, and gave it to his disciples saying, “Take and eat: this is my body.” ²⁷Then he took a cup, and gave thanks, and passed it to them, saying, “Drink this, all of you, ²⁸for this is my blood, the blood of the Covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. ²⁹Yes, I say to you: From now on I will not taste the fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink new wine with you in my Father’s kingdom.”

Mk 14:
12-16;
Lk 22:
7-13;
12:14

Jn 2:4

Mk 14:
17-21;
Lk 22:
14, 21-23;
Jn 13:
21-30

Ps 41:10;
Jn 13:18

Ps 22;
Is 53:9;
Jn 17:12

Mk 14:
22-25;
Lk 22:
19-20;
1Cor 11:
23-25;
Mt 14:19;
15:36

1Cor
10:16

24:8;
Is 53:12;
Jer
31:31;
Zec 9:11;
Heb 9:20

Jn 12:23;
13:1;
17:1

Mk 14: 26-31; Lk 22: 39, 31-34; Jn 13: 36-38
 30 After singing psalms of praise, they went out to the Mount of Olives.
 31 Then Jesus said to them, "You will falter tonight because of me, and all will fall. For the Scripture says: *I will strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered.* 32 But after my resurrection, I will go ahead of you to Galilee."

Zec 13:7
 33 Peter responded, "Even though all doubt you and fall, I will never fall." 34 Jesus replied, "Truly I say to you: this very night before the cock crows, you will deny me three times."
 Jn 11:16 35 Peter said, "Though I have to die with you, I will never deny you." And all the disciples said the same.

Gethsemane

(Mk 14:32; Lk 22:39)

Mk 14: 32-42; Lk 22: 39-46; Jn 12: 27-30; 18:1; Heb 5: 7-10
 36 Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I go over there to pray."

17:1; Mk 5:37
 37 He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee with him, and he began to be filled with anguish and distress.
 38 And he said to them, "My soul is full of sorrow, even to death. Remain here and stay awake with me."

Jn 4:34; 6:38; Rom 5:19; Phil 2:8
 39 He went a little farther and fell to the ground, with his face touching the earth, and prayed, "Father, if it is possible, take this cup away from me. Yet not what I want, but what you want." 40 He went back to his disciples and found them asleep, and he said to Peter, "Could you not stay awake with me for even an hour?" 41 Stay awake and pray, so that you may not slip into temptation. The spirit indeed is eager, but the body is weak."

20:22 42 He again went away, and prayed, "Father, if this cup cannot be taken away from me without my drinking it, let your will be done."

43 When he came back to his disciples, he again found them asleep, for they could not keep their eyes open.
 44 He left them again, and went to pray the third time, saying the same words.

2Cor 12:8
 45 Then he came back to his disciples and said to them, "You can sleep on now and take your rest! The hour has come, and the Son of Man will be handed over to sinners. 46 Get up, let us go. Look: the betrayer is here!"

Jesus arrested

• 47 Jesus was still speaking when Judas, one of the Twelve, arrived. With him was a crowd armed with swords and clubs, who had been sent by the chief priests and the Jewish authorities. 48 The traitor had arranged a signal for them: "The one I kiss, he is the man; arrest him."
 49 Judas went directly to Jesus and said, "Good evening, Master"; and he gave him a kiss. 50 But Jesus said to him, "Friend, do what you came for." Then they laid hands on Jesus, and arrested him.

51 One of those who were with Jesus drew his sword, and struck at the servant of the High Priest, cutting off his ear. 52 So Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back into its place, for he who uses the sword will perish by the sword. 53 Do you not know that I could call on my Father, and he would at once send me more than

Mk 14: 43-52; Lk 22: 47-53; Jn 18: 2-11

Gen 9:6; Rev 13:10

Jn 18:36

• 26.47 See commentary on Mark 14:43.

The kiss of Judas: this was the usual way a disciple greeted his master.

He drew his sword (v. 51). Peter, like other apostles who took part in resistance movements against Roman oppression, brought swords (Lk 22:49).

