

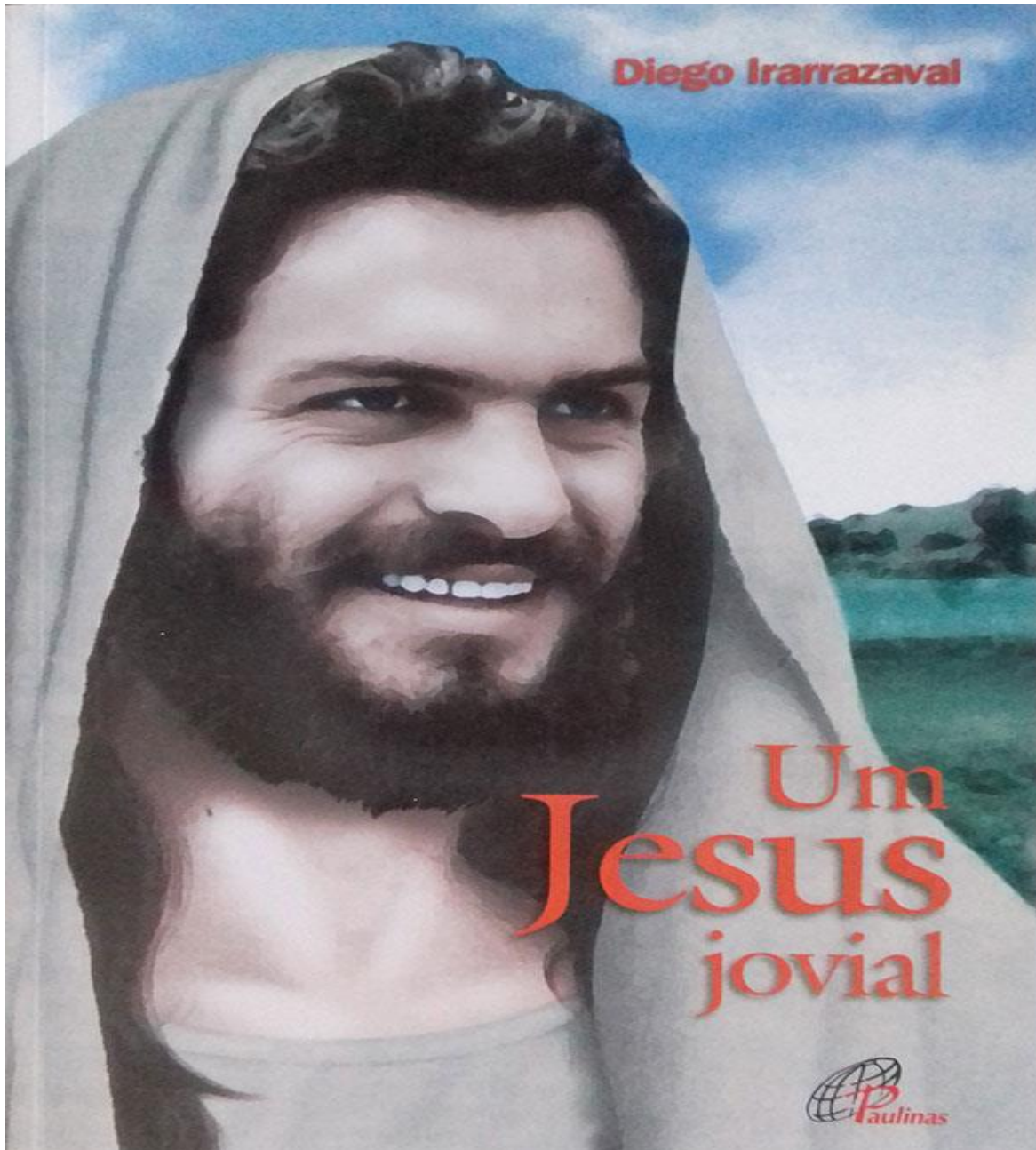
A JOYFUL JESUS

Diego Irarrazaval

Published in Spanish: Un Jesús Jovial, Lima: Paulinas, 2003.

Published in Portuguese: Um Jesus Jovial, Sao Paulo, Paulinas, 2003.

Translated into English by Kathy Gilfeather MM.



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A good question

What was the joy of Jesus like and how do we appreciate that joy today? This question leads us to rediscover the Christian faith that guarantees genuine happiness; a faith, which at the same time censures the cruelty and aggression in our world today.

Personal insight...

Each of us has internalized images of Jesus. The images that dominate are likely those of a teacher who instructs us about very serious things, a prophet who makes his adversaries tremble, or a crucified victim. There are few images of a contented, smiling Jesus, perhaps enjoying a delicious meal with his friends. Nonetheless, many of us suspect that he was a profoundly happy man. We intuitively recognize his cordiality for he is the one who guides us to a tender, overflowing joy in God. Our intuitions are confirmed by the gift of faith in the Son of God. He enjoys life in all its overflowing abundance.

Why then is it so difficult to visualize the carpenter of Nazareth as cheerful and appealing? We are weighed down by a solemn, petulant idea of what it means to be a Christian. The spiritual has been separated from the pleasant and attractive. The principal problem lies in the low esteem given his human condition, which brings with it a failure to appreciate the sheer joy of the Risen One. For this reason it is essential that we return to the Gospels as a source of clean, fresh water.

When we pray and profit from the Gospels, we distance ourselves from a great deal of the empty discourse and sterile study that claim to teach us what Jesus was like. There are a number of meticulous investigations about his life and work; these explain the context and the intellectual content of his message. Their intent is to demonstrate its meaning for the Church and humanity with solemn, detached phrases. Then there are those of a sentimental cast from fundamentalist and pious groups; these reveal the anxieties of many. Writings of a more meditative character may enlighten and appeal to us but too often they tend to lack warmth. Generally, these are apt to be one-sided moralizations with little humanity, overlaid with a strange *spiritualism* with little real spiritual and evangelical depth.

In short, this type of official presentation has little to do with the humanity of Jesus or with his joyous divinity. It does not strengthen our faith in God nor our sense of responsibility for history. It neither touches our hearts nor moves us to action. Perhaps the reader of these pages feels as I do: terribly bored with the overly solemn and irrelevant things often said about God.

For my part, I am grateful to my mother for teaching me to love and pray to the Infant Jesus and not to a terrifying God. And I thank my father for having shared his great good humor with me. In my travels through many corners of Latin America I have also enjoyed many expressions of Christianity filled with a sense of festivity. Finally, I thank the ecclesial community where the Word of God is received and where it is correctly interpreted in a vital way.

I must add something of importance here. Three years ago, on returning home after an Andean celebration, I sat down to meditate with the *New Testament*. It occurred to me that I had in my hands a book bursting with good humor. It was a fantastic revelation for me. I then assumed the task of rereading the four Gospels in order to rediscover there *the joyful life* that is God's gift to humanity. It was a slow and disciplined labor that took two years to complete, as I was more accustomed to other types of readings on the Word of God. Once again I took on the biblical task. Many authors, rather arid but wise, explained the meaning of the texts, while friends, discovering that I was writing about Jesus' sense of humor, gave me a few good clues.

Joy in the midst of sorrow...

Over the past years I have been puzzled by the vital spark I have found among impoverished peoples of many nations. They have far greater motives for despair than for good spirits. Although surrounded by unbearable situations, they are great teachers of optimism.

Despite the bleakness of unemployment or unbearable work routines that wear them down, their sympathetic compassion, jokes, witty remarks and amusing gestures continue to abound. Thus one manages to endure the hardships of every day.

During long years of ideological and economic dictatorship, those ingenious sayings thrived. Their conversations at wakes which so easily embrace both sympathy and humor are a continued source of fascination, while drunkenness, despite its very negative features, provides an occasion to “die laughing”.

Throughout the length and breadth of Latin America, religious feasts are noted for their importance. Through them, an austere, guilt-ridden Christianity is transformed into a faith, filled with grace and hope.

Such contrasts! In the midst of so much festivity, gigantic dramas continue to unfold. It is a dejected, crestfallen land where skepticism grows stronger. The so-called advances in civilization that spark such great illusions and bring so many misfortunes sicken the observer. They promise a material hedonistic paradise while the great majority remains deprived both of food and the resources for a decent healthy life.

It seems to me that, in a number of ways, humanity is now passing through a birthing process. There is far too much pain and frustration in our globalized world, while at the same time innumerable energies seem to emanate from underneath. An obstinate hope thrives. Many venture to hope for a more authentic happiness, creating a close-knit solidarity that will enable them to undergo the human drama with compassion. In this context one human right is reaffirmed: the right to a healthy, healing joy. This is contrasted with an empty sort of happiness, an ideology of “good fortune”, the false enjoyment that comes from the consumption of objects and persons.

Apparently there is much room for discernment: what is joy and what is the diversion and amusement that dehumanizes us? With regard to this, one is appalled by so much propaganda, by so much entertainment that abuses the female body and offends both men and women. The globalized entertainment industry, which contains a great deal of rubbish, is also extremely aggressive and cruel. Audiences lacking a critical perspective naively assimilate a great deal of it. However it does not control the entire world. We can still count on the sensitivity of the common people, the creativity of the poorer nations that know how to rejoice in a more authentic way.

In terms of our faith, joy is close at hand, thanks to the Spirit of Jesus. For this reason we will begin our revision of the Gospels with biblical testimonies that indicate the good humor of the carpenter of Nazareth and his disciples. Then, with a sharp eye and a heartfelt sense of humor, each one can revise the human and spiritual condition. It is possible to make jokes in the face of oppression (and thus subvert it). The unjust powers begin to crack, split apart and fall; this inspires a good deal of conversation with hope and rejoicing. It is also appropriate to make jokes in the face of religious structures that are so often discriminatory and hypocritical. In personal terms, it is valuable to make use of the incongruities that characterize us as human beings, riddled as we are with paradox.

I said at the start that we would rediscover Jesus as a divine-human being with a sense of humor. At the same time that we appreciate his person and the attractiveness of his work, it is possible to continue that struggle against the cruelty and aggression that surrounds and destroys us today. It is my personal opinion that the first cannot be separated from the second. Whoever attempts to change the world but lacks a sense of humor, will get nowhere. I am convinced that the good humor and exuberant optimism of Jesus will enable us to recover the vision and energy that will bring us to personal transformation within our historical context.

A few clarifications...

We are going to complete a biblical task. God willing, we will rediscover the divine and human features of Jesus throughout these pages. There are many ways of drawing close to him and benefiting from his mystery. In these pages the accent is placed on his joviality, his sense of humor. It is inseparable from what is fundamental to his message. I refer to fidelity to our journeying with Jesus, to our loving relationship with Him, to our passionate living in accord with his Spirit and to our contemplation of the wonder of God.

Now, the Bible deserves a vigorous and faith filled study, with all the intelligence of that faith, following the orientations given by the Church. The human sciences are also necessary. This combination of elements makes it possible to find and understand biblical texts with their linguistic and historical characteristics. Without this effort one is merely left in the dark to act in an arbitrary, fundamentalist fashion, incapable of capturing the sense and the context of the passages. For this reason I insist that we do some investigating with respect to humor.

Our starting point is the interpretation made by the ecclesial community. The Bible is a collection of books made by editors and faith communities. These writings are interpreted in the Church and they are the foundation for theology, evangelization and everyday spirituality. They summon us to live responsibly and joyfully. To this we would add the need to stay close to the sensitivity of the people of God, particularly to their faith-filled joy and their spark of good humor.

I also add something obvious. It is certain that the biblical stories about Jesus were not intended to provoke laughter, nor will we find any superficial joking. However, we are presented with many humorous and congenial situations, sayings and actions of both an implicit and explicit nature. They make us smile and invite us to enjoy the interactions of Jesus and his contemporaries. They also motivate us to be a joyful people in the depths of our hearts.

Practical suggestions...

My contribution has been developed in eight facets, which is to say, in eight chapters. I begin with the feast of the Kingdom of God and end with the good humor of Jesus in the face of his death and resurrection. These eight facets are only a mode of classifying and interpreting the biblical material. I ask that my readers be attentive to other types of biblical literature and that they read my contribution with a critical eye.

Each of these facets or chapters has subdivisions (entitled A, B, etc.) which group together situations, expressions and actions of a humorous nature. In each subdivision biblical units have been enumerated on two levels and the biblical text highlighted with an alternative print type.

The first level includes a personal comment, including clues to its humorous and charming characteristics; it is expected that each reader or community add their own findings with regard to the presence of humor in Jesus and in his relations with his contemporaries. My intention is to encourage this free exploration since the symbolic is always rich in significance. Between the first and second levels I have placed the text from the New Testament, assigning the version from Mark, Matthew, Luke or John, along with parallel and similar texts. I have chosen to work particularly with Mark, Matthew and Luke because of their direct style in presenting the tradition of the sayings and actions of Jesus.

The second level offers further annotations with regard to the selected text. I offer details regarding versions of the text, if these exist, in order to capture the different shades of meaning included by the evangelists. Finally, I include the studies of biblical experts; all of this is to ensure that efforts to draw near to biblical texts would not prove, in the end, to be ingenuous or uninformed.

My esteemed readers...

We are meeting on an agreeable and kindly terrain that may prove at times rather unfamiliar to us.

This work is different from others. When we revise biblical, theological and spiritual commentaries we find that, with few exceptions, they do not take good humor into consideration. This scholarship and piety certainly has its achievements, but at the same time, there are deficiencies.

A deep faith in God emerges out of joy and it leads us to joy. With joy we can live through times filled with problems and we can transform them.

I began by asking: *How has Jesus shown himself to be a man of joy and how can we be joyful today?* By using the biblical stories and the sense of faith given us by the Spirit, we look for answers and we rejoice in the presence of the Lord. At the same time, we ask ourselves: *Where can we find the joy that helps us face up to the sadness and violence that envelop us?* The Bible leads us to the book of creation and to our day-to-day lives; it helps us confront today's responsibilities with confident joy and enthusiasm.

I. Everyday jests

Each day we are surprised by comic situations and people. This only happens when one enjoys good humor, a ready laugh, a smile for children, for the neighbors and for those with whom one works. Each day is enjoyed if we can count on a healthy smile.

On the other hand, social violence can be accompanied by jokes and laughter that hurt others. We make fun of others, of their race, of their poverty and ignorance, of foreigners, of people from other ethnic groups and regions. The most persistent type of aggression is directed to the woman in the form of humor. Given the dominance of chauvinism, jokes at the expense of feminine dignity abound. Men who fall into this trap dehumanize themselves. For this reason, it is necessary to examine the varied types of diversion with a critical eye. We must learn to distinguish between healthy humor and biased mockery.

Using these facts as a springboard, we will direct our attention to a few biblical narratives. What was the day-to-day experience of Jesus? The Bible offers brief brush strokes from the time of Jesus, the Gospels are not diaries nor are they journalistic reports that tell the details of daily life. We know almost nothing about what Jesus did from dawn to dusk each day.

We do know that Jesus was born in a small Jewish town, that he grew up, had friends, participated in feasts and worked for a living. We know that he developed a brief, controversial public life that culminated in his crucifixion and death. Did this man walk about bitter, head bowed, bad humored and sad? Or did he go about full of enthusiasm and contagious joy? Was he a normal child, a happy youth, a pleasant, attractive adult?

Whom did Jesus criticize –with those flashes of humor? He was accused of being a glutton and a drunkard (Lk 7:34); this was not true but the criticism presupposes that he had great human vitality. The New Testament does not suggest that Jesus was boring, sad or incapable of enjoyment. We are going to consider some passages and expressions from his adult life and draw out the humorous dimension in some details of his human relationships.

We will look at the first aspect of Jesus and of his community: the day-to-day sparks of joy. This is shown in a number of activities (eating, working, family, celebrations, impatience and finally, his relation with foreigners) and with respect to the value of being small and how to face the future. We appreciate the attraction present in the activities of the Teacher from Nazareth and his followers. In doing this, we will take into account the nature of the actions and the sayings of the New Testament which commemorate salvation and nourish the faith of the community.

A- Eating

1) Glutton and drunkard?

A skillful response to an unfounded accusation is to change the aggression into a joke. Many of us have had just such an experience or we have seen people emerge from a difficult situation through the use of humor. This is what occurred in the confrontation between Jesus and his skeptical and unimpressed contemporaries. On one occasion, Jesus observed little children playing in a public place. Some were complaining to the rest because they would not dance nor would they weep. The narrative includes the criticism of the ascetic John the Baptist (cousin of Jesus) accused of being possessed, and the censure of Jesus, blamed for being scandalous and a violator of the Law (because of his association with sinners).

Instead of growing bitter about their accusations, Jesus tells the humorous parable of the children playing in the market and then he takes up the accusation of his opposition: a glutton and a drunkard. The truth of the matter is that Jesus was fully human and delighted in life. Like the playful children who invited the rest to dance, Jesus opted for joy. He says:

John the Baptist came neither eating nor drinking wine and you say, "He has a demon." The Son of Man came eating and drinking and you say, "Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners" (Lk 7:33-34; Mt 11:18-19).

The parable of the children playing in the market (Lk 7:32, Mt 11:17) is applicable to John and Jesus, both prophets of the time of salvation. Those who do not believe in John (accused of possession) nor in Jesus (a supposed violator of the Law) are confronted with a sense of humor. In an amusing way Jesus takes up the criticism of his eating and drinking and turns it against those who do not accept him as Son of Man.

Bible experts show that the parable was a very important means of teaching for Jesus. This is a story that forms part of the Q source and has three moments: the question concerning with whom to compare the one who does not believe; followed by a short parable about the children and finally the application to John and Jesus. In the second and third moments there is an antithetic parallelism between joy and sadness.

The application is a saying with regard to the two eschatological prophets, John and Jesus. One commentator (J. Meier, *A marginal Jew*, NY: Doubleday, 1994, II: 148-149) states that John and Jesus are like children who incorporate into their play both dance and lamentation; they are prophets that call both to Joy (Jesus) and to repentance (John). Another significant point: Jesus describes himself as "Son of Man", a title with eschatological meaning, that makes reference to the arrival of the Kingdom of God. This title also has the power to elicit our response; it is even humorous which matches the parabolic language.

2) A hungry Jesus curses the fig tree

It is surprising that Jesus, lover of nature and savior of life should treat a barren tree so badly. The miracles of Jesus have a salvific sense, in favor of humanity. He does not perform miracles to resolve personal problems like hunger. In fact we do not know if this episode ever really happened.

The episode of the fig tree is placed before and after the intervention in the Temple where the buyers and sellers were driven out, according to Mark. It is possible then that a disciple who wished to announce the destruction of the Temple elaborated the scene of the fig tree. Those who created and transmitted this episode had a sense of the comic.

Feeling hunger, Jesus finds a fig tree with only leaves and no fruit. We are presented with a Jesus who punishes the tree, although it was not even time for fruit to appear. In any case it is a comic scene that shows Jesus acting like a capricious human being. We are told that he curses the fig tree and the tree is withered to its very roots. This is the comment of Peter when he passes the tree on the following day. An abuse of nature, but it has its humorous side. We see the hungry humanity of Jesus acting with inflexibility.

The next day as they were leaving Bethany, Jesus was hungry. Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to find out if it had any fruit. When he reached it he found nothing but leaves, because it was not the season for figs. Then he said to the tree, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again"...In the morning as they went along, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots. Peter remembered and said to Jesus, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree you cursed has withered" (Mk 11:12-14, 20-21; Mt 21:18-20).

The study of the Bible shows that Mark's narrative about the fig tree is a prophetic action of Jesus in opposition to the Temple of Jerusalem and for this reason it is placed together with the text on the expulsion of the buyers and sellers.

Just as the fig tree is withered, the Temple will be completely destroyed. The action that includes the cursing and the harsh miracles appear quite often in the Old Testament, in apocryphal

writings and in the Acts of the Apostles (5:1-11, 9:1-9, 13:6-12) but it is not the usual mode of action used by Jesus.

In chapter 11 and those following of Mark there is a collection of various types of material with respect to the final crisis of the Messiah: the episode of the fig tree and the violent expulsion from the Temple show the prophetic strength of Jesus. Following this there are sayings concerning the faith, prayer and pardon. The text of the fig tree has its own characteristics and was part of pre-Markan material. With respect to Matthew's text, this joins the two parts of Mark and puts the scene after the Temple incident and his teaching refers to praying with faith. Finally this matter of the fig tree is rather astonishing and brings a smile to the lips.

3) A good tree does not give bad fruit nor does a bad tree give good fruit

Indirect language about the ordinary things of life can be very amusing. In this case, it has to do with a fundamental fact: the evil present within the believing community. This evil is faced up to through making humorous comparisons: how does one go about collecting good fruit from a thorn bush or a bramble? To this is added a phrase even more shocking is added with a sense of humor: a bad tree does not give good fruit. Only from a good person (out of the heart's treasure) do good acts appear.

For some people, the use of concepts is the only mode of explaining with clarity and morality must be taught with norms. Nonetheless, there are other excellent pedagogical forms. For example: parables, comparisons through symbols, amusing stories and healthy irony. The texts of Luke and Matthew with regard to fruit from trees make use of sharp, comparative and amusing language.

No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thorn bushes or grapes from brambles. The good man brings good things out of the good stored in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of the heart his mouth speaks (Lk 6:43; Mt 7:16-20, 12: 33-37).

These sayings suggest something impossible through an ingenious play on words. Just as in the vegetable kingdom something good does not produce what is bad nor vice versa (the thorn bush does not give figs, the brambles do not give grapes), neither does the human condition. If the heart is sound, the behavior is also good.

In Luke, these and other moral teachings follow the discourse on the Beatitudes. In Matthew, there are various arguments against believers and false prophets and, as also in Luke, there are warnings against the use of words that will also, finally, be judged. In these contexts, it is amusing to find references to natural realities which help to unmask the deceitfulness in many believing people.

Comparisons with nature are common in this epoch, we also find them in Mt 3:10, 15:13; Jn 15:1ff. These texts with regard to trees and fruit come to us from the Q source. They are comparisons used by Luke and Matthew to face up to problems present in the world of believers. The problematic has to do with actions (fruits), as in the case of the supposed prophets. The fundamental question refers to the state of the faith of the person (tree). There were problems of dishonesty among the disciples and among those who taught and prophesized. These facts are confronted through symbolic language, containing ingenious plays on words.

B- Work

1) They have only worked an hour... and you pay them for the entire day

In any society, those who work under contract exact the pay agreed upon previously and they are paid according to the hours and the work performed. If this does not happen, criticism and controversy result.

In Jesus' time, there were landowners, and many without land or work who eventually became hired help. It was common to give a *denarius* as payment for unspecialized workers. Certainly the scene presented by the parable of the workers in the vineyard is not altogether normal, neither with regard to those who began to work early in the morning nor with those who arrived later in the day. They are paid the same sum, a *denarius*, and to add insult to injury, these last who did not bear the heat of the day, are paid first! It is absurd and unjust! It must be a joke.

What is happening here? The parable of the vineyard was a dispute with those who were scandalized because God is good; it showed that the Kingdom of God is like what happened in the vineyard. The good God is like this; He gives everyone what he needs to live (a *denarius* was sufficient to provide food for the day), and He wishes to give the last the same amount that He gives the first. This surprising episode, with the dialogue between the landowner, the workers and those who felt disregarded, has humorous characteristics.

The Kingdom of Heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire men to work in his vineyard... When evening came the owner said to his foreman, "Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first." ...When those who were hired first came they expected to receive more... They began to grumble against the landowner saying: "These men who were hired last only worked one hour and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day." But he answered one of them, ... "I want to give the men who were hired last the same as I gave you. Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?" ...So the last will be first and the first will be last (Mt 20: 1-16).

The shocking (and the amusing) element in this story is that those who worked very little receive the same wages. This is the heart of the parable: the owner of the vineyard is very generous with the last and this has no rational, economic explanation.

This is what happens in the Kingdom of Heaven (of God); God is good (v 15) and makes a preferential choice in favor of the last (v 8). The text has two parts: the hiring of the workers (1-8) and the payment of the same wages to all, which causes protests from those who were hired first (9-15). This is the more humorous part and the one that reveals the magnanimity of the owner -the heart of the parable.

Then as an addition to the parable, we have the proverb: the last will be first and the first will be last. Similar expressions can be found in Mt 19:30, 22:14; and Mk 10:31 where the proverb is applied to Peter and the disciples and in Lk 13:30 where the proverb is applied to the dispute between Jews and gentiles. This inversion of the socio-religious order also makes us smile, particularly those at the bottom of the social pyramid.

2) No one tears a new garment... to mend an old one

In today's consumer society, fashions fade very quickly, particularly with respect to clothing. Only very poor people use the same garments for many years.

In first century Palestine there was a wide gamut of occupations and many types of activities. The Gospels mention in particular farming, herding and fishing and the occupations of religious groups. But there were also construction, carpentry, tailoring, administration, tax collecting, the military and domestic activities such as cooking, etc. the sayings of Jesus make reference to many of these day-to-day labors of the ordinary people. With respect to this, one delightful parable has to do with mending old clothes with a bit of cloth from a new garment.

Luke's version is even more humorous: no one tears a new garment... The context is the world of the poor, accustomed to mending used clothing. Here we find the amusing element. What is the principal meaning of this strange episode? The biblical message is that the time of salvation has already begun and there is no value in returning to the old way.

Jesus told them this parable: No one tears a patch from a new garment and sews it on an old one. If he does he will have torn the new garment and the patch from the new will not match the old (Lk 5:36; Mk 2:21; Mt 9:16).

The text is a brief parable, that is to say, an imaginative, comparative way of communicating an important message. Luke often comments that Jesus used parables (Lk 5:36, 6:39, 12: 16, 18:1, 20:9, 21:29). This was an important pedagogical tool used for his teachings but it is not well known that he used parables to confront his adversaries. This is to say that the parable is, among other things, an arm of defense and attack. It is also less known that some of these parables are truly amusing.

The three versions, Luke, Mark and Matthew, offer different details. Luke puts the accent on the absurdity of destroying a new garment. There are two problems here: one we have already noted and the other lies in the fact that the new piece will not match the old garment; two motives for laughter. Mark and Matthew offer another image: mending an old garment with a patch from a new garment. Here the accent is placed on the worse state of the old garment that will now be ripped apart by the new piece. In each version of the parable on the garment there is peculiar human behavior that does not follow the norm (in the area of mending), and this causes amusement among the listeners.

3) Do not worry about food... The birds of the air do not sew or reap and God feeds them. Nor about what you will wear... Look at the lilies!

Do not worry about anything? Live at the expense of others? That is to say take advantage of others; enjoy yourself and let others do the work. Is this the meaning? Certainly human beings have been concerned with providing food and the necessities of life throughout the centuries; now as well as in the time of Jesus, human labor has been the means to achieve this. This is the reason why this clear, strong statement so moves us. You must not be concerned about providing the basics of food and clothing!

The intention of this biblical saying is to direct the listener to what is most important: their relationship with God and the welcoming of His Reign. It is an exaggerated and delightful way to suggest the essence of discipleship.

It might also be that at that time in Galilee there was relative material well being. In this context, the saying of the Teacher would not have been so shocking. In any case, the intention was not to legitimate passivity or misery. On the contrary, it has to do with gratefully receiving what God gives and orienting everything toward the promise of the Kingdom already present. This profound teaching is presented with common images from daily life together with exaggerated terms that have a humorous effect.

Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink, or about your body what you will wear... Look at the birds of the air, they do not sow or reap or store away in barns and yet your heavenly Father feeds them... See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these... Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be given you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will take care of itself (Mt 6:25-34; Lk 12:22-31).

These shocking phrases have elements of wisdom: trust absolutely in the providence of God and give priority to the Kingdom. These are recommendations directed, perhaps, to his followers (Lk 12:22) or perhaps to the entire population.

The sayings of Jesus frighten all those who are concerned about the necessities of life whether they lived in the past or in today's world. But they also make us smile. It is rather delightful to find our daily concerns compared with the birds and flowers, to whom God gives all they need.

These are sayings from Q material. The exegetes tell us that we can presuppose some prosperity in Galilee at that time and it is within such a context that Jesus speaks of confidence in God's Providence. We do not know if the sayings were directed to those in misery, calling them to be poor. Rather the central issue is that each day we can welcome the Kingdom. Daily concerns for food and clothing are framed in the principal concern of discipleship: Seek the Kingdom of God and his righteousness. Dupont comments that kingdom and justice are not different goals. Everything is said in an amusing way: the comparison with birds and flowers and with the human presumption to add a cubit to his span of life (Mt 6:27; Lk 12:25).

4) More joy for one sheep than for ninety-nine... For a sinner than for ninety-nine just

The joy of God and of the believer is connected to the sinner and not to the ninety-nine who consider themselves just. This sounds disconcerting for certain pious, legalistic people but is very welcome to normal people.

Many people of that time were dedicated to working with livestock. The parable uses an exaggerated and amusing case of leaving ninety-nine sheep (an immense number for the ordinary stock farmer) to go and search for one lost sheep. This amusing exaggeration is taken up again at the end in a contrast between the sinner (for whom a celebration is made) and ninety-nine just people. One can imagine the annoyance of the religious authorities because the Teacher undervalues the just and prefers the sinner! One can also imagine the smiles on the faces of ordinary people categorized as sinners by these same authorities. One can also verify the reiterated joy (Luke): the shepherd rejoices and calls the rest to do the same and finally it is God who is happy. Using an everyday human instance, Jesus clarifies an immense theological reality: God delights in pardoning and Jesus enjoys the company of sinners.

Then Jesus told them this parable: "Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me for I have found my lost sheep'. I tell you that in the same way there is more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent" (Lk 15: 4-7; Mt 18: 12-14).

This is a precious parable of the mercy and joy of God. This puts into question the Pharisees and scribes who criticize Jesus for eating with sinners (Luke) and is offered again as advice to the leaders of the Christian community that they search out believers who had strayed (Matthew). It is about the Good News of God the joyful reconciler. There are few texts of the New Testament that speak explicitly of God of Joy. With respect to the parable, the initial question has a definite aim, is skillful and amusing as is the contrast between one and ninety-nine. This type of exaggerated language is characteristic of the oriental humor in the Bible.

A study of the texts shows that Luke is close to the original situation where Jesus would have elaborated this parable. Two expressions stand out: the incisive question "Who among you?" typical of Jesus' message and the typical conclusion: "In truth I tell you that". On the other hand, the theme of conversion is more present in texts associated with John the Baptist and less in the

language of Jesus. With respect to Matthew's text, it gives a different dimension to the original parable with an end to advising the leadership of the Church which must look out for anyone who has strayed. This version ends by making even more unmistakable the complacency of God. In synthesis, it is a parable not only of mercy but also of joy.

C- Family and nation

1) Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you... Why did you search for me?

A naughty boy, a sorrowful mother and father, and a common occurrence -a little fellow who speaks ingenuously. These are things that happen everyday. We have little information about the life of Jesus before his public ministry. We presuppose that his infancy, adolescence and youth unfolded in the little town of Nazareth and its surrounding area.

It is probable that Jesus, Mary and Joseph, as pious Jews, made the pilgrimage each year to Jerusalem for the Passover. It was in these circumstances that the child was lost, according to the infancy narratives in Matthew and Luke. These events were constructed with material from the Old Testament.

In the face of his anxious parents, the young boy of twelve is said to have asked a rather odd question: Why were you searching for me? It is also curious that an adolescent child should teach the venerable teachers of the Law and that they would ask him questions.

Every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the feast of the Passover. When he was twelve years old they went up to the feast according to the custom... The boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem but they were unaware of it... After three days they found him in the Temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions... His mother said to him, "Son why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you". "Why were you searching for me", he asked. "Didn't you know I had to be about my Father's business?" But they did not understand what he was saying to them (Lk 2:41-50)

This is the only narrative concerning Jesus as an adolescent and it is possible that Luke gathered it from the oral tradition. It is worth noting for various reasons: for the questions and for what is said about God. Jesus directs questions to the Teachers of the Temple and two to his parents. The questions of Jesus are abundant in the rest of the Gospel. He speaks of God as "my Father" as he will later on in his public ministry.

Jesus is presented here as a person of great wisdom. Here we have an adolescent from the backwater region of Galilee enlightening the supposedly enormously wise teachers of the most important city of the region. On the other hand, one can speculate about the independent attitude of this adolescent and why it took his parents an entire day to realize that he was not with them, etc. The data we have does not respond to all our questions. The crucial fact is the pronouncement of Jesus with reference to God the Father. The missionary and Christological meaning developed in the Christian community after the Pasch is carried over into this episode about the adolescent Jesus. Another notable point is (2:50) that his parents did not understand what their son said. The coming together of these elements flow into a pronouncement about who Jesus is, in this episode previous to his public mission.

2) Is this not the carpenter, son of Mary?... Jesus said: a prophet lacks prestige only in his own country and in his own house

During years of living in a small town, what annoyed me most was the envy and derision often shown toward someone who is superior to the rest. Everything is known and discussed and

often undervalued in a town with no more than two thousand people. Let's take the case of Nazareth. Here Jesus was born, grew up, participated in the synagogue and worked as a carpenter. This same place turns against Jesus, a painful and dramatic event. The attitude of Jesus stands out, it does not seem to embitter him; rather he laments that a prophet is not recognized by his own people.

The attractive thing is the transformation in the reality: from the rejection that Jesus suffers as a prophet born in Nazareth he manages to demonstrate that this same town has excluded itself from all they might have received and benefited from a true prophet. Once again the aggression directed against Jesus is converted into a revelation of the misery of his aggressors. This is both pathetic and amusing at the same time.

Another important point is that Jesus is catalogued as a carpenter (Mk 6:3) and the son of a carpenter (Mt 13:55). This is the only time that we hear mention of the working status of Jesus. He probably worked with wood in the construction of houses, farming implements and furniture. This was not the poorest sector of working status nor was it well-off. This category of labor is offered as an objection to the quality of his status as messenger from God. Certainly it offered no obstacle for the humble carpenter is a prophet. This also offers an overturning of the socio-religious order.

Jesus went to his hometown... and began to teach in the synagogue and many who heard him were amazed and said, "Where did this man get these things? What is this wisdom that has been given him that he even does miracles! Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren't his sisters here with us?" Jesus said to them, "Only in his home-town among his relatives and in his own house is a prophet without honor". He could not do any miracles there... (Mk 6:1-6; Mt 13: 53-58; Lk 4: 16-24).

In his hometown, where everyone knew him, Jesus is not recognized as one sent by God. The people ask incredulously why he teaches and does miracles. They criticize him for being a carpenter and being member of a local family. This has its element of irony. The words of Jesus discover the absurdity here; the prophet is rejected precisely where he should be most accepted, in his own town and in his own family. The absurdity is emphasized because those who reject the prophet are those who come out the losers and with reason we find the poetic justice amusing.

The narratives of Mark and Matthew are almost identical. Luke contains editorial elements proper to his Gospel: the prophecy of Isaiah 61; Jesus mentioned as son of Joseph (Lk 4:22) without mention of his being a carpenter. The three texts are dramatic in their revelation of the rejection of Jesus which will culminate in the Passion. In Luke, they drive him out of the town and try to throw him off the cliff but fail.

3) They were unable to eat. His relatives say that he is out of his mind

Anyone who forgets to eat or does not permit others to enjoy their food is strongly criticized. The biblical scene is desperate: the relatives and collaborators of Jesus are hungry and they accuse him of being out of his mind.

One asks oneself how Jesus experienced these situations. We cannot say anything certain about the inner feelings of the Lord and the text gives no indications. Nonetheless, one can presuppose the attitude of the Carpenter by referring to his behavior in other circumstances. When his companions feel panic (the pressure of children, the storm on the lake, the distribution of bread, etc.), Jesus on the contrary acts with compassion and patience. What others see as madness, Jesus sees as a better way of making things happen.

The scene is amusing Jesus patiently attends the crowds in his home, while his family and relatives, are concerned with meals and living with some tranquility as one would expect. They do not accept the behavior of Jesus, grow desperate and declare him out of his mind.

Then Jesus entered a house and again a crowd gathered so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat. When his family heard about this they went to take charge of him, for they said, "He is out of his mind" (Mk 3:20-21).

The evangelists offer a number of scenes where Jesus and his circle of collaborators are exhausted by large numbers of people. In Mark's text, the problem becomes so extreme that the demands of the crowds keep them from eating. In this case (Mk 3:21) the family is mentioned and further on, the mother and brothers of Jesus (Mk 3:31). These close family members are annoyed to the point of saying that Jesus is out of his mind. The scene is appalling and even heart breaking but it also has its amusing side. The crowds of people with their needs, Jesus in the midst of them; the apparent panic of not being able to eat because of the numbers; the desperation that made them say that Jesus was out of his mind for making it all happen – a scene with a humorous dimension.

An analysis of this passage does not clarify who is criticizing Jesus (Mk 3:21): the Greek term used is "the people around him". It may well have been his family members, relatives, friends or collaborators but the connection between 3:21 and 3:31 suggests that it may have been his family. Neither is it clear exactly where this happened although the expression "at home" is used. Although it may have occurred in Capernaum, it probably happened in Nazareth. Another element of discussion is whether it was the multitude that declared Jesus out of his mind, family members or both. The plural form of the verb can refer to any of these possibilities.

4) Who are they?... These are my mother and brothers

Through the use of questions one can say a great deal more than other language forms permit. And a question, whether direct or indirect, can contain a good deal of humor. In the face of an evident fact, like the presence of family and relatives, to ask who these are has its amusing dimension.

Family ties were very solid among the Israelite people of first century Palestine. For this reason the scene where Jesus seems to give little attention to his mother and brothers strikes us as strange.

The question sounds very harsh: "Who is my mother?" But the objective in this passage is to animate fidelity to the will of God the Father; for this reason a new messianic family has emerged around Jesus. Moreover, Jesus appears to be speaking only to his followers since his family were trying to draw near but were unable because of the crowd (Mt 12:46; Lk 8:19). There is also an attempt to subordinate the family to the relationship with God and to present a mode of an open, non-exclusive family/community. It is offered in a clever, striking fashion.

Jesus' mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him. A crowd was sitting around him and they told him, "Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you" "Who are my mother and my brothers?" then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, "Here are my mother and my brothers. Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother" (Mk 3: 31-35; Mt 12: 46-50; Lk 8: 19-21).

The central point is the teaching about fidelity to God and there are no biblical references to the fact that Mary and his family failed to do this. This constitutes the criterion for being a member of Jesus' family. He does not break ties nor is he irresponsible with regard to his mother, brothers and sisters. But his mode of teaching is both paradoxical and amusing. Jesus asks (Mark and Matthew): "Who is my mother? With this shocking question he gives an unforgettable lesson for those present and for all believers. This sharp and paradoxical pedagogy has its attractive aspect.

Mark and Matthew are very similar, the teaching is about doing the will of God. Luke's version is less harsh, it does not include the question "who is my mother?" and the lesson is "to

hear the word of God and fulfill it” (Lk 8:18). Matthew includes the solemn gesture of Jesus who extends his hand towards his followers. Biblical commentaries concentrate on whether Jesus undervalued familial ties and was discourteous with his family (which is not the heart of this passage). They do not take note of the skill and pedagogical humor of Jesus in this message.

D- Uncomfortable facts

1) At midnight... the friend gets up and gives everything needed

Real friendships take the liberty of asking for anything. But at midnight! No one has the right to bother a family at that hour. In Palestine any family, like the one mentioned in the text, would normally retire for the night four hours before midnight. It would be most annoying and uncomfortable to break one’s sleep in order to take care of a friend.

This is about a brief dramatic scene spiced with humor. The family went to bed early, sleeping together in the same space. Once the door was closed and locked for the night it would not be opened until morning. Opening the door would disturb the sleepers. In a small town there was no place to buy food at midnight. Here we have a request for three portions of bread, enough to satisfy one person’s hunger. In the end, insistence obtains what is needed.

The response of the sleeper is far from friendly. A good friend would have gotten up immediately. Annoyed, he says: don’t bother me, my children and I are in bed and I cannot get up. If he does get up it is only out of the obligation of hospitality in the Orient where one must help one’s neighbor. Perhaps he does so to keep the friend from knocking at the door and to get rid of an inopportune visitor. The scene is humorous and one can imagine the listeners enjoying the melodramatic story. Even today it seems amusing to us. It is finally a way of saying that God listens to our prayers and requests (Lk 11:9).

Jesus said to the, “Suppose one of you has a friend and he goes to him at midnight and says, ‘Friend lend me three loaves of bread because a friend of mine on a journey has come to me and I have nothing to set before him.’ Then the one inside answers, ‘Don’t bother me, the door is already locked and my children are with me in bed. I can’t get up and give you anything’. I tell you though he will not get up and give him the bread because he is his friend, yet because of the man’s persistence, he will get up and give him as much as he needs” (Lk 11: 5-8).

This narrative is only in Luke. It is a parable that is not accompanied by an allegorical explanation. Apparently, this was the original form of the parable, only later oral tradition and biblical writers added moral and theological explanations.

Perhaps this was a proposal to pray with persistence. This is seen if we take into account the framework of chapter 11 of Luke: from verses 1-4 *The Our Father*, and from v 9-13 there are various directives to ask and obtain from God all that is needed. In the midst of these passages the evangelist has placed the parable of the importunate friend. The fundamental idea is that whoever asks receives as is also seen in Lk 11:10 and Mt 7:8. This is to say, the certainty that comes from a faith that believes that whatever is asked will be fulfilled.

The teaching appears to be that just as one asks a friend with confidence for whatever is needed, whenever needed, just so one should make known one’s needs to God. However, the story puts the emphasis on the response of the annoyed friend who responds unwillingly.

I consider it significant that outside of an indirect spiritual teaching (the Our Father immediately precedes it and verses 9-13 provide directives), the text does not offer a teaching. For this reason the community can enjoy listening to the narrative and discover the insights offered by their faith.

2) *Everyone is looking for Jesus... He went somewhere else*

At times one hides or puts some distance between themselves and others. This may be an erratic act, a sort of game, an expression of a need for personal space or a variety of other motives. On various occasions, Jesus went away from his followers and the crowds to seek solitude and to pray. Jesus was usually compassionate and attentive to those around him and to those who came looking for him, but there were opportunities when he put distance between himself and others. When his followers complain about this behavior he says that he will go to some other place and he does so in a brusque manner. He explains that he must work for the Kingdom in other cities. This is his most fundamental motivation: to announce the Kingdom of God in different places. But from the point of view of his contemporaries, his behavior appears strange. Moreover, we can say that Jesus plays a game of hide and seek with people.