He who uses the sword. This sentence does not condemn soldiers and policemen in a world of violence, but Jesus asserts that weapons do not establish the kingdom of God, nor do they lead to life. Force leads to death (in one way or another) for those (and for the institutions) who use it, even where it is necessary.

twelve legions of angels. ⁵⁴If Scripture says that this has to be, should it not be fulfilled?”

Lk 19:47; 21:37; Jn 18:20 ⁵⁵At that moment, Jesus said to the crowd, “Why do you come to arrest me with swords and clubs, as if I were a robber? Day after day I was seated among you teaching in the Temple, yet you did not arrest me. ⁵⁶But all this has come about in fulfillment of what the Prophets said.” Then all his disciples deserted him and fled.

Zec 13:7; Jn 18:32

Jesus before the Sanhedrin

(Mk 14:53; Lk 22:54)

Mk 14: 53-65; Lk 22: 54...71; Jn 18: 15...24

• ⁵⁷Those who had arrested Jesus brought him to the house of the High Priest Caiaphas, where the teachers of the Law and the elders were assembled.

⁵⁸Peter followed Jesus at a distance, as far as the courtyard of the High Priest; he entered and sat with the guards, waiting to see the end.

⁵⁹The chief priests and the whole Supreme Council needed some false evidence against Jesus, so that they might put him to death. ⁶⁰But they were unable to find any, even though false witnesses came forward. ⁶¹At last, two men came up and declared,

27:40; Jn 2:19;

• 57. We find two accusations against Jesus. The first: *I am able to destroy* (v. 61) is false in one sense, but it refers to the words Jesus had spoken about replacing the Temple of Jerusalem with another religion centered in his own person (Jn 2:19) and that was indeed subversive. Nothing was more sacred to the Jews than the Temple of Jerusalem, and to attack the Temple was, at the same time, to threaten the position of the priests whose power was based on the fact that they alone could perform sacrificial rites in the Temple. They also amassed wealth from offerings and taxes that the people paid to the temple. In defending the holy things, they were also protecting their own interests.

For the second accusation, which is the most important, see commentary on Mark 14:53.

“This man said, ‘I am able to destroy the temple of God and rebuild it in three days.’”

Acts 6:14

⁶²The High Priest then stood up and asked Jesus, “Have you no answer at all? What is this evidence against you?” ⁶³But Jesus kept silent.

Is 53:7

So the High Priest said to him, “In the name of the living God, I command you to tell us: Are you the Messiah, the Son of God?” ⁶⁴Jesus answered, “It is just as you say. I tell you more: from now on, you will see *the Son of Man, seated at the right hand of God most powerful, and coming on the clouds of heaven.*”

24:30; Ps 110:1; Dn 7:13

⁶⁵Then the High Priest tore his clothes, saying, “He has blasphemed. What more evidence do we need? You have just heard these blasphemous words. ⁶⁶What is your decision?” They answered, “He must die!” ⁶⁷Then they began to spit on Jesus and slap him, while others hit him with their fists, ⁶⁸saying, “Messiah, prophesy! Who hit you?”

Num 14:6; Ezr 9:3; Jer 36:24; Acts 14:14

Lev 24:16; Jn 19:7

Peter disowns Jesus

(Mk 14:66; Lk 22:56)

• ⁶⁹Meanwhile, as Peter sat outside in the courtyard, a young servant-girl of the house said to him,

Mk 14: 66-72; Lk 22: 56-62; Jn 18: 17...27

Jesus kept silent (v. 63). Not out of contempt for those men, who were the religious authorities, but because he saw it was useless to argue with them. He remained silent and felt confident, as do those who put their cause in the hands of God.

It is just as you say (v. 64). Perhaps this answer of Jesus should be translated: “You are the one saying it,” which is to say that Jesus did not agree with the terms used by Caiaphas. The expression “Son of God” signified the kings and saviors of Israel, and Jesus is the Son of God in a very different sense. Jesus identifies himself with the prophecy of Daniel 7:13, announcing a Savior, a Son of Man, who comes directly from God from all eternity.