Very early in the morning when it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. Simon and his companions went to look for him and when they found him they exclaimed. "Everyone is looking for you!" Jesus replied, "Let us go somewhere else - to the nearby villages- so I can preach there also. That is why I have come." So he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons (Mk 1:35-39; Lk 4: 42-44).

This is a missionary passage. It shows the principal activity of Jesus of Nazareth: announcing and putting into practice the presence of the eschatological Kingdom. Today, biblical scholars are in accord in that this is the heart of Jesus' message. The term Kingdom appears 107 times in the synoptic Gospels and only 5 times in John. The literary form appears to be a saying of Jesus in the two versions of Luke and Mark. Luke's version is explicit with regard to the form of the evangelical action for the Kingdom.

Jesus' activity has three moments: to go to a solitary place to pray (Luke), the dialogue with his followers and finally, the comment that Jesus will preach in Galilee and Judea. The evangelizing action of Jesus takes place in the synagogues. Mark presents him speaking and healing the possessed while Luke details the announcement of the Good News of the Kingdom.

With respect to the reaction of the people, according to Luke, the crowds hassle Jesus and try to detain him. According to Mark those who act are the apostles (Simon and companions) who speak in the name of the multitude ("everyone is looking for you!").

There is no doubt that this is a passage from the mission. It includes something humorous in the dialogue and in the behavior of Jesus. They complain that he is needed and he responds with a somewhat surprising: let's go somewhere else!

3) *Physician... cure thyself!*

There are strong and weak criticisms. Something far deeper and more painful is the total condemnation and depreciation of a person. Jesus suffered this on a broad-spectrum, even in his place of birth and on the part of those closest to him, even his family. In the midst of this terrible drama the Teacher is capable of being skillful. This is the case in his saying about the physician and healing.

The scene shows us the best of Jesus and the worst of his contemporaries. In Nazareth, the Messiah makes his eschatological and liberating proclamation, thanks to the Spirit. Moreover, he announces its fulfillment. This is what occurs on the one hand. On the other hand, we see the people react positively at first but then try to kill the bearer of the Good News.

In the face of the rejection of his fellow townsmen, Luke's text puts two proverbs into the mouth of Jesus, both of which critique this behavior: "Physician cure thyself" and "No prophet is well received in his home town". This first proverb appears to confront the cynicism and unbelief of

these people. The saying includes a spark of humor with which Jesus keeps himself from descending to the aggressive attitude of his opponents.

(In the synagogue of Nazareth) they said of him: "Isn't this Joseph's son?" Jesus said to them, "Surely you will quote this proverb to me: 'Physician heal thyself' Do here in your home town what we have heard that you did in Capernaum" And he added, "I tell you the truth, no prophet is accepted in his home town" (Lk 4:22-24; Mt 13:54ff; Mk 6:1ff).

In the three synoptic evangelists we find this visit to Nazareth and the terrible rejection of Jesus with respect to which Jesus uses the proverb about the prophet being rejected in his hometown. Luke's version is longer and the scene is the beginning of the public ministry of Jesus, while Matthew and Mark put this scene toward the end of his work in Galilee. We notice that various types of expressions or literary types are brought together here. The text appears to be a construction of various different pieces. With respect to the saying about the prophet, Luke does not include the rejection on the part of his family as does Mark, while Matthew notes the rejection in his town and in his house. Luke's version includes the curious refrain: "You will quote me the proverb, 'physician, cure yourself'" It is not possible to know exactly why Jesus made use of this popular proverb found in rabbinical texts and in Greek literature. It seems to me that Jesus is using a clever mode of unwrapping the incredulity of his contemporaries. He is giving them a message of salvation but the inhabitants of Nazareth respond with an insidious question. "Isn't this the son of Joseph?" and then reject him. In the face of this, the words of Jesus are skillful and aggravating. He brings to light the absurd unbelief of those who do not recognize the physician, in figurative terms, who truly knows how to heal. According to the interpretation of Jesus, on saying "physician cure thyself", his fellow townsmen are shown to be stupid. It is a humorous proverb, as applied to those who were so close to the Savior.

Finally, it is a terrible drama, they brought him to a precipice to throw him off and thus kill him. However, historical investigation proves that there was no such precipice in Nazareth. Luke's text simply shows the violence that existed against the Teacher. Nonetheless, Jesus walked right through the crowd and went away to continue his mission.

E- Human conflict

1) Try to be reconciled to him... until you have paid the last penny

In our societies, the poorest sectors have been the most damaged by the judicial and penal systems. Something similar occurred in the time of Jesus. The common people trembled before the authorities, judges and police of those times. In this context, the parable on settling matters with one's adversary is humorous.

Luke's version begins with a question (common in the oral traditions) and presents the case in an alarming fashion. The urgent call to resolve matters, probably directed to his followers, is placed in the mouth of Jesus. According to Jesus, one must try to settle quickly or be dragged before the judge, imprisoned and finally, thrown into misery. This is certainly frightening. At the same time, a highly exaggerated parable surprises us and provokes a smile.

Why don't you judge for yourselves what is right? As you are going with your adversary to the magistrate, try hard to be reconciled with him on the way, or he may drag you off to the judge and the judge turn you over to the officer, and the officer throw you into prison. I tell you, you will not get out till you have paid the last penny (Lk 12: 57-58; Mt 25:25-26).

This is a shocking parable. In one precise sense it is an eschatological passage about crisis that calls the listener to act immediately, in the hour of salvation. Faced with human conflict, a rapid

solution must be found. This is Luke's version. Matthew offers a moral lesson about how to act in the midst of a controversy. There are then two contexts and two distinct messages. In Luke the parable forms part of an entire section of eschatological content with the signs of the end times (they also make reference to the Roman judicial process). The message induces fear and calls for immediate change. One must be reconciled with one's enemy or something horrible may happen, one is left in a bad state before the judicial system and winds up in prison without a cent.

Matthew's narrative has another context and tone. After the Sermon on the Mount (the Beatitudes), there are some sayings about new forms of behavior. The disciples must live without offences and violence, pardoning and even reconciling with others. This is how the parable is presented concerning the settlement of conflict between believers before going to a judge (the officer of the synagogue according to the Jewish system). It is a moral teaching.

The parable, in whichever version, has a surprising and amusing tone, given the exaggeration of the scene. The presumption is that the magistrate and the prison will do damage to oneself and not to one's adversary.

2) *The obstinate woman... and the unjust judge*

One of the many qualities of people who are ignored and disregarded (particularly women) is their persevering protest and their demand to live. In the biblical case of the widow who demanded attention of a judge, it is surprising how the woman, apparently without resources, gets the better of authority.

The parable shows the contrast between two individuals with very definite characteristics. She is vulnerable, has no possessions or funds to influence the judge, but she is obstinate and forceful. On the other hand, the judge feels all-powerful; he fears neither God nor man. But it is she who wins over the powerful judicial authority. Certainly this parable must have impacted listeners both by the details of the individuals and the unexpected outcome. Hearing it today, one smiles with a feeling of admiration and celebration for the woman for she won justice from a dubious authority. Bravo for the obstinacy of the poor, of women, who win the right to live!

In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about men. And there was a woman in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, "Grant me justice against my adversary". For some time he refused but finally he said to himself, "Even though I do not fear God or care about men, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice so she won't wear me out with her coming." And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones who cry out to him day and night (Lk 18: 2-8).

In Jewish society at the time of Jesus, widows were vulnerable and disregarded. In the case of this parable, the widow had no material possessions, nor the social power to gain attention for her problem. She insistently goes to the judge because of some economic problem. The text does not explain the situation as one of debt, inheritance, etc. but she finally achieves her goal and the insensitive judge listens to her and resolves her problem. She wins; something out of the ordinary.

This parable in Luke is preceded by a call to pray and not to grow weak, probably an editorial or a theological addition to the text and it culminates with an explanation that God attends our cries for justice, far better than any authority. According to the translation of J. Jeremias: "Will God not hurry to help his elect, He who listens patiently when they cry out to him day and night?" (Jeremias *The parables of Jesus*, p.190). The text adds: He will give them swift justice. The explanation is accompanied by an ancient Aramaic proverb: "Will the Son of Man find faith on the earth?" Consequently, the behavior of God is absolutely different from that of the judge. With respect to this, the beginning of the narrative which is centered in the widow, closes with emphasis on the contrast between the judge and God.

Let us return to the original parable (verses 2-5). The protagonist is the obstinate woman who does not permit tranquility to the judge who is worn out and annoyed by her insistence. There is no doubt that it is she who has greater strength and capacity. This whole scene transmits the valor, skill and persuasive capacity of a fragile person of inner strength. It is also a scene that one looks at with pleasure and joy.

3) It is necessary to forgive seventy times seven times!

The theme of reconciliation refers to conflicts, wounds, sufferings and situations that are difficult to bear. These are not things that invite us to laughter. Nonetheless, the dialogue between Peter and Jesus is a humorous one.

Peter suggests that one should forgive the offender seven times, no small thing since each of us knows how hard it is to forgive the same person twice. One would suppose that Jesus would be in accord but this does not happen. Jesus' proposal is immensely difficult, without limits -to pardon up to seventy times seven times. This is not an ordinary dialogue. Peter must have been left open-mouthed. Something similar happens to us today when we hear this surprising dialogue. This attitude of reconciliation corresponds to God's way of pardoning, without conditions, without restrictions, this is the way one human being must pardon another. According to Matthew, this is what must be done with a brother or a sister in the Christian community. The expression seventy times seven signifies a very exaggerated number of times. It causes laughter.

Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?" Jesus answered, "I tell you not seven times but seventy times seven times" (Mt 18:21-22; Lk 17: 4).

The message of Jesus insists on pardon as a principal characteristic; the prayer Jesus gave us, the Our Father, contains the factor of pardon. During his ministry Jesus offered pardon to sinners and he pardoned even on the cross. It does not have to do with some formula nor is it something marginal. Pardon and reconciliation form part of the very heart of the revelation of the God of Jesus, the merciful and saving God.

In the narratives of Matthew and Luke the "brother Christian" is mentioned. The Greek word refers to the neighbor, but the way it is used by both indicates the person who shares the same faith. Luke's text is very graphic: if he sins against you seven times a day and shows repentance, you will forgive him seven times. This is a very generous attitude. Matthew goes even further. He does not mention if the offender repents. The accent is placed simply on pardoning the offender unconditionally. And this pardon is to be given seventy times seven times. That is to say, always. The dialogue between Peter and Jesus offers much theological content: to live as a Christian is to act like God the Pardoner. It likewise has an amusing dimension.

F- Contact with foreigners

1) Pearls are not... for the pigs

Each nation, each cultural universe has its proverbs and its peculiar expressions that transmit some knowledge, a moral norm or some prejudice, etc. In the case of the proverbs used by the people of Palestine which the evangelists attribute to Jesus, we come across unusual phrases.

On one occasion, the Teacher is said to have used the saying that one should not give something sacred to dogs, nor jewels to pigs. To whom was he referring? We do not know but it is probable that it had to do with non-Jews, that is to say, gentiles or pagans, which for the Jews meant "the impure". They were then discriminated against.

Another possibility is that they may refer to the Jewish leaders that Matthew continually criticizes. In this case, the scribes and Pharisees would be compared with the dogs and pigs. With respect to the formulas, they have their humorous side. One should not feed dogs with something sacred, nor give precious stones to pigs.

Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do they may trample them under their feet and then turn and tear you to pieces (Mt 7:6).

These two brief parables are included in a section with varied contents: judgment of the brother, divine providence, prayer and other texts from Mt 6 and 7. For this reason the editorial dimension does not help to interpret the shorter parables. Their original form might be: do not give what is holy to dogs because they may tear you apart nor put pearls before swine because they may trample them underfoot. The intention of Matthew may be to note the difficulties in the diffusion of the Gospel.

With respect to the literary form, there are two distinct images that contribute to one message. This is the Semite form of speech and another characteristic is to use very concrete language. This is what occurs with these images of dogs and pigs. For the mentality of Jesus' contemporaries, there was a clear distinction between the sacred and what was not sacred, the good and the unacceptable. These counter positions are made explicit in these two brief parables. Impurity is attributed to dogs and pigs. With respect to the last, the parable warns that the pig may tear the human being apart.

In the cases where non-Jews were insulted and treated as contaminated and contaminating, they are compared with an impure animal. This has to do with ethnic and religious prejudices that also occur in many forms of intolerance between enemy nations. Apart from these serious problems, the images used here evoke a smile.

2) A pagan woman teaches Jesus: the little dogs eat the crumbs

People and groups that are "different" suffer from the effects of being ignored for their race, gender, social position, religion, etc. At times they know how to resist and speak their truth.

A pagan woman, doubly discriminated against, gives Jesus a theological teaching insight. At least this is the way he accepts it: "For what you have said" (Mk 7:29) "woman, great is your faith" (Mt 15:28). Moreover, faced with the derogatory words of Jesus ("the bread is not for dogs") she answers with humor ("the little dogs eat the crumbs beneath the table"). The situation is heartbreaking, the daughter possessed by an evil spirit, the mother prostrate and crying out for help, and the conversation appalls us (Mark and Matthew). But the wise woman is not frightened. The salvific presence of Jesus and her words and faith ("for what you have said", "your faith") bring health to her daughter. We can say that she evangelizes, heals and theologizes. This goes together with her fine capacity to play with the language (little dogs) and her form of response.

Jesus left that place and went to the vicinity of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know it; yet he could not keep his presence a secret. In fact as soon as she heard about him, a woman whose daughter was possessed by an evil spirit, came and fell at his feet. The woman was a Greek born in Syrian Phoenicia. She begged Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter. "First let the children eat all that they want", he told her, "for it is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the little dogs". "Yes, Lord, she replied, "but even the little dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs". Then he told her, "For such a reply you may go; the demon has left your daughter" (Mk 7: 24-30; Mt 15: 21-28).

A Syro-Phoenician who tells the truth (Mark), a Canaanite of great faith (Matthew), convert the ethnocentrism of Jesus (“I have been sent only to Israel”) and even his discourtesy (although Mark presents him as benevolent “wait until the children are satisfied”). The disciples also feel uncomfortable with the woman. In accord with the mentality of the times, she is despised as a foreigner, from another nation, for being a woman, for having another religion. But she responds with human intelligence and theological clarity: salvation is also for the non-Jews. She also has an attractive spark of humor.

Matthew’s text directed toward the Jews, recreates the scene and places Jesus before the Canaanite woman. Canaan was a region with a polytheistic religion. For this reason what transpires between Jesus and the woman is all the more disconcerting. He keeps silent and when he does speak he uses a language of negation: “I have not been sent”, “It is not good to give the bread...” On her part, the language is affirmative: “have pity on me”, “help me”, “yes, but the little dogs also”. In this argument, it is she who wins.

In Mark’s narrative, Jesus enters a house to hide from people. But the woman, with great skill, prostrates herself at his feet to listen but ends by speaking and teaching truths to the Teacher. The dialogue is humorous with regard to the “little dogs”: this signifies smallness and also the impurity of the gentiles. The woman, however, reapplies these words to the family table where the little dogs below the table eat the bits of bread given them by the children.

3) On being rejected by his fellow-countrymen... Jesus praises the pagans

The scene in Nazareth is a pathetic one. The Lord proclaims the marvelous news of salvation but his contemporaries and family reject it. It is a deeply sad event. Jesus does not complain for this mistreatment of himself. Rather he makes them see the salvation of the non-Jews through the use of biblical example. This is an indirect and ingenious way of revealing the stupidity of his fellow countrymen. He speaks marvels about the pagans whom the Jews reject and clearly shows his sense of humor. The language is piquant. In the days of Elijah there were many hungry Jews but the prophet was sent to pagan widow in Zarephath; there were many Jews with leprosy in the days of Elisha but the prophet cured only Naaman. This sage criticism with its spark of humor annoyed his fellow countrymen and they threw him out of Nazareth.

“I tell you the truth”, he continued, “no prophet is accepted in his hometown. I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah’s time when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed- only Naaman, the Syrian” (Lk 4: 25-27).

The evangelist has placed this prophetic message within the frame of the rejection of Jesus by his fellow townsmen. The action of Elijah and Elisha is relevant to the crisis around the ministry of Jesus. To those Jews who were not open to salvation, he shows the mercy of God toward the pagan peoples through the work of the prophets. .

The passages of the Old Testament contain stories that have an impact on us. In the face of drought and the resulting hunger, Elijah asks food from a pagan and she in turn receives the blessing of God in abundant food for herself, her son and the prophet (1Kings 17:7ff). Elisha makes the military commander Naaman wash seven times in the Jordan and he is cleansed of his leprosy (2Kings:5ff). These stories are reinterpreted by Jesus as signs of God’s saving action through the prophet, not among the Jews but among those despised by the chosen people.

The entire scene in Nazareth is a dramatic one. It includes biblical memories through which Jesus questions those who arrogantly feel themselves saved while despising the rest. His reminding them of this shows his skill and his use of irony.

G- Insignificance, unimportance

1) *Physical stature... one cannot increase it*

One element that is common to humor in all cultures is the height and the bulk of the human body. We do not know if this was so in the time of Jesus, but nonetheless, in the biblical narrative, there is a curious phrase that refers either to the stature of the human person or the length of his life.

Jesus asks who of his listeners can increase their height or prolong their life. It is an uncommon question that demands a categorical response. No one! Although many might want to no one is capable of changing his stature or prolonging life. The form of the question is humorous.

Then comes the lesson: if you cannot change even the smallest thing, why worry about other things in life. At bottom, the issue is confidence in God. Jesus tells us not to be worried about food and clothing (Lk 12: 22).

Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest? (Lk 12: 25-26; Mt 6: 27).

Once more the style of language and the literary form favor the asking of questions. In the New Testament there are abundant questions either asked by or directed to Jesus. In this case the questions is rather unusual. It is a type of question that invites the listener to make a categorical reply. It also causes laughter. No one can change his stature nor prolong his life. In the Greek language the term used expresses two different ideas: increasing one's size and prolonging the length of one's existence.

In the first case, the equivalent of the term used (*codo*) is half a meter making the question even more noteworthy. No one grows half a meter because he wants to be taller. With regard to this, one interpretation of this passage is that it does not have to do with size but rather with the length of time for decisions before the immanent coming of salvation, in the face of which, one cannot prolong the length of one's existence.

Let us return to the type of question. Biblical studies explain that in the language attributed to Jesus, it is common to use this form: "which of you?" It appears that there is reason to consider this is an expression proper to the Lord (*the ipsissima verba Domini*). It is a form of speech that demands a categorical response, particularly when the question refers to something surprising and impossible. On various occasions Jesus spoke to his adversaries in this fashion. In this context, the dialogue would be somewhat humorous for the listeners who were in sympathy with Jesus, having been mistreated at some time by these very same adversaries. The question and the content show the superiority and skill of the teacher from Nazareth.

2) *It is not the learned... but the little ones*

Any comparison in which someone supposedly significant is despised and an unimportant person exalted, would certainly please the insignificant and reviled person and obviously annoy those who consider themselves superior.

In the scene which we will consider, Jesus is very happy. The text says that he was filled with joy through the Holy Spirit. It is extraordinary that the New Testament takes note of the joy of the Lord. In this passage there are two elements that call our attention: the attitude of praise for the Father and Creator of the world and the way God manifests himself preferentially to "little ones". To say that he hides something from the wise but offers his Revelation to the insignificant is certainly surprising and agreeable to the ordinary people listening to Jesus. When this passage is read today in communities it also pleases and fills ordinary people with joy.

At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, "I praise you Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned and revealed them to little children" (Lk 10:21; Mt 11:25).

It is a trinitarian passage in which the intimate relation between Father, Jesus and the Spirit is shown. It also reveals the joy of Jesus moved by the Spirit. Some expressions show the contact between the synoptic material and the writings of John. The text also seems to transmit a hymn of the early Church.

The linguistic form presents a strong contrast or antithetic parallelism, typical of the language forms of the time and used by the evangelists. We see this form in Mk 4:11 where the disciples understand the mysteries of the Kingdom in the form of parables while the rest do not understand. This is also the case in Mt 11:25 and Lk 10:21.

Each version has its context: Matthew gives his in the midst of the ministry of Jesus; Luke does so in the midst of various teachings directed to his collaborators and disciples. The first leads us to think that the "little ones" refers to the ordinary people who surrounded Jesus while the second indicates the disciples and the "little ones". With respect to the "wise", this may have to do with the teachers of the Law and other wealthy, powerful sectors in the time of Jesus.

In whichever case, it has to do with strong contrasts, it causes surprise among those listening and in the entire community. Anyone would be on hearing such a saying with respect to God. Not only that. Those who hear the message and have been catalogued as ignorant and for that reason despised, would certainly feel great joy, the joy of knowing oneself chosen and preferred by God. For this reason it appears that they felt a deep communion with Jesus who himself is a "little one" and by reason of that very fact, has felt the joy of the Spirit (Lk 10:20).

H- Everything with faith

1) With faith, say to the mountain: "throw yourself into the sea"

Today the majority has a scientific attitude and does not believe in things physically impossible. But there also exists a strong element of spiritual mentality that convinces us that the humanly impossible can happen due to superhuman forces. For example, we attribute great and very concrete miracles to prayer made with faith.