• 69. This denial by Peter is most amazing. His friend John is well known in the house of

“You also were with Jesus of Galilee.” ⁷⁰But he denied it before everyone, saying, “I do not know what you are talking about.”

⁷¹And as Peter was going out to the gateway, another servant-girl saw him and told the bystanders, “This man was with Jesus of Nazareth.”

⁷²Peter denied it again with an oath, swearing, “I do not know that man.”

⁷³After a little while, those who were standing there approached Peter and said to him, “Of course you are one of the Galileans: your accent gives you away.” ⁷⁴Peter began justifying himself with curses and oaths, protesting that he did not know Jesus. Just then a cock crowed.

⁷⁵And Peter remembered the words of Jesus, “Before the cock crows, you will deny me three times.” And he went away weeping bitterly.

27 ¹Early in the morning, all the chief priests and the elders of the people met together to look for ways of putting Jesus to death.

²They had him bound, and led him away to be handed over to Pilate, the governor.

The death of Judas

³When Judas, the traitor, real-

ized that Jesus had been condemned, he was filled with remorse, and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders, ⁴saying, “I have sinned by betraying an innocent man to death.” They answered, “What does it matter to us? That is your concern.” ⁵So throwing down the money in the Temple, he went away and hanged himself.

⁶The priests picked up the money and said, “This money cannot be put into the Temple treasury, for this is the price of blood.” ⁷So they met together, and decided to buy the Potter’s Field with the money, and to make it a cemetery for foreigners. ⁸That is why, to this day, that place has been called *Field of Blood*.

⁹So what the prophet Jeremiah said was fulfilled: *They took the thirty pieces of silver, the price which the Sons of Israel set on him,* ¹⁰and they gave them for the Potter’s Field, as the Lord commanded me.

Jesus before Pilate

(Mk 15:1; Lk 23:2; Jn 18:29)

¹¹Jesus stood before the governor, who asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” Jesus answered, “You say so.”

27:24

Acts 1:18

Zec 11:12-13

Mk 15:2-15; Lk 23:2-5; 23:13-25; Mt 2:2

Mk 15:1; Lk 22:66; 23:1; Mt 12:14

the high priest and Peter was introduced as his friend (Jn 18:16). The young girl knows very well who John is and does not say anything beyond an ironic word to Peter. Nobody is threatening him, least of all the men; instead they mock him for his provincial Galilean accent, the same as Jesus’ accent! It was enough to make Peter lose his composure.

In placing this episode just after the witness of Jesus in the presence of the High Priest, the Gospel intends to contrast Peter’s attitude with that of his Master.

• **27.1** Why this second appearance of Jesus before the Supreme Council or Sanhedrin? It is difficult to find agreement on this point in the Gospels.

It would seem that during the night Jesus was presented to Annas, ex-high priest, (succeeded by five sons and son-in-law Caiaphas). He retained real authority among the great priestly families. The Sanhedrin was not complete: the seventy-one members could not be accommodated in the house of Caiaphas. Besides, the Council could not legally hold a session during the night; so it met in the morning.

For the enemies of Jesus this private interrogation was the most important, and that is why Matthew and Mark place there all that they know of the trial of Jesus (Mt 26:57-64).

• **3.** Judas, as soon as he betrays Jesus, disappears from the scene and dies. We do not

¹²The chief priests and the elders of the people accused him, but he made no answer. ¹³Pilate said to him, “Do you hear all the charges they bring against you?” ¹⁴But he did not answer even a single question, so that the governor wondered greatly.

Jn 19:9

• ¹⁵At Passover, it was customary for the governor to release any prisoner the people asked for. ¹⁶Now there was a well-known prisoner called Barabbas. ¹⁷When the people had gathered, Pilate asked them, “Whom do you want me to set free: Barabbas, or Jesus called the Messiah?” ¹⁸for he realized that Jesus had been handed over to him out of envy.

¹⁹As Pilate was sitting in court, his wife sent him this message, “Have nothing to do with that holy man. Because of him, I had a dream last night that disturbed me greatly.”

Acts 3:14

²⁰But the chief priests and the elders of the people stirred up the crowds, to ask for the release of Barabbas and the death of Jesus. ²¹When the governor asked them again, “Which of the two do you want

me to set free?” they answered, “Barabbas!” ²²Pilate said to them, “And what shall I do with Jesus called the Messiah?” All answered, “Crucify him!” ²³Pilate insisted, “What evil has he done?” But they shouted louder, “Crucify him!”

Acts 13:28

• ²⁴Pilate realized that he was getting nowhere, and that there could be a riot. He then asked for water, and washed his hands before the people, saying, “I am not responsible for his blood. It is your doing.” ²⁵And all the people answered, “Let his blood be upon us and upon our children.”

Dn 13:46; Acts 18:6; 20:26

²⁶Then Pilate set Barabbas free, but had Jesus scourged, and handed him over to be crucified.

The way of the cross

(Mk 15:16; Lk 23:11)

• ²⁷The Roman soldiers took Jesus into the palace of the governor and the whole troop gathered around him. ²⁸They stripped him and dressed him in a purple military cloak. ²⁹Then, twisting a crown of thorns, they forced it onto his head,

Mk 15: 16-20; Jn 19: 1-3

even know what happened with the thirty coins: see Acts 1:18.

• 15. According to very old texts of the Gospel of Matthew the name of the troublemaker was Jesus, his nickname being Barabbas. Pilate proposes to the people a choice between Jesus called Barabbas and Jesus called the Messiah.

• 24. *Pilate asked for water...* (v. 24). The Jews understood this gesture as a clear expression of his refusal to become the judge or accuser of Jesus (see Dt 21:6; Ps 26:6).

• 27. In the inner yard called the Pretorium, the soldiers make fun of Jesus in full view of Pilate and all the people employed in the palace.

Twisting a crown of thorns, they forced it onto his head (v. 29). In all probability, local reed was woven in the form of a cap and entwined with long thorns.

The soldiers enjoy the game of the fallen king. In many cultures the king was a divine character and, at the same time, often became the victim responsible for all evils. Therefore, the game of the king was known in many places. One engraved tile that was a soldiers' game has been found in Jerusalem. On it is seen the journey of the king through many trials ending with his assassination.

The soldiers made this game a reality, without realizing how true it actually was. A triumphal Procession with Palms led to the arrest of Jesus, but the humiliation of Jesus prepared him to be the king, the Savior of all, as told in the story of Joseph (Gen 37-44), or more vividly described by the Prophet Isaiah (52:13).

Jesus is Savior, because he is the victim. He broke the mechanism of violence, because he suffered the greatest violence without becoming violent himself. In his humiliation, Jesus shows the greatness and the power of God. He took upon himself all the humiliations of

and placed a reed in his right hand. They knelt before Jesus and mocked him, saying, "Long life to the King of the Jews!"³⁰ They spat on him, took the reed from his hand and struck him on the head with it.

³¹When they had finished mocking him, they pulled off the purple cloak and dressed him in his own clothes again, and led him out to be crucified.

³²On the way they met a man from Cyrene called Simon, and forced him to carry the cross of Jesus.³³ When they reached the place called Golgotha, which means *the Skull*,³⁴ they offered him wine mixed with gall. Jesus tasted it but would not drink it.

³⁵There they crucified him, and divided his clothes among themselves, casting lots to decide what each one should take.³⁶ Then they sat down to guard him.³⁷ The statement of his offense was displayed above his head, and it read, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews."³⁸ They also crucified two bandits with him, one on his right hand and one on his left.

³⁹People passing by shook their heads and insulted him,⁴⁰ saying, "Aha! You who destroy the Temple and in three days rebuild it, save yourself—if you are God's Son—and come down from the cross!"