In the time of Jesus, he and his contemporaries saw the power of faith and of prayer. But some things seemed improbable to them. For example, the disciples were surprised that the fig tree cursed by Jesus was withered. In the face of their incredulity Jesus chides them and challenges them to have faith and do something spectacular: to order a mountain to throw itself into the sea. This certainly sounds absurdly impossible, like a joke made on someone. I believe there are two things going on here. On one side the Teacher insists on the strength of faith that makes all things possible. On the other, he gives an example of something out of the ordinary that produces laughter in the listener: make a huge mountain throw itself into the sea. One would never forget such a symbolic teaching about faith.

When the disciples saw this they were amazed. "How did the fig tree wither so quickly?", they asked. Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, 'Go throw yourself into the sea' and it will be done. If you believe you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer" (Mt 21:20-21; Mk 11:21-24; Mt 17: 19-21; Lk 17: 5-6).

The synoptic material gives four versions of this humorous scene. Mt 21 and Mk 11 offer the image of making the mountain fall in the sea and emphasize the power of prayer. Mt 17 and Lk 17 emphasize faith with the image of the mustard seed. The first text refers to the failure of the

disciples who cannot cure an epileptic and suggests that the mountain moves rather than falls in the sea. The second text suggests that a tree should fall in the ocean. In Luke it is the apostles who ask that Jesus increase their faith.

In each case these are spectacular things that have an impact and might produce smiles among the listeners. Moreover, the language demonstrates good pedagogy since it is graphic and will remain fixed in the memory. It is a common mode of communication in the daily life of people.

There are different details in each one of the four versions. At the same time there are different contexts: the withered fig tree, the curing of a sick person and the request to increase one's faith. The detail that compares faith with a grain of mustard seed (Mt 17 and Luke 17) is also ingenious, since it is the smallest seed and the suggestion is that even with such a little bit of faith, one can move mountains! In the midst of all these details in the four texts, there is a central message about the strength of faith: the example of a mountain or a large tree made to move from one place to another. With faith, everything is possible.

For the educated person of today the explanation of something as fundamental as faith and prayer through the use of spectacular symbols rather than through concepts and doctrines, may perhaps seem strange. With respect to ordinary people, this type of teaching causes an emotional response and helps them to understand the character of faith in a deeper way. These are the people to whom Jesus directs himself in a preferential way. We can also say that the humor of the Gospels was mainly directed to cultural sensitivities.

2) Do not worry about tomorrow... Tomorrow will take care of itself

In the modern world everything is calculated and measured. It is not easy to place one's life in the hands of God and his inscrutable will. The overwhelming influence of society draws all in the direction of material goods. We come to believe ourselves in charge of our present and our future.

If we fix our attention on the times and the message of Jesus we ask ourselves the significance of his words about trust in divine providence. We remember that essentially he spoke to rural inhabitants and in small towns where the people worked hard to survive. He was not inviting them to laziness or to resignation in the face of poverty.

When Jesus insisted that his followers and collaborators not worry about food and clothing, he was directing their attention rather to God the Creator who feeds the birds of the air and adorns the lilies of the fields and to the Kingdom which is the center of the evangelizing activity. He does not only tell them this but gives them a proverb: "do not worry about tomorrow for tomorrow will take care of itself." Then he adds that each day has enough trouble of its own. Does Jesus separate himself from everyday necessities with this message? Is he spiritualizing the Gospel? No, rather he is motivating us to give importance to what deserves to be the first priority: the work of God the Creator and the human dedication to the Kingdom. But this is put forward in a humorous way: tomorrow will worry about itself. This is a Jewish proverb with a dose of irony that has parallels in rabbinic literature.

Seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own (Mt 6: 33-34).

The proverb is a play on words: do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow is worried about itself. This sounds like fatalism, passivity, resignation to destiny. But it is also a humorous way of speaking, given the context.

People must certainly concern themselves about the concrete needs of every day since solutions do not fall from heaven but depend on the tenacious efforts of each worker. In this context, the message of Jesus about God's care of his creatures helps us to understand the proverb

about “tomorrow”. It is not an invitation to passivity but rather to recognition of the work of God visible in nature and in humanity itself.

Within this frame of reference one understands what it means to let tomorrow worry about itself. Mt 6:25-34 and Lk 12: 22-32 have this passage about Providence, but only Matthew includes the proverbs.

The message about Providence seems directed mainly to the disciples. Their goal is to give testimony and live for the Kingdom of God. It is God who will provide their concrete necessities. Those disciples who accompany Jesus in his mission are not to be anxious about other things but must concentrate on the mission. It is not then a general message to be interpreted in a spiritualistic way that might promote a certain fatalism with regard to the present and to the future.

I- The enjoyment of life

1) A banquet, not with friends and the wealthy... but with the poor

Celebration is like the heart of day-to-day living. At least this is the way we experience it today. It is a constant factor that cuts across all cultures and times. In Jesus’ time celebrations abounded and he took part in them, he enjoyed life and used these occasions to give his prophetic messages.

He put forward the “Sermon on the Mount” in a general way: “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst because they shall be filled (...) Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry” (Lk 6: 21, 25). This same thing is said by Jesus in a most precise way when he dined at the home of a leader of the Pharisees. It seems rather discourteous when he says to the host: “Do not invite your relatives, the rich, etc., but instead invite the sick and the poor”. It was common in these banquets that, besides the servants, there were observers, poor people, who looked on and listened from a distance. They must have enjoyed the words of Jesus that vindicated their right to eat well and be treated with dignity.

Then Jesus said to his host, “When you give a luncheon or dinner do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors. If you do they may invite you back and you will be repaid. But when you have a banquet invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous” (Lk 14: 12-14).

The scene is the residence of an authority, one of the principal Pharisees, where there were also representatives of the Law, sick people and the curious. In this situation, he gives a prophetic message. The banquet of the kingdom receives those on the margins and the hungry and this should be the case in our human celebrations as well.

Jesus contradicts the custom of preferring our friends, our brothers, relatives and wealthy neighbors and, as he often did, shows preference for the sick and the poor. Then he says that those who show this same preference will be happy at the resurrection of the just. All the behavior and the language used must certainly have made his poor listeners happy. Something similar happens today, the Good News is a source of great joy to the poor, the ignored and the forgotten.

2) Do not put yourself in the first place, but rather in the last

There are various ways of looking at events, Jesus point of view is always directed from the social margins. Observing the people invited to a banquet, he notes how they run to get the most important places where the food and drink is best!

In these circumstances, Jesus gives an eschatological message about the heavenly banquet where the last are first and this brings with it the topic of humility and a criticism of the proud. Once more, the message delights the common ordinary listeners and annoys the “important people”.

Here we have Jesus’ sense of humor, he favors the despised and confronts the proud. He expresses this by means of a story from a parable. It is not a simple, ingenuous message. He is imparting a great truth that challenges his listeners. He speaks of what is today called “the option for the poor”. He does so in a symbolic and pleasant way. It is a type of humor with socio-political weight and his basic theme is eschatological.

When he noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, he told them this parable: “When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. If so, the host that invited both of you will come and say to you, ‘Give this man your seat’. Then humiliated, you will have to take the least important place. But when you are invited take the lowest place, so that when the host comes he will say to you, ‘Friend, move up to a better place’. Then you will be honored in the presence of your fellow guests. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted” (Lk 14: 7-11).

The important thing is the message of the banquet. It is possible –as has happened in all epochs- that some important people arrive late and unseat those already occupying the first places. If such be the case, the parable indicates how one should act when invited to a feast. However, at the end a proverb with eschatological content is added: God exalts the humble and does the contrary with the arrogant. In this way, the parable acquires a new meaning.

For this reason, a prophetic saying is attached to a scene from daily life: the person who exalts himself will be humbled and he who humbles himself will be exalted. In Mat 23:12 this saying goes together with the direct criticism of the scribes and Pharisees and the publican in the temple.

The parable plays with enormous contrasts. One case is that of the person who sits in the first place. It goes from one extreme to the other. The other case is that of the person who takes the last place but who is then invited to move higher and in this way, is honored. There are no intermediate positions. This play on contrasts forms part of the language of humor.

3) *The delicious old wine*

In the valleys of Galilee where Jesus was born and raised, the wines produced were especially good. Jesus himself drank wine (Mt 11:19; Lk 7:34; Jn 2:1ff). Some paragraphs of the Old Testament associate wine with love: “Your love is better than wine”, “like a generous wine that goes directly to the Loved One” (*Song of Songs*, 1: 2, 7:10). It is also associated with salvation: “Yahweh will invite all nations to a feast of fine wines” (Is 25:6) and then in the person and work of Jesus: “I am the true vine and my Father is the gardener...” (Jn 15:1ff). The message of the New Testament presents a new phase of salvation in terms of a new wine (Mk 2:22; Lk 5:37-38). The old wine has to do with the Old Alliance. In this frame of reference, Luke’s narrative incorporates a saying from human custom. After drinking old wine, no one wants the new, because they say: “The old wine is better!” Here we are not comparing Old and New Testaments, rather it is the introduction of a popular saying. This expression touches the heart of people who like good wine. It confirms and exalts their experience of a joy filled life.

No one pours new wine into old wineskins... No one after drinking old wine wants the new, for he says, ‘The old is better’ (Lk 5: 37-39).

The content of these phrases is arguable. There is incompatibility between the old and the new. These expressions have to do with the distinction between the situation of the people of Israel with their fasts and their Alliance, and the new salvific situation that comes from Jesus in which fasting will not be as before. The first situation is similar to the old wineskins for old wine; the Christian experience is similar to the new wineskins for new wine.

Around these realities a prophetic expression is introduced about the quality of wine that has been kept over time and has excellent aroma and savor. This profane expression about the quality of wine is used in Luke in order to criticize those who remain attached to old religious forms. It would appear that an ironic saying from daily life (a *mashal* says Bultmann) has been added to the biblical text.

4) *There is no wine... What is that to me or to you?*

The fourth Gospel puts the Wedding at Cana as the first of the various prophetic signs performed by Jesus. These are signs directed toward the time of Glory expected for Jesus.

The scene here corresponds to one of those events of daily life. It is a wedding feast where Mary, Jesus and his disciples are present. In the midst of this joyful event an uncomfortable problem arises. There is not enough wine for the guests. On Jesus' part, we hear a strange expression: "Woman, what have I got to do with this?" This is how he responds to Mary when she makes it known to him that there is no wine left. In human terms, it is rather humorous as it sounds as though Jesus is unconscious of what is going on around him. In biblical terms, we know well that it signifies that his time of glorification has not as yet come. The outcome of this scenario reflects happiness and joy, thanks to the "good wine" which the steward appreciates and distributes to the guests.

A wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there and Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the wedding. When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine." Jesus replied, "Woman, why do you involve me, my time has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons. Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water", so they filled them to the brim. When the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine (...) he called the bridegroom aside and said, "Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink. But you have saved the best till now..." (Jn 2:1-11).

The theological vision of the evangelist John relates some miracles as discrete signs of the glory of Christ whose complete manifestation will be his resurrection. In this sense, the transformation of the water into wine is the first discrete sign and others will follow.

I am interested in the human dimensions of this event. The dialogue between Mary and Jesus is unusual. She does not call him "son" nor does he call her "mother", an unusual thing between mother and son. It is also rather shocking that Jesus says: "What does it matter to you and me?" One would suppose that what happened at the feast would have had an impact on both mother and son. We have then various indicators of an unusual conversation that has its humorous side.

All the elements of the scenario provide a generally joyful atmosphere. Jesus and his followers take part in a celebration. They are not involved in a missionary activity nor are they teaching. One supposes that they are eating, drinking and probably dancing, enjoying life together with all the other guests.

II. The feast of the Reign of God

We are always surprised by the festive capacity of those who suffer most. All of us are enchanted by diversion. But those who are most afflicted often display the best humor.

In the sordid world of the poor in Latin America, the faith is beautifully festive. Those most heavily beaten down by unemployment, hunger and cultural discrimination are those who generate more festive spaces and moments and these have been inserted into the Christian tradition. In these multifaceted realities, a basic ingredient is good humor whether displayed in customs such as dances within the framework of religious festivals, or in rich spontaneous forms with their jokes and comic gestures.

In these contexts, one comes to ask: *How did Jesus and the primitive church live and understand festivity?* We will now enter fully into this facet as seen in the actions of Jesus. We do so in connection with the core of his life and message: the eschatological Kingdom of God, which means to say, God's transcendent love in human history. Here we find humorous and kindly nuances. When one reads the Gospels, one finds that the eschatological Kingdom is both an omnipresent theme and an experience. As we continue with our reflections, we will concentrate on the humorous aspects of the eschatological surprise and particularly on *festivity* as the salvific presence of the God of the poor.

Let us take a closer look at the biblical language: Kingdom "*of God*", "*of heaven*", "*of my Father*". These were not common expressions in Judaism at the time of Jesus nor were they in primitive Christianity. These are terms hardly used in the New Testament with the exception of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels where the Kingdom is mentioned 57 times. It is therefore a living, primary theme of development that proceeds from Jesus and his tradition. Its symbolic and eschatological content is also conspicuously prominent. It is difficult to define the kingdom. So it is notable that Jesus chooses to present it in the form of parables and actions such as healing and expelling evil rather than using wise explanations. It has more to do with time than space and can be misunderstood in terms of territory. In terms of time, it includes both present and future: the Kingdom is "already" and "not yet".

What is eschatology? It is the action of God through Jesus and his Spirit, in creation, in the everyday lives of the believing faithful, in the events of history and in eternity. It implies surprise, judgment, admiration, a step toward something radically new with the *joy of salvation* as one aspect of great importance. All of this includes elements of good humor.

We will see the relation between *banquet* and *Kingdom*; then we will enjoy the sayings about the God's eschatology and finally, we will look at texts on the eucharistic meal. Twenty five years after the Last Supper, St. Paul wrote about the joy of eating together as a community and it was he who gave us that marvelous story that begins: "*the Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread...*" (1Cor 11: 17-34).

A- An Enjoyable Banquet

1) You are the men who have stood by me faithfully in my trials...you will eat and drink in my kingdom

We have abundant testimonies today from those who stake everything on a vision and work for a new world; despite obstacles, they smile as they struggle with great hope.

Let's go to the Gospel. We see that though the conflict which Jesus and his followers had to face was harsh, what was offered to the apostolic community was enormously satisfying: to recline on couches, as was the custom at the time, to eat and drink at table in the Kingdom of God. This contrast between the destitution and neediness of the actual moment and the overflowing happiness of the future gives us confidence and makes us smile. Perhaps this also happened with those who

surrounded the Master, those who were disposed to enter into the drama of the passion. Hope and confidence is reaffirmed in the God of the Kingdom- present in the decisive action of Jesus.

Another desirable factor is that the humble fishermen –despised by the authorities of the Jewish people- would be seated on imposing thrones and would be judges of Israel.

“You are those who have stood by me in my trials; and now I confer a kingdom on you, just as my Father conferred one on me: you will eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and you will sit on thrones to judge the twelve tribes of Israel.” (Lk 22:28-30; see also Mt 19:28)

This text is expressed in eschatological and apocalyptic language. It tells us that salvation and the judgment of Israel will come in the midst of crisis. I emphasize that in this dramatic and transcendent context, the Kingdom is presented to us under the attractive image of a feast. It is disarming for me to see the contrast between the opposition and persecution suffered by the Son of God and his disciples on the one hand, and on the other, their incorporation into the Kingdom where together they enjoy eating and drinking at a feast. Add to this, the image of fishermen and the poor and deprived being given the role of judging the tribes of Israel. This of course does not happen in our human world; but it does occur in the plans of God.

An analysis of this text highlights its solemnity; it has the characteristics of a farewell discourse. Jesus says: *“I Promise you”* (Mt 19:28). It also reveals a Christological development: the Father has given Jesus the Kingdom and Jesus disposes of it in favor of the apostles and makes them judges over Israel. This is post-Easter language, based on the apocalyptic, eschatological message that has characterized Jesus. In the midst of all this solemnity, an attractive, festive factor is introduced in the image of eating and drinking in the Kingdom.

2) From the east and from the west they will arrive at the table of the Kingdom...but you will be driven out

Throughout the bloody history of humankind, a lamentable religious fanaticism has persistently attacked and excluded those who possess different beliefs. Today it is uncommon that persons of different cultural and spiritual worlds should share the same table. Tribal, discriminatory habits continue to persevere even in our modern context. In this biblical text it surprises us to hear that people from all races and religions will participate in the Kingdom festivities.

In accord with Jesus’ approach, the most important element is the eschatological prophecy. His mission was directed to the people of Israel and not to the gentiles. The Kingdom is presented under the metaphor of a banquet. At that time, people reclined to eat at a banquet; they did not sit at a table as they do today. Here a surprising announcement is made which brings a smile to the lips. There will be unexpected guests at the banquet: the gentiles who come from the east and the west (Luke adds *from the north and the south* to emphasize universality). And there is a harsh warning: you members of the privileged people of Israel and followers of Jesus (who believe themselves to be saved) will be cast out into the darkness, where you will weep. The contrasts offered are ingenious

“Many will come from the east and the west and will take their places at the table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the Kingdom of Heaven, while the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into the darkness without...” (Mt 8:11-12; Lk 13: 28-29).

This prophecy puts the representatives of Judaism (Abraham, etc.) and the gentiles together in the future Kingdom. It is not a common opinion; it goes far beyond discrimination for religious motives.

In contrast, it is announced that those who will not listen to Jesus, will be excluded from the eschatological feast. This distinction would please neither Jews nor the supposed disciples of Jesus. It is a prophecy of misfortune and loss of favor.

But the text includes a flash of humor aimed at those who think themselves assured of salvation; they are told: many people you cannot even imagine will be seated at table in the Kingdom. This eschatological saying of Jesus has been inserted in two distinct parts in the Gospels: in a miracle story, in the polemic against Israel in Matthew and in a list of proverbs in Luke. The proverb appears to come from the *Q source* and while it terminates in a threat in Matthew, in Luke it concludes with the joyous announcement of their reclining at table in the Kingdom.

We know well that thanks to Paul, the primitive Church extended the mission to the gentile peoples; they were included in the present and future Kingdom. With regard to the pre-Easter perspective of Jesus and his followers, the gentiles could be seen only in the future coming of the Kingdom; for this reason the text speaks in terms of the future.

3) The invited do not wish to enter... bring in the poor and the crippled

If we are invited, we are accustomed to attend enjoyable celebrations. To fail to attend would be ludicrous. That no one would bother to go to a party is unthinkable.

In the case of the evangelical banquet, the fact that the invited do not attend for rather trumped up, capricious reasons surprises us and makes us smile in bewilderment. The feast is prepared but the invited guests do not show up. The search for people to fill the banquet hall begins and they are brought in from street corners and crossroads, the good and the bad, and, according to Luke- the poor and the sick. It strikes us as both shocking and rather funny. This type of parable stirs the imagination, particularly when it treats of a situation far from the ordinary: invited guests who haven't the time to enjoy a fantastic celebration! We are also grasped by the deep sense of the story: the salvific Kingdom of God in terms of a great celebration where the normally excluded are invited to take part in the feast.

One of his fellow-guests said to him: "Blessed is the man who shall feast in the Kingdom of God!" Jesus responded: "There was a man who gave a great supper and sent out many invitations...All of them with one accord began making excuses (...) Quick, go out into the streets and lanes of the city, bring in the poor, the cripples, the blind and the lame... Because I tell you that none of those who were first invited shall taste of my supper." (Lk 14:15-24; Mt 22:1-14)

This parable has artistic, symbolic and doctrinal qualities. We have two versions: in one (Matthew) the kingdom is compared with a wedding banquet; in the second (Luke) Jesus speaks in the form of a parable on the occasion of a special feast. The story is alarming: the invited are "busy" in Luke while in Matthew, they even go as far as to murder those sent out to invite them; this is incredible.

Given these circumstances, the invitation is extended to bystanders in the streets, to the poor and the sick. Divine Love is like that. There is likewise a humorous dimension in this radical presentation of the Kingdom of God. Oddly, the invited have no desire to enjoy themselves at a feast, while the poor and deprived enter with ease. This parable is part of a series about the Kingdom and the eschatological banquet is stressed.

The grave problem regarding the relation between the invited (the chosen people) and those not chosen is also touched upon. Luke 14:24 is categorical: not one of the invited will partake of the meal. Matthew is usually more polemic and harsh with the Jewish people; here Mt 22:14 is gentler: many are called but few are chosen. Matthew also adds the incident of the guest without proper wedding attire and he reiterates that the feast is prepared, which is to say, he insists on the urgency and nearness of salvation.

With respect to the excluded masses, he insists and even obliges them to enter the feast. These deprived people are the poor who because of modesty resist accepting the invitation. The deepest significance of the parable is that the Kingdom of God changes the reality to which we are accustomed; this has an impact upon us and makes us smile. This is said quite simply in the Beatitudes: the Kingdom of God gives happiness to the poor and makes the sad smile. This is the way the God of the Kingdom saves humanity.