⁴¹In the same way the chief priests, the elders and the teachers of the Law mocked him.⁴² They said, "The man who saved others cannot save himself. Let the King of Israel now come down from his cross and we will believe in him."⁴³ He trusted in God; let God rescue him if God wants to, for he himself said, "I am the Son of God."

⁴⁴Even the robbers who were crucified with him insulted him.

⁴⁵From midday, darkness fell over the whole land until mid-afternoon.

⁴⁶At about three o'clock, Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "*Eloi, Eloi, lamma sabbacthani?*" which means: My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?⁴⁷ As soon as they heard this, some of the bystanders said, "He is calling for Elijah."⁴⁸ And one of them ran, took a sponge and soaked it in vinegar and, putting it on

Ps 22:8

26:61;
Jn 2:19Ps 22:9;
Wis 2:
18-20;
Jn 5:18;
10:36;
19:7Mk 15:
33-41;
Lk 23:
44-49

Ps 22:2

Lk 23:36;
Jn 19:29;
Ps 69:22

the defenseless, the dejected, the victims on whom were heaped the mindless violence of peoples and their leaders. Jesus bears the sin of the world, as announced by Isaiah. In the future, no one will be able to look at him without discovering their own wickedness, and mourning for him who was their victim (Zec 12:12). From this encounter with God, hated and killed, (and so different from the God worshiped in heaven) will gush waters of pardon and purification (Zec 13:1).

They offered him wine mixed with gall (v. 34). According to Mark, they gave him bitter-sweet wine, a drink of the soldiers, mixed with myrrh, to dull the pain. This drink had probably been prepared according to custom by the charitable women of Jerusalem, perhaps the same mentioned by Luke in 23:28. Matthew speaks of wine with bile (a detestable drink) to give us an inkling of all the bitterness that Jesus had to swallow, and also to recall Psalm 69:22.

They also crucified two bandits with him (v. 38). Perhaps they were, like Barabbas, nationalist terrorists opposed to the Romans. They could have been the companions of Barabbas, and their execution enhanced the favor done to Barabbas. If so, they would have to die along with Jesus instead of Barabbas. They could also have belonged to a group of bandits who assaulted and robbed pilgrims in the hills of Palestine.

This is Jesus, the king of the Jews (v. 37). For Pilate and the people in general, this expression signified a nationalist leader in the movement for liberation from the Roman yoke.

The Jews are the people of God and the Father arranged that they would be associated, in a very special way, with the salvation Christ brings. In fact, they were later subjected to many trials and persecutions. Many Jews have suffered like Jesus without believing in him, but confident in the promises of God and in

a reed, gave him to drink. ⁴⁹Others said, "Leave him alone, let us see whether Elijah comes to his rescue."

⁵⁰Then Jesus cried out again in a loud voice and gave up his spirit.

After the death of Jesus

26:33 • ⁵¹Just then the curtain of the Temple sanctuary was torn in two from top to bottom, the earth quaked, rocks were split, ⁵²tombs were opened, and many holy people who had died were raised to life.

1P 3:19 ⁵³They came out of the tombs after the resurrection of Jesus, entered the Holy City, and appeared to many.

Rev 11:13 ⁵⁴The captain and the soldiers who guarded Jesus were greatly terrified, when they saw the earthquake and all that had happened, and said, "Truly, this was God's Son."

Lk 8:2; Mt 13:55; 20:20 ⁵⁵There were also some women there, who watched from a distance; they had followed Jesus from Galilee and had seen to his needs. ⁵⁶Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of Zebedee's sons.

The burial

(Mk 15:42; Lk 23:50; Jn 19:38)

Mk 15: 42-47; Lk 23: 50-55; Jn 19: 38-42
Dt 21: 22-23 ⁵⁷It was now evening, and there came a wealthy man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who was also a disciple of Jesus. ⁵⁸He went to Pilate and asked for the body of

Jesus, and the governor ordered that the body be given to him. ⁵⁹So Joseph took the body of Jesus, wrapped it in a clean linen sheet, ⁶⁰and laid it in his own new tomb, which had been cut out of the rock. Then he rolled a huge stone across the entrance to the tomb and left. ⁶¹Mary Magdalene and the other Mary remained sitting there in front of the tomb.