B. Eschatological Surprises

1) Happy those who weep... for they shall laugh

Every human being has experienced both a time for tears and for laughter; they are contrary experiences fundamental to the human story. One weeps in an intolerable situation. When we weep, happiness seems absolutely impossible. In the Gospel, reality is inverted; it is totally changed. The unfortunate person is happy; we are assured of this by the proximity of the Kingdom of God. This is not wishful thinking nor is it the sublimation of pain. It is not something promised to those of religious merit but to the poor, to those who weep, to those who hunger; it is to them that God will give salvation. Also notable is the testimony given by Jesus: as he carries out the eschatological work of God. That is to say, the Teacher from Nazareth does not place himself in the center; it is God who does these marvelous works. Our attention is drawn to the fact that the promise is directed to the needy person, without making any reference to whether they fulfill their religious obligations or not. Whoever suffers need is already assured future happiness. This is how God saves. How could we fail to rejoice in this rare and unwarranted salvation. How could we not laugh for joy.

“Blessed are you who weep now for you will laugh” (Lk 6:21; Mt 5:5).

This phrase forms part of the fundamental message of Jesus: the future Kingdom is made present; God saves the poor out of mercy alone. This is the way it is expressed in the Beatitudes and in a series of parables like that of the “banquet”. This is about *Kingdom of God* (Luke) or *of Heaven* (Matthew, who out of respect does not mention the divine name) which benefits concrete humanity: the poor, the hungry and those in pain.

The one who weeps is told: you are happy, because God will give you laughter. What a pleasant surprise! It gladdens our heart.

The commentaries, like that of J. Dupont, explain the Beatitudes as an announcement of the proximity of the Kingdom that favors the spiritually and economically poor. Each phrase states as happy those who certainly are not and promises that concrete and integral joy will come from God.

So it is that the one who will laugh (Luke) and be consoled (Matthew) will experience this both humanly and religiously. Matthew tends to generalize the promise for all believers. Luke is brief, categorical and concrete. The experts also note that in the Old Testament and in the writings from the time of Jesus there were many sayings of this type with regard to happiness. These sayings have significance and authority in the message of Jesus (besides the Beatitudes c.f. Mt 16:17; Lk 11:28; 16:17; 23:29; and Jn 13:17) but are scarce in the rest of the New Testament. This is a sign that the sayings regarding happiness originate, just as they are, from Jesus.

In Jesus, wisdom is joined together with the apocalyptic. J. Meier notes that this message from Jesus does not suggest a reform of the world but rather the end of the world, given the coming of the future Kingdom. It is a surprising message; and in turning things around and changing everything, it expresses a deep and razor-sharp sense of humor.

2) The abusive tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the Kingdom of God before you...

Every society designates some individuals as contemptible and indicates others as examples to imitate. It is scandalous then when those whose lives are *questionable* are considered as first in the plan of God.

The tax collectors, customs officials at the gates of the city and their assistants were in fact abusive Jews. They ordinarily extorted money from the people. Moreover, the taxes would wind up in the hands of a foreign power. They were seen therefore as unjust traitors. Women who were prostitutes were considered despicable by the Jewish law and in the eyes of Jewish chauvinism. According to this saying of Jesus, these people would be the first to arrive in God's Kingdom. This certainly unmasks and annoys the Jewish leaders and other pious people who consider themselves first on the list of those meriting to enter the Kingdom.

The rest of those who listened to Jesus would find this mode of clarifying things rather comical. He could have given other examples of people entering the Kingdom first but those he did give were diametrically opposed to what the mentality of the time would have accepted as decent, saved people. Jesus shows a sharp sense of humor.

"I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the Kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness but you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did." (Mt 21: 31b-32).

Jesus accused the religious authority of a lack of conversion and faith to their very faces. In an incisive way he tells them that those excluded for social (tax collectors) and religious (prostitutes) reasons will enter the Kingdom first. On the one hand, it offends the authority and on the other, causes laughter among his listeners. This saying comes just after the parable of the father and his two sons (Mt 21:28-31a); one that likewise displays humor. The son, who at first refuses, soon follows his father's request; the second son who accepts at first, does not obey in the end. With tongue in cheek, Jesus asks opponents to tell him which of the two did his father's will.

Various disputes of Jesus with religious authorities are included in Mt 21: 23-36. For example the saying of Jesus in 21:31b-32 seems directed against Jewish authorities (21:23). There is an addition with regard to John the Baptist which we also find in Lk 7:29-30. In Matthew's text the Baptist applies to himself what is said to happen to the father of the family in the parable (28-31b). The undesirable respond and the model son fails to fulfill. The contradictions suffered by John are the same faced by the father in the parable. All of this is an attack on the socio-religious order and the manner in which Jesus carries it out has a prophetic facet as well as a humorous dimension. According to J. Jeremias (*The Parables of Jesus*, p.99), the expression "*I tell you truly*" from Mt 21:31b is the usual form used to end a parable. The portion about the father and his two sons include the saying about publicans and prostitutes.

3) It is easier for a camel to pass through ... the eye of the needle

It strikes us as comical that a large animal would pass through something as small as the eye of a needle. We remember that in the region where Jesus and his contemporaries lived, the camel was an even larger animal. To say that something so immense could manage to pass through something so tiny is to speak humorously. On another occasion Jesus also says something rather comical in reference to a camel: he criticized religious dignitaries who strain out a mosquito, a minuscule insect, and swallow a camel, an immense beast (Mt 23:24).

The image of the camel and the needle and its contrast with the situation of the rich man who tends to feel capable and in control of everything, with even the right to be closer to God and more blessed by Him, are both humorous. We remember that this saying comes after the sad story of the man with many possessions who was unable to renounce them as Jesus asked (the three synoptic versions note that this person went away sad). In this scene Jesus says something creative and clever.

Jesus said: "How difficult it is for those who have riches to enter the Kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than that a rich man enter the Kingdom of God (...) What is impossible for humans is possible for God." (Lk 18:24-27; Mt 19: 23-26; Mk 10: 23-27).

Following the dialogue between Jesus and the rich man (only Matthew tells us that he was young), comes that surprising teaching about entering the Kingdom. The imagery is totally exaggerated and humorous: a camel passing through the eye of a needle is declared to be easier than a rich man entering the Kingdom! This phrase –surprising for Jesus’ questioners- has a solution: everything is possible for God. Moreover, both the possibility of a rich man entering the Kingdom as well as that of a camel passing through the eye of a needle, have their humorous side.

The biblical commentators indicate that this is only one of various sayings about entering the Kingdom: some refer to the coming Kingdom, others to the present Kingdom. It is not possible to say with any security if this is about the eschatology of the future or of the present.

In any case, the question is clearly about the difficulty of entering the Kingdom for those who possess great material goods and show pride and greediness. Not only Luke who presents various warnings against riches, but also Matthew and Mark retain this eschatological saying. Luke uses the image of entering the Kingdom three times and says, as does Mark, that it is difficult *for those who have riches*. Matthew puts it abruptly: *for the rich man*.

The final phrase offers a solution to the difficulty: what is impossible for man is possible for God (Luke and Matthew), and the more categorical expression: everything is possible for God (Mark).

The image is extraordinarily comical: the camel passing through the eye of a needle. Various Bible experts think that this saying very probably comes, just as it is, from Jesus. It illustrates his creative, humorous imagination.

4) The Reign of God? It is like a mustard seed... and a tree

Human laughter often breaks out in the face of contrasts: a giant/a dwarf, a fat person/a thin person, beauty/ugliness, etc. Another mechanism is to ask questions whose answers will be surprising or even shocking. In this case the all-powerful salvation is presented under the guise of the tiny seed of the mustard bush. This is an ingenious contrast. In terms of the piety and thinking of Jesus’ contemporaries, it would have been shocking if the response to the question about the majestic Kingdom were *a tiny seed and a tree*. It impacts even us, the believers of today.

We could say that divine salvation is summed up in an image from nature and ordinary human labor. But be careful! The contrast is not with a thing –the seed and the bush- but with the surprising process of the tiny seed that develops finally into a bush, reaching six to nine feet high. The accent is on the final result, called, in exaggeration, a tree.

The heart of the message is that the Kingdom is already in creation and in human history, thanks to the marvelous action of God. Jesus expresses this beautifully:

"What is the Kingdom of God like? What shall I compare it to? It is like a mustard seed that a man took and planted in his garden. It grew, became a tree, and the birds of the air perched in its branches" (LK 13:18-19; Mk 4:30-32; Mt 13:31-32).

This brief explanation of the Kingdom which Luke and Matthew place together with that of the yeast, points to the contrast between the diminutive beginnings and the enormous results. The parables of the mustard seed and the yeast along with six other parables are not accompanied by interpretation or application. It has to do with a brief but forceful eschatological message in symbolic, poetical form. The humorous or comical element lies in the description of the majestic

Kingdom, so admired by the contemporaries of Jesus, as the smallest of seeds that would become a great tree. We owe this marvel to the intervention of God. Jeremiah (c.f. pp.126, 180) emphasizes that neither the seed nor the yeast is synonymous with the Kingdom. Rather he suggests that the final result: a tree filled with birds and the fermented flour, is what happens with the Kingdom. It is not completely on target to call it a parable of growth; it does not describe the growth of the Kingdom. It is rather a contrast between the diminutive presence of the Kingdom and its final splendor (like a tree; like dough to make loaves for more than a hundred persons). The Kingdom is already here in this surprising reality of the diminutive- enormous. C.H. Dodd writes that this is the action of God throughout the course of history (*The Parables of the Kingdom*, pp. 142-144).

Other details: Mark and Matthew tell us that the seed is tiny but there are others even smaller. Luke's brief text appears to be the original version. The eschatological image of birds nesting in its branches refers to those on the margins in Israel, and perhaps the gentiles who are saved.

5) The kingdom of God? ...Is like the yeast... and the fermented flour

When we cook, we find ourselves impressed by the organic processes and the delicious results we enjoy! For example, the process that occurs with the flour that ferments for hours is swift and incredible. It both fascinates us and makes us happy.

I find it ingenious that such a common human activity, a simple, humble woman's task is used as a symbol for the Kingdom of God. We recall the Jewish cultural scene with the imagery emerging out of the sensitivity of the epoch, that saw the Divine Kingship embracing the nature and history of Israel, extending itself finally to the whole universe. Jesus' listeners had their nationalist and political aspirations channeled, in part, through apocalyptic hopes. Religion was enormously important.

Now, Jesus concentrated on the simple, day to day things. He did not confirm their aspirations but rather emphasized salvation already present and to come, the divine gift of the Love that we human beings can grasp in our day-to-day lives. This mystery was proclaimed in an absolutely simple and direct way as we see in the case of the parable of the woman making bread.

This has nothing to do with an esoteric process of salvation; rather, it is what occurs in a simple, surprising way, like the dough that rises in order to become bread. It is familiar language with a symbolic quality and it has its humorous dimension.

He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into three measures of flour, until it fermented all the dough"(Mt 13: 33; Lk 13: 20).

This parable of the Kingdom of God is added to that of the mustard seed; it tells us something similar: the dough grows in a marvelous manner when a small quantity of yeast is added. Now, in the cooking customs of that time, three measures of flour would be needed to make bread for more than a hundred people. The result is indeed fantastic. Once more, the Kingdom carries with it immense surprise. There is also an impact when we compare the Kingdom with the ordinary work of the woman who makes bread. With this humorous, appealing language, the eschatological mystery is explained.

The parable of the yeast is placed just after that of the mustard seed, while in Mk 4:26-32, the parable of the mustard seed is placed together with that of the seed that grows by itself. It is not accompanied with an explanation nor does it constitute an allegory. We cannot say that *Kingdom is equivalent to yeast*.

The object of the parable is to show what the Kingdom is like: transcendent eschatology and already present in the process of human history; and this occurs through the labor of a woman. According to traditional spirituality, Matthew's text speaks of the Kingdom of *Heaven* in order to respect the name of God.

The biblical commentators note the eschatological sense of the parable; it is neither indefinite nor apocalyptic; the *eskaton* is already here as the work of God.

For my part, I cannot overlook the beauty and the appealing imagery of the woman's task in order to communicate the saving strength of God.

6) *The sower went out ... he harvested thirty, sixty, one hundred... the seed is the word of God*

On listening to this parable, one is filled with admiration. It is a direct and beautiful mode of speech.

It was not common during the time of Jesus (outside of a few exceptions) to teach in this way. The parable is an excellent artistic, spiritual, theological, pedagogical piece of work.

In this case, as in others, the fantastic harvest represents the surprising presence of the Kingdom of God; it has to do with an eschatological parable.

With respect to the narrative, in the Palestine of that time the sowing was done before the ploughing (the sower is not a fool who puts the seed where he shouldn't); and the normal harvest was ten times the planting. But here we are told it is 30, 60, 100 times more, which is to say, something incredible that delights and fills us with admiration. The contrast between the difficult planting and the great harvest has its humorous side.

Then, a psychological explanation is constructed about the different types of people to whom the Message is given and for whom fidelity is difficult. In the face of this, the messenger need not despair.

"The sower went out to sow his seed... Some fell along the path; the birds came and ate it up. Another part fell on rocky places... they withered because they had no root. Some fell among thorns... and they bore no grain. Some fell on good soil... and produced 30, others 60 and others 100... Don't you understand this parable... The sower sows the word" (Mk 4:3-8, 14-20; Mt 13: 3-8, 18-23; Lk 8: 5-8, 11-15).

The abundant harvest gives us a clue that the parable has to do with the Kingdom. It is about two stories: the original parable, an oral tradition predating Mark, and the allegorical explanation which may have come from Jesus or from the primitive Church.

The first part, which does come from Jesus, contrasts the labor of the sower with the extraordinary harvest; the listeners would have enjoyed hearing this surprising story. The second part which may have come from the primitive Church, also shows a delicate humor: compare the grandeur of the Word of God with the simple and unpretentious seed planted in the earth. This manner of speaking about the work of God does not correspond with the usual teaching imparted by the experts of the Law.

They are then different stories. The first part is parabolic having an Aramaic linguistic background and elements proper to Palestine. The second is allegorical with language in common with the rest of the New Testament: it both speaks of *Logos* and contains the teaching of Paul.

In the message of Jesus, the harvest is usually compared with the Kingdom which erupts in a marvelous way; then it is the primitive Church which develops the perspective of the Word (cf.. Jeremias, op.cit. pp. 95-98). Our attention is called by the fact that the Word is imaged as seed planted in the earth; in contrast with the legalistic doctrine and religious self-exaltation so common during the time of Jesus. This too makes us smile.

7) *The Lord and master serves... the servants*

In each social order, it is taken for granted that the important personage must be served by his subordinates. Never, or almost never does a powerful personage serve a meal to common folk; to say the contrary sounds absurd, like a sort of joke.

On the other hand, an alternative order might be suggested: each attends to the rest, and preferentially those considered the least important. It seems to me that this is the direction in which the Gospel points us.

We have the parables in which the doorkeeper (or many servants) awaits the arrival home of an important person in order to serve him. The “logic” in each unjust social order is that the “inferior” person serves the meal and responds to any requirement of the “superior” person. This is not evangelical.

Luke’s text tells us that the Master will serve each servant, one by one (cf. also Lk 22:27, Jn 13:14). This is “scandalous” behavior on the part of Jesus. For the multitude normally obliged to wait on the rich, the message of Jesus makes them happy and causes them to smile. It is worth adding that the key element in these texts is to wait and watch in order to receive the immanent arrival of the lord, which the primitive Church interpreted as the *parousia* of the Lord Jesus.

“Be like men waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them.”(Lk 12:35-38; Mk 13: 33-37; Mt 24: 42).

This parable of the *parousia* (in two versions) puts the emphasis on the arrival of the important person. Mark’s version appears to be the most original: the porter is awake and prepared. Luke’s version demands that all the servants (the Christian community) be waiting and watching for the arrival of the Son of Man; only Luke introduces the allegorical phrase of the master who serves his servants.

Matthew also presents the Christological aspect (24: 42): to be watching and waiting for the day of the Lord. The message of the Christ who serves is sharp and clear in Lk 22:27: *“I am among you as one who serves”*. Also at the Last Supper, according to Jn 13: 14: *“I the Lord have washed your feet..”*

With regard to those to whom the parable is addressed, the original version appears to be directed to the common folk whom Jesus warned to be prepared for the coming of salvation. The version developed by Luke and Matthew is directed to the community that must keep watch between the first and second Coming of the Lord. It is a Christological teaching and presents a Jesus who serves. This attractive feature is that a master would be so attentive with his servants and that although he arrives tired and late, he serves them their meal, one by one. This destroys the schemas of social and patriarchal superiority. It is a salvific happening with a humorous dimension.

8) Sad... at a feast?

The rich and powerful, of both yesterday and today, inculcate a sad, guilt-filled, sacrificial religiosity. All this is in contrast with the joyful existence of a believing people. One of the most important symbolic actions of Jesus and his followers was to avoid the practice of fasting and privation, as was common among devotional groups during his time. Why? Because salvation was already present. That makes us happy.

It is not fitting that one should weep and fast if the groom is already present and the feast has begun. Once more, the loving Kingdom of God, described as celebration, changes human comportment. Instead of fasting, one should eat and share joy. Any good celebration carries with it interesting conversation, pleasure, smiles and integral well-being.

In this passage we once again have a delightful dialogue around questions and complaints from John’s followers or the Pharisees and scribes: *“Why do your disciples not fast as ours do?”* Skillfully, Jesus introduces another question, which changes the ground of the dispute: *¿Can those*

invited to the feast... remain sad? This disarms his opponents. Jesus faces up to a trick question with humor.

Then John's disciples came and asked him: "How is it that we and the Pharisees fast but your disciples do not fast?" Jesus answered "How can the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them?" The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; then they will fast" (Mt 9: 14-15; Mk 2: 18-20; Lk: 5: 33 –35).

The symbolic action of not fasting (that is to say not acting as do the pious groups) has a greater impact than many words might. With good reason the scandalized disciples of John come to Jesus to ask why his disciples do not follow this religious custom.

This is due to the fact that the time of salvation has already begun. Those who fasted (the disciples of John and the Pharisees) were preparing in this way for the future salvation. Jesus and his disciples do not have this attitude, since the Messiah, the bridegroom of the eschatological feast, is already present. The dialogue in its origins has been controversial: the ingenious question put by Jesus disqualifies the insidious question of his opponents. It has a certain comic quality.

The question is directed to Jesus by the disciples of John the Baptist (Matthew and Mark) or by the Pharisees and scribes (Luke); both sectors felt disconcerted by the action of Jesus. He appears to resolve their problem by means of a resourceful saying. Some time later, the reflection of the Church elaborates the allegory of the bridegroom, the Messiah; and the three synoptics add that the bridegroom having been carried off (by his crucifixion) his followers will now fast.

9) *Whoever does not have, even what he has ... will be taken away.*

This proverb makes us shudder. We instinctively say: this isn't just! Why should the one who already has receive even more, while the destitute loses the little he possesses? This is apparently a saying from popular wisdom used by Jesus and his followers. Since it is a shocking statement, it provokes some uneasiness; on the other hand, interpreting it as an absurd saying causes laughter. It is necessary to take the content of the text into consideration.

This has to do with various types of parables about the coming of the Savior (the *parousia*) in which this strange saying is inserted. There is no doubt that it served to make listeners shudder. Since the coming of salvation is surprising, a saying of this nature has the pedagogical value of disturbing believers. It raises the question: What is going on here? Emphasis is placed on the fact that the one who has not, even what he has (but we have said that he has nothing) will be taken from him...

Why is something said that is so different from what one expects from the God of Jesus Christ? It is a proverb that unsettles us, provokes anxiety, and by accenting contrasts, becomes humorous.

Jesus also said to them:- "Consider carefully what you hear. With the measure you use it will be measured to you - and even more. Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him." (Mk 4: 24-25; Mt 25:14-30; Lk 8:16-18, 19:11-27).

We will concentrate on the proverb (he who has will be given and he who has nothing loses even what he has). It may have been directed to the religious leaders of the Jewish nation: they thought they had everything and the little they have will be taken from them.

Then the proverb has been inserted –by those who transmitted it orally or by those who edited the Gospels- at the end of different parables. The objective may have been to offer a general teaching to the Christian community to direct them to continue awaiting the *Parousia* of the Lord. (In Matthew, the insert is obvious since the proverb interrupts the thread that unites verses 28 and

30). That is to say, the proverb has its own wisdom significance; and it has been inserted into other messages.

We are referring to messages about measuring out (Mk 4), the giving of talents and coins (Mt 25, Lk 19) and the lamp (Lk 8). In Matthew's case, there are Christological elements: entering the master's feast (25: 21, 23). Some are parables of the *Parousia* that is delayed (Mt 25 and Lk 19 in particular); for this reason Christians are in a time of testing and must use their gifts well. Therefore, in the case of the one who does not cultivate hope, it will be taken from him; he who does so will be recompensed; Luke says something similar about the one who places the lamp in a place where it serves others. Mark says the same about the one who does the measuring out to others. All of this gives new meaning to the proverb and offers amusing elements.

10) Neither here nor there... the Kingdom is among you!

At times, human beings can be “*off course*,” “*out of line*,” they can fail to notice the obvious and *put their foot in it*. In these situations humor breaks out spontaneously. This often happens to us on the religious level.

In the circles in which Jesus moved, his followers were often off base and the religious leaders frequently missed the point.

We know that Jesus never referred to himself as “king” in this world (John the Evangelist attributes this title to him on two occasions). With respect to the Kingdom of God, this was not presented as favorable to the rich or the pious.

In this context, the dialogue with the Pharisees regarding the establishment of the kingdom is notable and has a humorous vein. The question put to Jesus by the Pharisees goes in one direction, while his response takes another and this adds a humorous ingredient.

The question refers to when the Kingdom will come (a malicious question because Jesus was insistently proclaiming its proximity and indeed its presence) and tends to disqualify his efforts to establish it. The Master's response gives no details of date or place but rather affirms that the Kingdom comes imperceptibly and is already in the midst of his contemporaries. It is a very genial pedagogical dialogue.

“Once having been asked by the Pharisees when the Kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, ‘The Kingdom of God will come imperceptibly, nor will people say’, ‘Here it is’ or ‘There it is’, because the Kingdom of God is within you (Lk 17:20-21).”

Many Jews judged only themselves worthy of the benevolence and the Kingdom of Yahweh. The Kingdom was wrongly interpreted as the privilege of one nation with ingredients of economic, military and patriarchal power. Many passages of the Old Testament point out this narrow vision of the Kingdom, while others present the Kingdom as universal, without exceptions and preferentially linked to people on the margins. These scenes make this saying of Jesus appear curious and amusing. “It will come imperceptibly...”

In the constant debate with his questioners (in this case the Pharisees), Jesus explains the Kingdom principally with actions (eating with sinners, refusing to fast, etc.) and with parables. We only have one text (Luke 17: 20-21) which speaks of a possible time-space position.

This saying of Jesus does not assume the terms presented by the Pharisees; on the contrary, he affirms the mystery of the Kingdom which has already come, imperceptibly (something that would seem ridiculous for sectors of nationalistic, ethnocentric Jews). The same is said later to the circle of the disciples (Lk 17:23). Moreover, Jesus announced that the Kingdom was already “in your midst”. That is to say, those who asked the question look foolish because they failed to notice what was happening. It is laughable.

The message of the Kingdom then cannot be used to sanctify this or that; rather it should be grasped as a gratuitous gift already operating in human history. Given the dominant mentality of the times, the eschatological saying of Jesus has its amusing side.

11) John: Are you the one who is to come?... Jesus: Happy is he who is not scandalized in me.

Once more we have a genial game of questions and answers. The New Testament writings include many queries. This is notable in the dialogues where Jesus is involved. The synoptic narratives tell us a great deal through skillful questions and very clever answers. It appears that the imprisoned John did not know the eschatological role of Jesus and for that reason sent his emissaries. The message of John was God's immanent judgment of a sinful Israel: he warned of this! John had baptized Jesus; this man was his teacher in the prophetic task; but Jesus took another direction and accented the merciful work of God (through his ministry he made the blind see, cleansed lepers, etc) and announced the joyous good news to the poor. This attitude moves rather toward joy.

Before the question (which smacks of a lack of confidence), Jesus did not evade the summons; rather he changed the focus, from the somber to the luminous. Then follows the saying with the form of a blessing; it is directed to John and his disciples (not to a general audience): do not distance yourselves from the faith; do not be scandalized by this work of salvation. Jesus could have responded more harshly. He does it gently: inviting them not to make a mistake about God's work and to be happy in His presence.

When John heard in prison what Jesus was doing, he sent his disciples to ask him: "Are you the one who is to come or should we expect someone else?" Jesus replied: "Go back and report to John what you see and hear. The blind receive sight, the lame walk and the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear the dead are raised and the good news is preached to the poor. Blessed is the man who is not scandalized in me" (Mt 11: 2-6; Lk 7:18-23).

The dialogue between the followers of Jesus and John the Baptist has an eschatological content: on one hand it refers to the person of Jesus, on the other his response refers to the joyous Good News; the final point is a gentle but firm response from Jesus to his teacher: you are blessed if you are not scandalized in me. John's message inspired fear; Jesus put the accent on the salvific work of God. As the saying, so too the content, and Jesus' mode of treating John, all have genial, rather affable ingredients.

This has to do with an apothegm, a narration (John sends his disciples), and a pronouncement by Jesus (in which he uses prophecies from Isaiah 24-27, 56-66). This material from Q comes to us in a brief version (Matthew) and in a slightly more extensive text (Jesus performs miracles and then speaks, LK 7:21).

The commentators also note that the attitude of John after receiving this message is not provided; his disciples continued with John's vision and there were tensions between the disciples of Jesus and John. In this context, we are particularly impressed by the amiable attitude of Jesus.

C- JOYFUL EUCHARIST

1) Five thousand people... You yourselves give them something to eat

When someone goes beyond the expected limits in anything we often refer to this in colloquial speech as "going too far". Well, in this biblical scene, Jesus went too far. He gives orders to feed the crowds; his disciples, with a similar sense of humor ask if they are going to buy bread. This dialogue between Jesus and his collaborators is humorous. What is happening in this scene?

Jesus feels compassion (Mk 6:34, 8:2; Mt 15:32) for the crowd suffering hunger in a desolate place; he prays and distributes the bread and fish.

The accent is not on the multiplication. The important thing is that Jesus gives food to hungry people; this will be valued by the community which will celebrate the Eucharistic Supper. Jesus did not only speak about the Kingdom –feast; he broke bread with sinners, distributed bread and fish; celebrated the paschal supper: all of which has eschatological weight.

It is marvelous how God has become present in the midst of hungry humanity. The dialogue is also amusing: “send the people away!”, “give them bread”, “are we to buy 200 *denarius* worth of bread?” (this amount would equal what 200 workers would earn in a day), “ how much do they have?”, “5 loaves and 2 fish”. The humor of it provokes a smile.

When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them... His disciples came to him and they said: “Send the people away so they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat”. Jesus responded: “You give them something to eat.” They said to him: “Are we going to buy 200 denarius worth of bread to feed them?” He asked them: “How many loaves do they have? Go and see.” When they found out they told him: “Five loaves and 2 fish” Then Jesus directed them to have the people sit down in groups on the grass... Then he took the 5 loaves and the fish and lifting his eyes to heaven, he blessed and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to his disciples to set before the people. He also divided the fish among them all. They all ate and were satisfied and the disciples gathered up twelve baskets filled with pieces of bread and fish. The number of the men who had eaten was five thousand. (Mk 6:32-44; 8:1-10; Mt 14:13-21, 15:32-39; Lk 9: 10-17; Jn 6: 1-15).

The narrative of the feeding of the crowd is found twice in Mark and Matthew and once in Luke and John. These include allusions to the Eucharist (blessing and thanksgiving); the background is the formal supper of Judaism.

The scientific commentaries emphasize the fact that all the sources (Mark, Q, Matthew, Luke and John) mention this tradition. The miracle is suggested but the eschatological fact has greater weight. There is a certain influence of similar instances in the Old Testament; the importance of the Eucharistic narrative and the rite carried out by the community (thanksgiving; the reiterated mention of bread and the less frequent mention of fish). It is probable that the repeated texts in Mark and Matthew refer to the same event (transmitted in two versions: five loaves and five thousand people, seven loaves and four thousand people, etc.) The central point is the festive meal, thanks to the presence of the Kingdom, through the ministry of Jesus.

2) I will not drink ... until I drink once again in the Kingdom

Today, one can verify that there is solemnity but very little joy in the usual way the Eucharist is carried out; Christians “hear Mass” or “assist at Mass”. There is little enjoyment of the Kingdom and its celebration.

It would be worthwhile to reassume the experience of Jesus and his community (Mk 14:25; Acts 2:46- Eucharist, breaking of bread and a joyful supper). In the time of Jesus, it was not common for poor folk to drink wine at meals. The first communities broke bread and had a feast. This marginal sector is assured, prophetically, that the coming Kingdom would be a joyful experience: in symbolic terms, the community would drink the best wine. Moreover, they are told that this is not an abstract, spiritualized kingdom; it is about a great feast; it will happen today and in the future. This is said when the life of the Master is seen as an apparent failure: he is on the path to crucifixion and his best friends have dispersed and run away. In the midst of these circumstances the prophetic and eschatological expression of Jesus is certainly a motive for joy. One can imagine the community smiling and even acclaiming their Master.

And he said to them: "This is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many. I tell you the truth, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it anew in the Kingdom of God" (Mk 14:24- 25; Mt 26:28-29; Lk 22: 17-18).

This is the narrative of the Last Supper. It is given us by each Evangelist with their individual details and expressions. It is about the paschal feast where the Son of God instituted the Eucharist. It is a joyous moment though it lies within the account of the Passion. One detail in this narrative that has a special significance since it refers to the Kingdom to come, is a peculiar phrase from Mark 14:25 (Mt 26:29; Lk 22:18).

Jesus tells them that it will be his last festive meal, however, in the future Kingdom of God he will again drink wine in the community of his disciples. The situation is dramatic but the future is happy, thanks be to God. This phrase from Mk 14:25 (Mt 26:29; Lk 22:18) is a formal prophecy indicated by the phrase: "I tell you that..." Good exegetical commentaries show that this may have been an independent expression of the narrative of the institution of the Eucharist but later united with it because of its significance.

It is given us as the scene of the last festive meal of Jesus before his death. At the same time we are assured that in the coming Kingdom there will be feasting (there will be drinking of wine). The expression "in" the Kingdom makes reference to a future time rather than to anything spatial. Luke's version offers its own shades of meaning: Jesus will not drink wine until he arrives in the future Kingdom.

In synthesis, this is a precious passage which affirms the certainty of the Kingdom, full of joy and good humor, in the paschal Eucharistic meal itself.

III. Faith in God and confrontation with Satan

The poorer, deprived sectors of society have always had a concept of the sacred which included joyful characteristics, seldom considered by formal religion. These have to do with representations assumed in curious forms of enculturation by the faith message. For example, God's joy is accentuated in the festive traditions of each place and community. With regard to the devil, alliances with the rich of this world are attributed to him; in this way, the oppressed feel free to criticize, sneer and mock the rich, along with anyone else who acts arrogantly.

The presence of God as well as the work of Satan elicit many questions and interpretations. With regard to this we can count on solid comments. Christian revelation presents us with a living, liberating, true God, devoid of a transcendental dualism between the benevolent and the malignant, as though these were opposite poles with similar power. The New Testament shows how Jesus and his disciples conquer the forces of evil, especially through exorcism and the healing of illness. Rejoicing with God and laughing at the devil seem very liberating to me. On the one hand, the Christian community recognizes the right to be happy, thanks be to God. That is to say, the reality of the divine is not represented by fear and solemnity that paralyzes and dehumanizes but rather, by confidence without limits, the healthy pleasure of living and the festival of faith. All of this is a source of liberation.

On the other hand, the devil is the object of scorn, demystification and fine comic remarks. For some, it is a motive for terror, an instigator of guilt, a motor for sin that destroys freedom. But many people take the threats of hell fire and the tricks of the malignant with a sense of humor.

Now let us go to the synoptic material. There are no jokes about God or the devil. Nonetheless there are humorous and surprising elements. I have selected a few elements that have caught my attention.

With regard to God, various texts are invitations to enjoy his salvific presence. Jesus speaks to his Father and teaches about God in marvelous language. God is "*Abba*", an Aramaic expression, "Daddy", as Jesus called Him (Mk 14:36); and he showed believers that the Savior is "Our Daddy". This Aramaic expression does not appear often but the sense of "God as Father" is characteristic of the prayer, life and message of the Galilean Teacher. In the face of the false gods of yesterday and today and the search for meaning in the midst of a chaotic world, the message that God is the "daddy" who excludes no one, loves all and offers them salvation is marvelously delightful. This is news that gives us infinite joy and happiness. I will also comment on the passage about God being content with His son and the pleasing criticism of those who speak to God but do not act coherently.

With respect to Satan, let us pay attention to the deeds and sayings in which Jesus is competent and challenging. His behavior before the tempter has humorous aspects. There are also comic characteristics in his struggle against the evil of Satan and in the argument with those who accused him of being possessed. In these affairs it is well to situate oneself within the mentality of that time, so different from ours. That universe was peopled by angels and devils. Physical illnesses, mental and emotional disorders were attributed to the latter. The Lord confronts these powers and liberates people. This is the most important thing. It is also fitting to take into account a few humorous features. If one takes the malignant seriously, one is tangled in his nets. It is better to keep a certain distance and laugh at the one who does damage.

With regard to God, appreciation of the fact that His being is the never-ending source of joy, helps the believing community to live deeply the experience of liberation. Rejoicing in life and struggling for liberation are not so different from each other; on the contrary they have a great deal in common.

A- Jesus' Daddy

1) God is... a Daddy

Every epoch and culture and, indeed, each individual constructs its own images of divinity and the sacred. Some think that God is the opposite of the material while others sanctify the human; there are innumerable representations. Many visualize God as solemn, severe and all-powerful. There is little room for joy and good humor in the face of God.

In the time of Jesus, the Jewish people associated God with the Torah, the Law and with its history as the chosen people. Fears and apocalyptic longings associated with divine action in the immediate future were rife, while a moralistic, individualistic piety was promoted by power groups. There was also authentic faith in God as Yahweh and in response to the message of Jesus.

I wish to emphasize the newness of the message of Jesus about God. God is invoked as *Abba* (Daddy), source of life, near to us and merciful. Jesus taught his followers and those who listened to him how to treat with God, how to pray to Him without a lot of words. With respect to this, Jesus says something humorous about those who pray to God as though He did not know their needs and feelings. It has been said that God is closer to us than we are to ourselves! He is *Abba*. He is no austere, severe monarch, nor is He a sacred concept or a law that finds us guilty. He is our “Daddy God”. So it is with affection and joy that Jesus calls on Him; and in the same way we joyfully call upon Him today.

And when you pray do not babble on like the gentiles, for they think they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him. This is how you should pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil (Mt 6: 7-13; Lk 11:1-4; Mk 14:36; Lk 23:46).

This prayer synthesizes the spirituality proposed by Jesus. This spirituality pulls together elements from the Old Testament, particularly hope in the Kingdom, faith in the Creator who gives the food necessary for each day and the forgiveness of debts in the spirit of the Jubilee. An innovation is found in the invocation to the Father made by Jesus, Son of God, and taught to those who are sons and daughters of the Lord. The relation with God as Father contains a special note of proximity, confidence and son-ship; for this Jesus employs an Aramaic term “*Abba*”, translated as “daddy”. St. Paul also gives witness to this spirituality. *For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear but you received the spirit of son-ship. And by him we cry “Abba, Father (Rom 8:15; Gal 4:7).*

This invocation contradicts all representations that disfigure God’s way of acting. At the time of Jesus and throughout the history of Christianity, God’s way of acting has been blemished as a sacred object, a law, an idea, as a distant insubstantial being. In the face of these images reverence, fear, human, divine, natural and supernatural dualism are appropriate. There is room for neither incarnation nor the joy of salvation.

Regarding Judaism, there was not only legalism; there was above all, the Yahweh tradition in its history. This is expressed in the creedal statement: *My father was a wandering Aramean and he went down into Egypt...and lived there and became a great nation, powerful and numerous... we cried out to the Lord ...and he brought us out of Egypt... and gave us this land flowing with milk and honey...(Deut 26:5-10).* But there was also much terror in regard to the divine; they feared to even speak his name and spoke rather of angels and the Kingdom of Heaven in order not to say the word God. This changed with Jesus.

The text of the Christian prayer comes to us in two versions. Matthew introduces it with the humorous words about people who use too many words when they pray; Luke introduces it with the disciples’ request that Jesus teach them to pray. Matthew has seven phrases in his version of the prayer (as he has seven beatitudes along with various other lists of seven elements -a number indicating something complete); Luke on his part has only five petitions.

2) *I am well pleased... with my beloved son*

Let's look at this reciprocity. Not only does Jesus speak lovingly to God and about God. The Father also responds to His beloved son with great affection. We see this at the scene of his baptism in the Jordan River. The Bible does not register how Jesus and his Father speak to each other. There are only minimal asides such as: Jesus calling Him "*Abba*", when he rejoiced in the Revelation given to the little ones, when he prayed to Him on the cross or when the Father spoke a few words to His son at the Jordan River.

The scene takes us by surprise. The heavens are opened. One expects thunder and lightening or a deafening, commanding voice or just about anything that would crush us from head to foot. But it does not happen this way. What we hear is a soft declaration of love. This is my dear son in whom I am well pleased.

As soon as Jesus was baptized he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened ... And a voice from heaven said: "This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased" (Mt3 16-17; Mk 1: 9-11; Lk 3:21-22).

The three synoptics have the baptism scene and the words directed to Jesus. Mark indicates that Jesus came from Nazareth to be baptized by John. Matthew includes the dispute with John in which John insists that Jesus baptize him. Luke notes that Jesus prays when he is baptized and the Spirit descends upon him in the form of a dove. In Mark, God speaks only to Jesus while in Luke and above all in Matthew the message has a public character.

One should not forget the context. John the Baptist is performing a Jewish act of purification in the river waters and announcing and preparing the arrival of the Messiah. Jesus of Nazareth expresses the attitude of a pious Jew who, along with his countrymen, seeks pardon for sin and participates in the Baptist's ritual. This manifests the humanity of Jesus and it is in these circumstances that the revelation of God is given. The baptismal scene brings both the revelation of Jesus as Son and the very character of his mission, guided by the Spirit. It has then a trinitarian content.

Finally, the expression of God's pleasure with His Son comes after the most important expression, "beloved son" (*agapetós* in Greek). To this is added the joy of God. The form of the expression may come from Isaiah 42:1 which says: "*my chosen in whom my soul delights*". In any case, it reaffirms the previous statement (the beloved Son) with whom God the Father is extremely content, to the very foundation of His soul!

3) *What counts is not who speaks but the one who acts!*

Despite secularism and the religious crisis there are numberless lectures about God. So many different things said about God and so many rituals and ceremonies referring to God are accompanied with many questions.

Why do those who explain most about God simply turn Him into one more thing and seem insensitive to Mystery? Why are so many young people out of sync with sacred language? Why do those who say they represent God have so little credibility and often do not act in accord with their faith?

What did Jesus feel when they called him Lord? We do not know. But we can count on one sharp warning made by the Master. On one occasion, he becomes annoyed with the words of his contemporaries. He makes a very categorical distinction between the speech and action of the believer. He says: *you call me Lord but you do not act as I have taught you to live*. He says this in the form of an accusatory question, as we will see later on.

In this context, those who do the most speaking in religious terms were the power groups that will soon reject him and contribute to his death. If the criticism of Jesus were directed to these

groups, then the simple people would have enjoyed the prophetic warning made by the Teacher. Perhaps the criticism was directed to those who prophesized and pretended to perform miracles (Cf Mt 7:22ff). In any case, Jesus exacts consistency:

Why do you call me Lord, Lord but do not do as I say? (Lk 6:42-49; Mt7: 21-27).

This saying is followed by the parable concerning the person who builds a house (on rock or on insecure land); this parable explains perfectly the critical phrase directed against those who called him Lord. In Matthew's version, he makes reference to the Kingdom, the central theme in the life of Jesus; moreover, the saying of Jesus comes after the complaints of those who feel accused (those who prophesy and do miracles using the name of the Lord); and then a short response follows: *I do not know you, get out of my sight!* These are shocking and prophetic phrases. They are also well received and can bring a smile to the lips of those who cannot support hypocrisy and inconsistency. Once again, Jesus uses questions as a way of talking to people. This is about a question that disturbs and troubles the existing order; in this case it unmasks the dishonesty of the pious and exacts consistency.

This saying comes to us in a formula that seems to follow the mission practice of Jesus. It was the post resurrection community that called Jesus *Lord* and emphasized the need to put his teachings into practice. This occurs in many synoptic texts in which the source material comes from oral tradition and the written form reflects mainly the communities formed after the Resurrection of the Lord. On comparing Luke's version with that of Matthew, this last (with its reference to the kingdom) may be closer to the expression that comes from Jesus.

In this text, as in the rest, we are emphasizing the humorous dimension. In this case we notice the way the contrast is made between speaking about God, on the one hand, and, not acting consistently on the other. The incongruity becomes a motive for laughter.

B- A dispute with the evil one

1) The wisdom of Jesus before Satan

The evangelists present us with a conversation full of ingenuity. On the one hand the devil provokes Jesus; and on the other, he wisely responds with arguments taken from the sacred books. It is a passionate dispute.

There is no doubt that Satan is very clever as seen in his tempting a hungry man with the miracle of bread. But Jesus is more astute and conquers with his arguments. It is the devil who has to leave. We can say that Jesus mocks his adversary in his wise manner of triumphing over him.

The scene offers theological directions. It illustrates the hostility that Jesus suffered in his ministry. He was asked for extraordinary signs of divine power used in his favor. Jesus did not fall into that temptation. He was the *Suffering Servant*. This is most important. We can also appreciate the literary form; the debate between the evil one and the Master of Life in which Jesus shows his veracity and his shrewdness and even his ingenuity and humor

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." Jesus answered, "It is written: Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God" Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God", he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written: "He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone." Jesus answered him, "It is also written: Do not put the Lord your God to the test" Again the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all

the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. "All this I will give you", he said, "if you will bow down and worship me". Jesus said to him, "Away from me Satan! For it is written: "Worship the Lord your God and serve Him only." Then the devil left him and angels came and ministered to him (Mt 4: 1-11; Lk 4: 1-13; Mk 1: 16-18).