Acts 13:29

Jn 19:25

The guards at the tomb

⁶²On the following day, the day after the Preparation for the Sabbath observance, the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate ⁶³and said to him, "Sir, we remember that when that impostor was still alive, he said, 'I will rise after three days.' ⁶⁴Therefore, have his tomb secured until the third day, lest his disciples come and steal the body, and say to the people: He is risen from the dead. This would be a worse lie than the first." ⁶⁵Pilate answered them, "You have soldiers, go and take all the necessary precautions." ⁶⁶So they went to the tomb and secured it, sealing the stone, and placed it under guard.

12:40; 16:21

Jesus appears to the women

(Mk 16:1; Lk 24:1; Jn 20:1)

28 • ¹After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary

Mk 16: 1-8; Lk 24: 1-10; Jn 20:1

the kingdom of Justice. Jesus is really their king.

In Latin, the letters I.N.R.I. (that we read on crucifixes) are the initial letters of Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.

• 51. This paragraph declares in apocalyptic style that the death of Jesus marked the completion of definitive salvation. Some apparitions of dead persons were interpreted as a sign of fulfillment of the prophecies of Daniel (12:2) referring to the Day of Salvation. The open tombs signify that the Risen Christ conquers the kingdom of the dead.

• **28.1 THE RISEN CHURCH**

On the apparitions of the risen Jesus, see the commentary on Luke 24:1.

This first paragraph is still in apocalyptic style, with its resplendent angel and another earthquake. The Gospel refuses to describe a triumphal departure of Jesus, as his readers would have preferred. The risen Jesus is only seen by those who believe: the women who look for him will see him, the soldiers and rulers who do not seek him will not understand.

The evangelist mentions the names of Mary of Magdala and the other Mary, the mother of

went to visit the tomb. ²Suddenly there was a violent earthquake: an angel of the Lord descending from heaven, came to the stone, rolled it from the entrance of the tomb, and sat on it. ³His appearance was like lightning and his garment white as snow. ⁴The guards trembled in fear and became like dead men when they saw the angel.

⁵The angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. ⁶He is not here, for he is risen as he said. Come, see the place where they laid him; ⁷then go at once and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead, and is going ahead of you to Galilee. You will see him there. This is my message for you.”

⁸They left the tomb at once in fear, yet with great joy, and they ran to tell the news to his disciples.

⁹Suddenly, Jesus met them on the way and said, “Rejoice!” The women approached him, embraced his feet and worshiped him. ¹⁰But Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid! Go and tell my brothers to set out for Galilee; there they will see me.”

¹¹While the women were on their way, the guards returned to the city, and some of them reported to the chief priests all that had happened. ¹²The chief priests met with the elders, and decided to give the soldiers a large sum of money, ¹³with this instruction, “Say that his disciples came by night while you were asleep, and stole the body of Jesus. ¹⁴If Pilate comes to know of this, we will explain the situation and keep you out of trouble.” ¹⁵The soldiers accepted the money and did as they were told. This story has circulated among the Jews until this day.

17:2;
Acts
1:10

26:32;
Mk
14:28;
Jn 21:1

James and of Joseph (Mt 27:55), two of the “brothers of Jesus” (Mt 13:55), his closest cousins. (She is a relative of Mary, the mother of Jesus, Jn 19:25).

Suddenly, Jesus met them on the way (v. 9). It is obvious that Matthew is combining two different events; one, the discovery of the empty tomb, and the other, which happened later on, the apparition of Jesus to Mary Magdalene alone as related in John 20:11-18.

Set out for Galilee (v. 10). Why did Jesus say this date if he was going to appear later that same day in Jerusalem? (Lk 24:13-42). It is not clear. Probably the evangelists combined several apparitions to simplify their narration. Anyway, time was needed for the apostles to believe in the Resurrection and understand something about it. After the two apparitions in Jerusalem, in which Jesus tried to convince them that he was not a phantom or a spirit, they would have to return to their provinces and environments, far away from the city that had caused them such trauma, in order to ponder what they had experienced. In Galilee, Jesus will manifest himself differently, making them understand that he is already glorified, that his existence is earthly no more.

A woman, Mary Magdalene, conveys the message, in order to indicate that, in the

Church, not everything will come from the authorities. God communicates with whomever he wishes, giving prophetic messages to simple people and to women.

The resurrection of Christ is the pivotal point of the Gospel; yet Matthew reports it briefly. Why? Because when Matthew wrote his Gospel, the Resurrection was considered too great an event to put into writing; rather, it should be proclaimed and witnessed to by the Spirit at work in the Christian communities.

Are we in a different situation? The Church that talks of the Risen Christ should never be a powerful Church but a Risen Church. If the Church finds itself in a situation where there is no apparent hope of salvation, yet it is revived by the power of God; if in each generation the Church seems doomed to die because of its ancient structures, its worldly ways or the persecution it undergoes, yet it is nevertheless given new energies and new apostles by the Lord, then the Church is a witness that the Lord has risen and has given her the power to rise.

• 16. EVANGELIZATION—THE TRINITY

Jesus sent his apostles to evangelize the world.

The last apparition is related in a very simple way: no sudden appearance, no fear—no

Jesus 'sends the apostles

•¹⁶As for the eleven disciples, they went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go.

¹⁷When they saw Jesus, they bowed before him, although some doubted.

¹⁸Then Jesus approached them and said, "I have been given all au-

thority in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹Go, therefore, and make disciples from all nations. Baptize them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teach them to observe all that I have commanded you. I am with you always, even to the end of this world."

11:27;
Jn 3:35;
13:3;
17:2;
Eph 1:20

physical demonstration of the reality of Jesus. What is important are the words of Jesus Master.

Although some doubted (v. 17). With this, Matthew sums up the last apparitions of Jesus. Not all the disciples of Jesus (the Eleven and the rest) believed so quickly in the resurrection of Jesus.

Make disciples from all nations (v. 19). Jesus, following the example of Jewish teachers of his time, gathered around him a group of disciples who lived with him. The teacher knew his disciples and the disciples knew the teacher by sharing everyday life. The same holds true today: evangelization implies interpersonal sharing.

To evangelize means to help someone ponder his former experiences until he can recognize in the person of Christ, in his death and resurrection, the truth that lights up his own life.

Those who believe will be baptized in the one Name of *the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*, the Three Persons Christ taught us about. Of course, he named them separately because the Father is not the Son and the Son is not the Holy Spirit; in spite of that, the Three are the same God. Upon entering the Church, the baptized will enter into communion with the Father, with the Son and with the Holy Spirit. The Church is, before anything else, communion.

See Acts 19:5 regarding baptism *in the Name of the Lord Jesus*.

Teach them to observe all that I have commanded you (v. 20). These instructions of Jesus have first place in Matthew's Gospel; they are in the five discourses and we are to do the will of the Father just as Jesus has revealed it.

I am with you always. Here we find again the certitude which the name Emmanuel already expressed in 1:23: Jesus is God-with-us until the end of time. The first generation Christians thought that Christ would not delay in returning but at the time the Gospel was written, they already understood that history would continue; the nation of Israel rejected the salvation offered to her and only a minority believed. Jesus was now committing himself to his apostles and to his Church and now began to build the Church of his apostles.

The Catholic Church is different from Protestant or Evangelical churches, because it was founded by the apostles of Jesus. Only she feels obliged to remain united around the successors of the apostles, the bishops; this unity and continuity are at times hard to maintain, especially in situations where it would seem easier to form a new reformed community alongside her. Obedience to the will of the Father is the means by which he purifies and strengthens our faith. Jesus is and remains "Lord" regarding the destiny of "his" Church.

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