The narrative of the temptations summarizes the hostility shown to Jesus by those who wished to see him as the Messiah for the sake of power and finally rejected him as a humble prophet of the Kingdom. This problematic accompanied Jesus during his entire active life. It is probable that the evangelists concentrated this extensive and complex problematic in one scene with Satan as the adversary of Jesus. He had many adversaries who took upon themselves a diabolical role as seen in this account. So then, this is not a scene that transpired literally as it is narrated. Rather it is a dramatic narrative which synthesizes various elements throughout the ministry of Jesus, in which his adversaries used diabolical means. The form of the narrative also uses texts from Deuteronomy in which Satan is confronted in a style similar to the rabbinical debates. Christians who knew these texts could have elaborated the entire narrative. It is well constructed.

The three temptations make reference to how at times the Israelite people abandoned the correct path. In the desert they dreamed of the bread of Egypt instead of confiding in the manna from heaven. Jesus does not fall into this temptation. Israel is also tempted, like Jesus, to use messianic power in its favor, and dazzle others with spectacular gestures. Finally, Israel succumbed under religious powers and cults that were not their own. Jesus does not surrender nor adore another; only God.

The drama culminates with the victory of truth over the evil one and this truth is presented through an ingenious dialogue.

2) He casts out the demons ... and does not allow them to speak

Today there are contradictory positions with regard to the diabolic. The secularized mentality and some contemporary psychologists do not believe in it. On the other hand there is a great deal of alarm and discussion about demonic forms in the modern world, for example in certain forms of rock music.

Considering the New Testament context, experiences and beliefs regarding the devil abound. The data indicates that Jesus carried on a ministry of exorcism and a number of his miracles benefited people who were possessed.

His objective was to show forth salvation and not demonstrate spectacular qualities or prove his divinity. Rather, because of the presence of the Kingdom and through the labor of Jesus, healing is brought about. Biblical material contains texts which summarize this activity.

In general phrases and in a few cases of demonic expulsion there is a curious detail: he does not allow them to speak. They may not speak of Jesus as the Messiah or as the Son of God. This corresponds to the manner in which Jesus and the Gospel narratives maintain the "messianic secret". He dedicated himself to announcing the Kingdom and to carrying out his mission together with his disciples; he did not involve himself in the role of a powerful Messiah. The curious scene shows possessed people crying out and Jesus on his part insisting on their silence.

When the sun was setting the people brought Jesus all who had various kinds of sickness, and laying his hands on each one, he healed them. Moreover, demons came out of many people shouting, "You are the Son of God. But he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak because they knew he was the Christ" (Lk 4:40-41; Mk 1:32-34; Mt 8:1).

The merciful action of Jesus toward so many sick people is a constant and not an exceptional thing in his life and mode of giving testimony of God's love. With regard to the healing

of the possessed through exorcism, this appears in the three synoptics; the Gospel of John does not depict exorcisms. The most vivid and elaborated stories are in Mark's narrative.

Biblical studies dispute whether these are historical narratives or are constructed on the foundation of the practice of Jesus but put together and adorned by those who transmitted his work. John Meier holds the cautious position that historical elements exist in various of these cases of exorcism.

Mark as well as Luke contain these summaries of the practices of Jesus. In the cited text, Luke has Jesus placing his hands on each sufferer (4:40). This is a reiterated fact in many specific healing stories. With respect to the demons, they cry out "Son of God"; Mark's version simply says that the demons "knew him". Luke also adds the commentary concerning the identity of the Christ (Messiah), something that corresponds to the post-resurrection time.

3) Can Satan drive out Satan? If I act by Beelzebub, by whom do your people drive them out?

The fact that Jesus was accused of being an agent of the devil causes deep pain to all believers. And how would he have felt about it?

We have no data with regard to his feelings. But we do know his intelligence and his witty mode of response to such accusations. He does not express himself as one offended but rather he leaves his adversaries looking foolish with his adroit rejoinders. Those who listened to this argument would have enjoyed the courage and liberty of Jesus in the face of those who wished to destroy him.

The point of departure is the cure of a possessed mute (Matthew also adds "blind"). Then follows a long and succulent polemic. Jesus terminates with something fundamental: if I drive out demons it is because the Kingdom of God has come upon you. The majority of Biblical scholars consider this phrase the most genuine expression of the message of Jesus about the Kingdom already present.

With regard to the humorous aspect of the polemic, the teachers of the Law and the Pharisees attack Jesus as the agent of Beelzebub, one of the Canaanite divinities (Baal the prince). Jesus turns the discussion around: if this were so, Satan would be against the devil. This is absurd. Not only that. If this were so, other people, collaborators of the very people calumniating Jesus, who perform exorcisms, would do so as agents of Satan. A fantastic argument!

Jesus defends himself from the attacks by demonstrating the ridiculous stance of his calumniators. Without a doubt, it is a witty argument.

They brought him a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute and Jesus healed him...and all the people were astonished and said: "Could this be the Son of David?" But when the Pharisees heard them they said: "It is only by Beelzebub the prince of demons that this fellow drives out demons." Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them: "If Satan drives out Satan he is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? And if I drive out demons by Beelzebub by whom do your collaborators drive them out? ...But if I drive them out by the Spirit of God, then the Kingdom of God has come upon you" (Mt 12: 22-28; Lk 11:14-20; Mk 3: 22-26).

The narrative of the exorcism is extremely brief. The possessed (and blind) mute is healed and begins to speak and to see. Then immediately the discussion begins. Some are left with open mouths. The enemies of Jesus react rapidly and accuse him of being an agent of Beelzebub, a Canaanite name to designate Satan.

The phrases Jesus uses are both flinty and humorous. They are made in the form of questions, as seen at other times when there have been disputes. How can the devil drive out the devil (since this is what they are accusing him of). Such a question has only a negative response and

it brings a smile to the lips. Then Jesus mentions others (Jews) who also perform exorcisms and who would then also be disqualified. All of this discussion is razor-sharp.

Then comes the principal phrase. The exorcism forms part of the arrival and the presence of the Kingdom. Luke tells us that it is “by the finger of God.” Matthew says “by the Spirit of God”. The phrase is directed not to his adversaries (of whom he speaks in the rest of the text) but to those who listen to and accompany Jesus. The majority of exegetes consider this an authentic saying of Jesus. Only he, as the Son of God, can affirm that the Kingdom is already present.

This is to say that thanks to the action of Jesus, the Kingdom of God has come. In the performance of the exorcism, the presence of the Kingdom is manifest. This is a fundamental truth. It comes from Jesus. Other persons do not speak like this nor are other writings of the New Testament expressed in this fashion. It only appears in the synoptics where the expressions of Jesus are collected.

4) *The demons and the pigs... fall and drown in the sea*

Jesus acted in favor of non-Jewish people on few occasions; this exorcism is an important case in point. The objective of the narrative is to show that salvation is also for the gentiles. A scandalous, possessed individual (who can shatter chains) is cured.

With respect to the violent and even humorous details (pigs throwing themselves into the sea), their vividness is characteristic of the oral tradition. We do not know exactly what happened but there is evidence that Jesus conquered the evil one (who altered the behavior of some people).

The narrative inspires terror but has an ending that causes laughter. The sick person goes about day and night screaming and frightening others, living among graves, breaking apart the chains that bound him, wounding his body with stones. It is a heart-rending situation. In face of the healing action of Jesus and the demons' request that they be made to enter the pigs, these two thousand desperate animals run headlong down the bank and drown in the sea. The narrative takes a sudden turn, from horror to humor.

They went across the lake to the region of the Gerasenes. When Jesus got out of the boat a man with an evil spirit came out of the tombs to meet him. This man lived in the tombs and no one could bind him anymore, not even with chains. For he had often been chained hand and foot but he tore the chains apart and broke the irons on his feet. No one was strong enough to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones. When he saw Jesus from a distance he ran and fell on his knees in front of him. He shouted at the top of his voice, “What do you want with me Jesus, Son of the most High God? Swear to God that you will not torture me”. For Jesus was saying to him, “Come out of this man you evil spirit.” Then Jesus asked him: “What is your name?” “My name is legion”, he replied, “for we are many”. And he begged Jesus again and again not to send them out of the area. A large herd of pigs was feeding on the nearby hillside. The demons begged Jesus, “Send us among the pigs, allow us to go into them.” He gave them permission and the evil spirits came out and went into the pigs. The herd, about two thousand in number, rushed down the steep bank into the lake and were drowned. Those tending the pigs ran off and reported this in the town and countryside and the people went out to see what had happened. When they came to Jesus they saw the man who had been possessed sitting there dressed and in his right mind and they were afraid. Those who had seen it told the people what had happened to the demon-possessed man -and told about the pigs as well. Then the people began to plead with Jesus to leave their region. Jesus said to the cured man: “Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you. So the man went away and began to tell how much Jesus had done for him in the Decapolis. And all the people were amazed. (Mc 5: 1-20; Lk 8:26-39; Mt 8:28-34).

It is an exorcism near the city of Gerasa. The principal thing is the healing work in favor of a pagan, since the salvation of God is for all. This was part of the mission of Jesus and of sectors of the primitive Church, although there were some who opposed the mission to the gentiles. The data is not precise. For example where did this occur? It could not have been in Gerasa which is situated about 30 miles from the lake where the pigs were drowned. Mark's text has influenced both Matthew and Luke's versions. The possessed man (Mark and Luke mention one but Matthew speaks of two people) confirms that his name is "Legion" because many demons lived in him.

Our attention is also drawn to the fact that the demons enter into innocent animals which are driven mad and run to drown themselves in the lake of Galilee (called a sea). Another uncommon element is that the demons refer to Jesus as the Son of God (Matthew) or Son of God most High (Mark and Luke); the so-called messianic secret did not permit the use of this title until Jesus was glorified. After the healing/exorcism, the Gerasene is sent to give the good news to his family and his countrymen in the Decapolis (south of Syria where there were Greek cities). This is very important in terms of the mission; the gentiles are not only evangelized, they are also carriers of the Good News. For this reason, some picturesque, imaginary characteristics have been added to the fundamental facts which include the universal salvific mission and the exorcism of Jesus. These include humorous deeds and phrases.

5) And you, will you be lifted up to the skies? No you will go down to the depths!

Every city has its trajectory and its pride. Comparisons are often made between one city and another and there are both positive and negative things said about them. The city is a collective entity to which we attribute certain traits.

With regard to the history of Jesus, he traveled frequently through the rural areas and small villages. At times he also visited medium sized cities and even Jerusalem. One passage shows his irritation with cities when the people did not change despite the miracles performed there. Jesus particularly rebuked Capernaum where, Matthew suggests, he spent the greater part of his active life (4:13, 9:1 "his city").

The manner in which the sinful Sodom is compared with Capernaum is humorous. Moreover, the threat to Capernaum sounds both shocking and humorous: Will you be lifted up to the skies? Well, the contrary will happen to you: you will go down to hell! It is a shocking expression but it tells the truth. The people who had so benefited by the presence and the ministry of Jesus deserve such a reprimand.

And you Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the skies? No, you will go down to hell. If the miracles that were performed in you were performed on Sodom it would have remained to this day. But I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you (Mt 11:23-24; Lk 10:15).

The central theme was: the Kingdom has arrived, change your lives. In the face of the preaching of Jesus and his works of mercy and healing, many were not converted. This calls forth anger in Jesus. His reaction is strong as is seen in this passage. He begins to criticize Korazin and Bethsaida and finishes by impugning his beloved Capernaum where he passed a good part of his life.

Jesus looks at the city with a prophetic gaze and he does so with the eyes of someone from Nazareth, a small town. From the margins of the social order it is easier to see the defects that exist in the centers of power.

Sodom and Gomorrah were infamous for their immorality. They were remembered since the days of their destruction by fire, sent down by Yahweh in punishment (Genesis 19:24). They are likewise mentioned in both the books of the Old Testament (Deut 29:22; Is 1:9, 13:9; Jer 49:18, 50:40, etc.) and the New (Matthew, Luke, 2Peter and Judas). To say that Sodom is better than a Jewish

city of the time of Jesus was a surprising statement. Other cities are compared with Tyre and Sidon but Capernaum (the city of Jesus , Mt 9:1) is judged to be worse than Sodom. This is alarming.

This is part of Jesus' style. He makes his listeners tremble and shudder and at times he surprises them and makes them smile.

IV. Jesus entertains his followers

The reception of a special gift and bringing people together were common events in the biblical era. These occurred in religious institutions with teachers of the Law and their students and also in more marginal spheres of action such as prophetic associations, the disciples of John the Baptist and then with Jesus. In the case of the Prophet from Galilee, his leadership has two phases. In the first phase, Jesus calls a few people and sends them on the messianic mission of the Kingdom -to heal the sick, drive out demons and announce the Kingdom of God. In the second phase, greater rejection and persecution is faced and many people are brought to follow the One who loved even unto death. The accent now passes from the messianic to the Christological (Cf. Jon Sobrino, *Christology from Latin America*, Mexico, CRT, 1976, 102-103).

Speaking in human terms, throughout this process Jesus manifests his charismatic gift for convoking others and working with them. Did this personal relation with his disciples, followers and collaborators have a humorous side or was the link between leader and helpers mainly pious and pragmatic? We will see that the comic aspect cannot be disentangled from other dimensions.

Let us likewise not forget the conflictive context. The existing powers seek to eliminate Jesus and bring him to the cross; this includes controversy and the mistreatment of his followers. They experience uncertainty, internal discussions, doubts with regard to the faith, enthusiasm and frustrations. They also have pleasant moments. But the general context and the climax of the mission with Jesus have unforeseen, conflictive and painful characteristics. We cannot count on details with regard to the daily life and actions of Jesus and his followers. The Biblical texts are terse and concise, their objective neither biographical nor chronological. Rather they contain his sayings and behavior that were meant to nurture the faith of the communities formed after the resurrection.

These narratives offer elements which I would like to emphasize. In the first place, there are the ever present questions. Many queries directed to the crowds, to his adversaries and to his disciples are put into the mouth of Jesus. With respect to his followers, a few dialogues seem rather humorous, as is the case in questions about the identity of the Master, about the miracle of the loaves and the salt that lost its savor.

Then we will look back on various types of incidents in his missionary work: his words about fishing for persons rather than fish; the polemic and unusual expression with regard to the well, the sick, and sinners; the cry of the stones; going off to work with nothing; the shocking command to sell and leave everything; a number of admonitions and corrections given to his clumsy companions; the humorous conflict with Peter accused of being like Satan, along with other surprising aspects.

We are also surprised by the convocation to mission and the interaction of Jesus with women and with the socially margined. In this, as in other things, Jesus was controversial, prophetic and surprising. His contact with Martha, Mary, and Mary Magdalene, the widow, the Samaritan woman, the prostitute, the adulteress and others is truly marvelous. In these cases there are humorous lines. In last analysis, the little child is the greater, the last is the first. This inversion of the established order shows preferential love and mercy; and this has its amusing and droll side.

Let us take a look at a few human aspects of the Teacher's personal relation with his followers, collaborators, listeners and interrogators, who in one way or another, enjoyed his company.

A- Incisive Questions

1) What do others say? ... What do you say?

Jesus is full of questions. At times he formulates his questions with a touch of mischief. Or he might raise a few questions that require answers that will leave his adversaries in a bad light and delight his listeners (not all that sympathetic to the Pharisees and the doctors of the Law). Some are

humorous, clever and astute, directed to his friends and collaborators. On one occasion the Teacher directs a series of amusing questions to his disciples. First he asks them to tell him the opinions of other people. Then he asks them directly: and you, who do you say I am?

This is not what we would call a psychological subject today. It has nothing to do with subjective identity or self esteem. It is significant that instead of giving a discourse about himself, Jesus asks a question. In this way it is no doctrinal imposition but rather an evangelical dialogue.

The purpose is to manifest the faith relation they have with Jesus. Peter's response is clear: "You are the Messiah, the Christ". This was the consciousness of the community of disciples after Easter. With respect to this, the synoptics include the warning: "Do not tell anyone that I am the Messiah". His identity as the Messiah and the Son of God will be explained later:

Once when Jesus was praying privately and his disciples were with him, he asked them: "Who do the crowds say I am?" They replied: "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah and still others that one of the prophets of long ago has come back to life. "But what about you?, he asked: "who do you say I am?" Peter answered "The Christ of God". Jesus strictly warned them not to tell this to anyone (Lk 9:18-21; Mk 8:27-30; Mt 16: 13-16).

The dialogue is unusual. The other occasions that Jesus asks questions they have to do with secondary things or they are questions of invitation. In this case they have to do with his own personal, transcendental condition. The dialogue occurs in or on the way to Caesarea (Matthew and Mark) or perhaps during a time of prayer and intimate conversation between Jesus and his disciples.

There are two sets of questions and answers. One is general, impersonal and does not obligate the disciples (in Matthew's version: "Who is the Son of Man?" and in Mark and Luke: "Who do they say I am?") They respond: "They say... John, Elijah, one of the prophets." Then the dialogue becomes direct: "What do you say?" Only Peter responds, representing the group: "You are the Christ" (Mark); or Matthew's version: "The Christ Son of the Living God", or Luke: "The Christ of God". There is then a Christological content. Matthew includes the assigning of Peter's special mission: the Church will be built upon him and it will bind and loose (govern and discipline) (Mt 17: 17-19).

Biblical studies debate whether this narrative is previous to or after the Resurrection; this is to say, was Peter able to say this during the ministry of Jesus or did he become conscious of who Christ was after Easter? The confession of the Messiah could have a Jewish content (the expectation of the coming of the Messiah), or, on the other hand, it might signify the Christ of faith.

One might also emphasize the sharp and unusual character of the interchange of questions and answers. One might imagine the disciples are taken by surprise by this very fundamental theme. The set of questions and responses has its delightful side.

2) Why are they talking about bread?

In any human communication misunderstandings appear. This happens because of cultural, personality, economic and political reasons. At times the person is dull and doesn't understand. It also happens in the religious dimension.

Let's take a biblical case. Jesus cautions his followers to open their eyes, to be neither naïve nor stupid and adds that they be careful with the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees. The question is then the conflict with religious and social power groups that ambushed Jesus and set traps for him (Mt 16: 1, 4).

Well then, how did his followers react to the Teacher? They are worried, and they dispute among themselves about not having bread to eat. Obviously this had nothing to do with the problem stated by Jesus.

In the midst of a tense, conflictive situation, we have a relaxing, amusing dialogue. Jesus tells them: "Why are you talking about not having bread?" The question is amusing and both the

question and the later statements leave the disciples in a poor light. The disciples are made to see how dull they are. If they had had a sense of humor they would have laughed at their own stupidity.

When they went across the lake the disciples forgot to take bread. "Be careful," Jesus said to them, "Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and the Sadducees." They discussed this among themselves and said: "It is because we didn't bring any bread." Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked: "You of little faith, why are you talking among yourselves about having no bread? Don't you remember the five loaves for the five thousand and how many basketfuls you gathered? (...) How is it you do not understand that I was not talking about bread? But be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees" (Mt 16: 5-12; Mk 8: 14-21; Lk 12: 1-2).

It seems only a misunderstanding. But it is more than that. On many occasions the followers of the Teacher did not understand certain expressions of the message of Jesus, his person or his mission. Moreover, the life of Jesus is surrounded by threats and unpleasantness. The doctors of the Law and the Pharisees ambushed him in a particular way. One might suppose that people treated like this would be tense and nervous. However, in Jesus' case, he shows a great capacity to bear conflict. In the face of conflict, he does not turn against his followers and collaborators. Rather, he knows how to assume difficult situations with patience, clarity and a sense of humor.

It seems that this is what is happening in this biblical passage. In the previous scene there was a debate with the Pharisees and Sadducees and then, the incident about the bread. Jesus admonishes his disciples and he does so with amusing and challenging questions ("How is it you do not understand?"). Each version has its own characteristics. According to Matthew, they did not bring loaves and Jesus warns them against the yeast of the Pharisees and the Sadducees. According to Mark, they brought only one loaf (only one loaf among so many) and the warning is against the Pharisees and Herod. Both versions include the reiterated question: "How is it you do not understand?" But in Matthew's version they come at last to understand. Jesus' insistence on their having been present and participated in the multiplication of the loaves is a way of making them come to see their stupidity. Another element is the clever criticism of the yeast of the Pharisees which, according to Luke, is hypocrisy (Lk 12: 1; Mt 16:5; Mk 8:15). One can imagine a batch of bread rising with the yeast of hypocrisy. They are then dangerous people. In this way the adversaries are unmasked. It is an amusing way to face up to a conflict.

3) *The insipid salt. With what can it be seasoned?*

In human nutrition, salt is absolutely necessary. Those of us who cook have sometimes been embarrassed when diners notice the lack of salt and that the meal is insipid and unpalatable.

In first century Palestine, salt was used in various domestic activities (nutrition, the preparation of fuel from dung). In any cultural ambient, salt is something fundamental. For this reason, in a day-to-day context, Jesus speaks of an amusing thing: if salt fails to fulfill its function, how can it be seasoned? (Mark). Which is to say, if the salt is insipid, how can you season the meal? It is a question that states something absurd and for that reason is amusing. Obviously there is no answer. For salt that has lost its flavor, it is impossible to give back its very nature. This curious phrase is applied by Mark and Matthew to the followers of Jesus and Luke applies it as a threat to Israel (to be thrown out).

Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out. He who has ears to hear, let him hear" (Lk 14: 34-35; Mk 9:50; Mt 5:13).

Salt has played a fundamental role in the economy of the Jewish people. Besides its role in nutrition, it is often used as a catalyst for dung in the preparation of fuel. Even today salt has many important uses.

The fundamental intent is to make plain that the chosen people are no longer preferred: like salt that is no longer salty. They will be displaced, thrown out and even trampled underfoot. In literary terms, we have an absolute contrast between the good salt (Jesus' listeners) and the insipid salt (the Jewish people who do not receive the Good News). There are a number of types of commentaries and applications on this phrase regarding salt. Luke adds the phrase: he who has ears to hear let him hear (14:35). Mark juxtaposes a moral invocation: have salt in yourselves and be at peace with each other (9:50); Matthew elaborates a direct discourse: you are the salt (5:13). This is to say: in Mark and Matthew the phrase about the salt refers to the disciples of Jesus; while in Luke it is directed to the crowds.

B- A Humorous Mission

1) Fishing for persons, rather than fish

Many people pass their whole lives involved in only one profession or office. When this is the case, should anyone propose that they leave it, and begin something completely different, they are stupefied.

Around the Lake of Galilee there were people dedicated to fishing. Jesus draws near and unexpectedly says to them: "Come follow me!" Now, what would people accustomed to earning their daily bread in a determined activity, working with perishable merchandise make of such an invitation. They cannot leave the merchandise to one side because it will be stolen or go bad,? They are left stunned.

There comes an even bigger surprise. The fishermen are not invited to something proper to their occupation, nor to a form of diversion or anything of that nature. They are invited to fish for "human beings". Anyone might feel paralyzed by such an unexpected invitation or perhaps they might smile or become annoyed. Besides being surprisingly unexpected, the invitation of Jesus has its humorous side.

On the other hand, it is significant that simple fisher folk are chosen for the mission of the Kingdom. Jesus does not search for dignitaries nor religious functionaries or people of economic means. The poor are the first to be called.

As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. "Come follow me, Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men" (Lk 14:34-35; Mk 9:50; Mt 5:13).

One can imagine the surprise of a normal workingman asked to leave his job and follow a Teacher and Prophet. Nonetheless, it must be remembered that in the time of Jesus there were examples of such discipleship (for example, John the Baptist had his disciples). It is not known whether these actual fishermen (Simon and Andrew) would be the type of people disposed to follow a Rabbi for spiritual motives. We are only told that they were fishermen.

The dialogue unfolds in the midst of the unexpected. The daily labor of fishing has begun. Jesus speaks to the fishermen and in an instant they leave their nets and follow him (Mark and Matthew). Something unheard of! No one simply thrusts aside the tools they use to gain their daily bread. The reaction of surprise is reinforced by Luke: "Don't be afraid", says Jesus to Simon.

Then another surprise: come and I will make you fishers of human beings. A translation from the original Greek would be: you are going to take human beings alive. This contains a spark of humor. It is a very serious thing to follow a Teacher and a Prophet but at the same time, it has a

comic aspect. This is indicated by the contrast between fishing for fish and dedicating oneself to fishing for people (evangelizing).

2) Healthy people... do not need a doctor

Each person's experience and that of all humanity has been deeply marked by moments of illness. These are times of anxiety and pain when solidarity can also flourish. In this biblical passage Levi, the tax collector, who is Matthew (Mt 10:3), is called to be an apostle. Then follows the themes of sickness and health, which are transposed, to another plane: sinful people who, like the sick, need a doctor. There is humor in this play of words uniting different planes.

Jesus places himself in the eye of the storm. He chooses a tax collector as one of his collaborators; a man hated by the population because he helped collect the hated taxes and extorted funds. Then Jesus exposed himself to heavy criticism by dining with functionaries considered sinners. By eating with them, Jesus and his disciples became impure.

It must have seemed rather humorous to the followers of Jesus to see the way the Teacher reacted to the criticisms of the Pharisees. He does not justify himself. Nor does he defend Matthew and his colleagues whom many considered corrupt thieves. The well do not need a doctor he said, but rather the sinners. In this fashion he skillfully turned the conversation around with an ingenious saying:

Once again Jesus went out beside the lake. A large crowd came to him and he began to teach them. As he walked along he saw Levi, son of Alphaeus sitting in the tax collector's booth. "Follow me", Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed him. While Jesus was having dinner at Levi's house many tax collectors and sinners were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with sinners and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?" On hearing this Jesus said to them: "It is not the healthy who need a doctor but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners" (Mk 2:13-17; Mt 9: 9-10; Lk 5: 27-32).

Historical-biblical studies show that the collection of taxes in the Jewish society was unjust and those in charge of the collectors were corrupt and obtained the money in illicit ways. In the case of local tax collectors like Levi, soon to be called Matthew, they were not necessarily thieves but they had a bad reputation and the Jews detested them. In accordance with the official posture, in terms of the Law, they were "impure". Many of them were to be found in the company of Jesus (Mk2:15).

Jesus does two things, scandalous in the eyes of the Pharisees and other power groups: he calls an "impure" tax collector to be his collaborator, and, in Levi's house, he eats with those considered to be public sinners. Thus Jesus and his disciples become impure. Luke notes that Levi left everything; this suggests that he has been converted from his role as tax collector, a socially corrupt and legally impure situation. With respect to the argument used by Jesus: the relation "sick-healthy" is transposed to the area "sinners-just". It seems to me that this leap from one plane of reality to another offers a skillful and amusing type of argument.

3) Happy their eyes because they see... Many wished to see

In today's world the multi-faceted intelligence has been vindicated; symbolic, corporeal, artistic and ecological knowledge are particularly appreciated. These have always been appreciated by popular cultures; now, enlightened sectors also appreciate these aspects of human intelligence.

But returning to the biblical narrative. On various occasions, Jesus praised the wisdom of simple people and on others he criticized the stupidity of those who asked for signs and miracles,

etc. His disciples were then, in the majority, ordinary people, with few exceptions like Matthew, Luke and others. They are praised because they “see and hear”.

The humble people who form part of the crowds of poor folk are described as happy. They are happy because they “see and hear”, which is to say, they understand that the hour of salvation has arrived. This could be a reference to the apostles only (as seen in Lk 10:23). But it must be remembered that many men and women disciples were also simple people; with few exceptions they did not belong to power groups. When he tells them that they are seeing and enjoying what many prophets and just people in the past longed to see, he is giving them a piece of Good News that fills them with joy.

Happy are your eyes because they see and your ears because they hear. For I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it (Mt 13:16-17; Lk 10:23-24.).

The New Testament message is graphic and emerges from daily life. Instead of talking about intelligence or reason, we are told that the disciples see and hear. With eyes and ears, human beings draw near to the Mystery of the Kingdom of God, of which Jesus is the bearer. The parables are the facts of life and very clearly point to the presence of the Mystery. Matthew’s narrative speaks of the meaning of parables which help us to understand the mysteries of the Kingdom (13:11). Further on, the text cites Isaiah 6: 9-10. This prophecy laments that the people of Israel look but do not see, hear but do not understand.

In contrast to what occurs in Israel, the disciples of Jesus both see and hear. A comparison is made with the prophets and the just of the Old Testament. That is to say, with very important people. But these people did not receive the revelation that simple people like the disciples have received. They are truly happy and blessed. Jesus tells us this; it was felt and enjoyed by his disciples and it can also be experienced today by his humble and faithful followers.

4) Nothing will remain hidden ... everything will be disclosed

We suffer a great deal in countries where there are allegations, indictments, exploitation of human dignity, violation of human rights, prison and even death under abusive powers. In these difficult situations, each sign of protest and hope allow us to take the path of life once again.

In a number of places, one of the greatest scandals has been the thousands of detained and disappeared persons. Their bodies and their memory have been hidden. This cannot be permitted. We cry out for justice and a ray of hope. The people who followed Jesus suffered persecution, calumny and martyrdom. Given these conditions, the words that reveal injustice have great value.

On one occasion Jesus minced no words: everything hidden will be brought to light. Fear will be over and the truth will be known. This surely gives hope and joy. This is the way Jesus lifts the spirits of those who accompanied him in the midst of so many contradictions.

Meanwhile, when a crowd of many thousands had gathered so that they were trampling on one another, Jesus began to speak first to his disciples saying: “Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. What you have said in the dark will be heard in the daylight, and what you have whispered in the ear in the inner rooms will be proclaimed from the housetops” (Lk 12:1-3; Mt 10: 26-27; Mk 4:22).

These sayings are framed in a number of situations. In the face of persecutions suffered by the first Christians, Jesus acted with power and gave them confidence: I tell you in the darkness... you tell it in the light of day (Mt 10:27). Before the hypocrisy of the Pharisees... nothing will be hidden (Lk 12:1-2). In Luke’s text, the saying about the hidden and the disclosed is added to the

parable of the lamp. Various contexts are put forward for the sayings of Jesus. Another facet that remains unclear is whether or not these are directed to the disciples or to the crowd. In any case, it has to do with promises that things will change.

The promise is made on the basis of many contrasts: the hidden...will be disclosed; the unknown... will be known; what is said in the dark... will be heard in the light; what is heard in the most secret place... will be proclaimed from the housetops. That much contrast offers a clever and amusing language form.

5) Satan fell like a flash of lightening... but do not rejoice because of your actions

The human being, in every period of history and every culture desires to achieve good results and makes efforts to obtain them.

With respect to the Gospels, the disciples are seldom said to have had success. The narratives are, on the contrary, rather dramatic, filled with tension, uncertainty and fear. There was strong opposition to the work of Jesus and his collaborators.

Just as Jesus performed exorcisms, his followers also confronted malignant spirits. They were commissioned to do so. On one occasion they arrived euphoric, because they were able to conquer the demons. Jesus follows the thread of their experience: I saw Satan fall... In this fashion, in a moving, symbolic way, he reaffirms and praises his companions. But then he takes away the enthusiasm for their concrete achievements and gives them motive for being joyful about something more important. He tells them that their names are written in heaven, and that they should not be happy because of the exorcisms alone.

The droll element is the description of the fall of Satan as a flash of lightening. On the other hand, the text tells us that what is important is not the feat against the devils, but the fact that the disciples are valued as persons. This evokes a deep joy.

The seventy-two returned with joy and said: "Lord even the demons submit to us in your name." He replied, "I saw Satan fall like lightening from heaven... However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven" (Lk10:17-20).

It is about a witty dialogue. The disciples have had some success in driving out evil spirits. They arrive before Jesus in euphoric spirits. He takes part in their joy and responds to them with a humorous expression: I saw Satan fall from heaven like lightening.

In three instances joy is mentioned (10:17, 20 – twice). It is the tone of the narrative. One might suppose that just as Jesus performed exorcisms and felt the salvific power of God, so too he rejoiced that his followers did the same. Nonetheless, the text presents us once more with a contrast. This is a common language form in the synoptic Gospels. In this case it is the contrast between "do not rejoice for this or that", and "rejoice for another motive". This is one vein of humor in the text

6) If these people keep silence... the stones will cry out

It is not easy to know what to do when one is in the midst of a conflict between two groups of people. In some situations it is possible to take the role of an arbiter; or try to achieve a consensus between the groups. One can also enter into the discussion and assume the conflict personally.

What did Jesus do on finding himself in the middle of a dispute? Let us take a look at the case of Jesus' entrance into the city of Jerusalem, the day we call Palm Sunday. It is a joyful context. As in a number of other circumstances, the adversaries of Jesus see a way to annoy him. They ask him to silence his enthusiastic followers.

The Master does not agree with the Pharisees nor does he begin to discuss it with them. Rather, he throws out a comic, ingenious phrase: if these people keep silence, then the stones will cry out. Those who heard the phrase, particularly the followers of Jesus who were spied on and calumniated by the Pharisees, certainly would have been overjoyed at the way Jesus silenced them. Because they were not going to close the mouths of the disciples, nor would they silence the stones...

Some of the Pharisees who were among the people, said to him: "Master rebuke your disciples". He responded: I tell you if they keep silence, the stones will cry out (Lk 19:39-40).

The tension and conflict between the Pharisees and the followers of Jesus were constant. One instance is given only by Luke. The context is the messianic entrance into the great city of Jerusalem. "The multitude of disciples, full of joy, began to praise God with loud voices..."(19:37). It seems then that there was a great tumult, loud cries and crowds in movement.

Jesus speaks in a solemn way: "I tell you..." and then he suggests something contrary to nature: that stones would open their mouths and cry out. Clearly this is a humorous expression. The confrontation between inert objects that do not speak but do cry out, and a vociferous crowd whom the Pharisees are trying to silence, is worthy of note. It seems that they are in resonance with each other, on the one hand –the joy of the multitude of disciples who acclaim Jesus, and on the other, the humorous, skillful response of Jesus to the Pharisees.

C. Between nothing and everything

1) They have all power... take nothing with you

The majority of human beings have few possessions. They often dream of having much more and even of living in the midst of abundance. No one wants to live without belongings.

This is what was expected of the twelve most important collaborators of Jesus, the apostles. But first everything is given to them. Then immediately they are warned that they must travel with empty hands. How can this be? It has to do with contrasting situations. Everything and nothing! It seems somewhat absurd and contradictory. Anyone would be astonished. Anyone would be stupefied and tempted to laugh.

They are given everything (for the mission): power over demons, power to heal the sick and power to announce the Kingdom of God. Immediately, the apostles are obliged to work with empty hands: without money, food or clothing (although according to Mark, they may use a staff). In this way the mission of the Kingdom is completed. They have all the power but at the same time, they have nothing. What a joke!

When Jesus had called the Twelve together, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons, and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to preach the Kingdom of God and heal the sick, He told them: "Take nothing for the journey –no staff, no bag, no bread, no money, no extra tunic. Whatever house you enter stay there until you leave that town. If people do not welcome you, shake the dust off your feet when you leave the town as a testimony against them. So they set out and went from village to village, preaching the Gospel and healing people everywhere (Lk 9:1-6; Mk 6:7-13; Mt 10: 5-10).

This passage describes the sending of the apostles as preachers of the Kingdom, healers and exorcists. In this way they are incorporated into the mission of Jesus and his activities. The Master exercises his role of sending missionaries during his own ministry. Later it will be his Spirit who does the sending. It has to do then with a programmed journey.

Each of the evangelists adds his own accent. The three coincide in that the apostles must go without goods and resources (only Mark allows them to carry a staff for walking). Matthew notes that a worker has the right to his keep (10:10). But the command is sharp and clear: travel without material resources (with only one tunic, which is to say, no change of clothes in these areas of blazing temperatures).

The mission has its objectives. The principal one is to announce the Good News of the Kingdom (Lk 9:2,6), that the Kingdom is near (Mt 10:7); a preaching that calls to conversion (Mk 6:12). At the same time (in all three synoptics) the apostles are charged to heal the sick and drive out evil spirits. This implies great power or, better said, all the necessary power for the mission of the Kingdom.

As to the extent of the mission, Matthew puts restrictions: do not go to the gentiles, the Samaritans, but only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Mt 10:5-6). Although Mark and Luke do not mention restrictions, they do characterize the synoptic mission. Soon after Pentecost they guarantee the evangelization of the gentiles. One more detail, according to Mark the apostles are sent two by two (Mk 6:7; like the 72, who are also sent two by two, Lk 10:1). Together with all these fundamental elements, I would highlight the sharp contrast between receiving all power and going without the minimal resources of subsistence (since they must enjoy the solidarity of the people). The contrast is humorous but it has an evangelical background. This is called evangelizing with an option for the poor.

2) Do not go from house to house

Some people abuse hospitality; for example, taking material advantage of people or institutions they attend which directly or indirectly require you to give concrete help. Those who act this way are considered to be rather wily and underhanded.

Let's skip ahead to the time of the first Christian missions. The labor of the apostles and the disciples was of an itinerant character. They went out to people starting from an institution. They literally walked, traveling on foot from one place to another, carrying the Good News. This is very different from what we are used to seeing today (except in diocesan and parish missions, etc.). In that situation, perhaps there were abuses.

It often happens, when a prohibition exists, it is because something seriously wrong has happened. Perhaps some followers of Jesus went from house to house accumulating goods and gifts that were given in each place. It would also have been convenient to remain in one place in order to establish more solid relations. Or perhaps it was a prudent action in order to avoid rejection. In any case the order is surprising: not to go from house to house but rather to eat and drink what was provided in one house alone. It is a case of discipline which, depending on how it is said or heard, has its appealing side.

Stay in that house, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages. Do not move around from house to house (Luke 10:7-8; Mt 10:11-15; Mk 6:10-11).

The missionary task unfolds in the midst of hostilities and fine receptions. Jesus sends his apostles and disciples out like lambs in the midst of wolves (Lk 10:3). They changed certain precautions and rules in order to avoid annoyances and achieve good results.

The order to not go from house to house is presented only in Luke, in the section on the mission of the 72 disciples, (10: 1ff). Only Luke has the sending of the 72: the other synoptics say similar things about the 12. No other explanations exist. There is the directive to remain in one house (the first) where one is welcomed and to remain there until leaving to go to another place. With regard to the order to not move from house to house, one can only guess the reasons for such a disciplinary directive.

The saying has its humorous aspects. I say this because of personal experience: on occasions when I have had various pastoral obligations, (for example, a number of baptisms on the same day, each one with a party to which I was invited) there came the comment or advice in a facetious tone of voice: don't go from one party to another.

3) Sell all... and accumulate nothing

When someone says something that sounds too exaggerated or even impossible, one might react by saying they are mad or they are trying to get the attention of others or even trying to deceive us. In today's world, we receive many messages about impossible things, particularly in the media, and these try to make us believe that they are really part of reality. We already know this type of language.

The language used by Jesus and his communities (where these synoptic texts were written) contain expressions that are extremely exaggerated. More correctly, these expressions indicate the apparently impossible which, thanks to the grace of the Lord and to faith, are indeed a reality.

On speaking of treasures on earth and in heaven, the earthly and the heavenly are contrasted in an absolute fashion. Treasures of earth can be stolen or ruined by some insect; for this reason it is necessary to store treasure in heaven. This exaggerated alternative produces laughter. Even more exaggerated is the expression: "Sell all your goods and store your treasure only in heaven." It is necessary to choose between God and money.

These are not exaggerations. Rather it is the wisdom of the Gospel. When this wisdom is transmitted through recommendations impossible to fulfill, they remain engraved in the imagination and in the heart of every listener. Moreover, they are recommendations that motivate us to detach ourselves from temporal things and find deeper happiness.

Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is there will your heart be also (Lk12:33-34; Mt 6:19-21).

This is a gratifying paradox: in order to obtain the authentic treasure of heaven, it is necessary to abandon everything. It is also amusing to say that thieves and moths do not get to heaven. Obviously, such problems do not exist there.

At bottom, the theme is conversion to the Reign of God, which implies a change of life. For the sake of the Kingdom, persons who are disciples of Jesus can leave all, sell their goods and direct all their existence to God or, in figurative language, to the treasures of heaven.

Luke's text is preceded by the theme of the Kingdom received by the small flock of disciples (Lk 12:32). To receive the kingdom is to receive everything. The response to this is to sell everything, to dispossess oneself of all earthly treasure. In this sense then, detachment from all things and total simplicity of life is possible.

The final proverb is a great truth: where your treasure is there will your heart be also. Each one of us can attest to it. It is also a proverb that unmask the covetous element in material things. And in bringing this to the light, we are given motives for smiling in the face of a truth well expressed.

4) Leave all... and receive a hundredfold

In games of chance one sees people who risk everything. At times they gamble not only their money but also property and even the future of their families. Of course they are under the illusion of becoming millionaires and even of winning the whole world... It is a type of risk that is part of covetousness. It is a risk fed by economic capitalism and by its idols of quantitative success.

Another type of risk in the area of religion is praying to obtain something beyond one's possibilities. One invokes this or that saint, or one or another sacred force to do something spectacular and miraculous. Everything depends on our devotion and belief in order to obtain the good fortune.

The message of Jesus raises a totally different risk. It is not only a risk; it is a practice of discipleship for the love of God.

Once again, it contains expressions of something apparently impossible: leave family, home, goods necessary for life. For those who do so, they are promised 100% more on earth and then eternal life. On hearing this anyone would say: "Are you speaking seriously or is this a joke?" It does not seem realistic to leave everything and then win everything and more besides. It is the paradox of the Gospel of Jesus, in all its radicality.

Peter said to him "We have left everything to follow you!" "I tell you the truth", Jesus replied, "no one who has left home, or brothers, or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the Gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields- and with them persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life" (Mk 10:28-30; Mt 19:27-20; Lk 18: 28-30).

Peter and Jesus have a fantastic dialogue. The context of the conversation, according to the synoptic narratives is the problematic of riches. Peter speaks in the plural in the name of the disciples closest to Jesus. In Matthew's version, Peter adds: "We have left everything to follow you. What then will there be for us?" One might say in modern speech that Peter is passing along his claims demand. He does it, perhaps, with humor and a mischievous tone.

The response of Jesus in Mark's version is extravagant. Whoever leaves everything for the discipleship of Jesus, for the sake of the Gospel will receive, in this present age, 100% in: more homes, families, mothers, children, fields and also persecutions, and in the age to come, eternal life. It is a great deal! Too much! Again the language is extreme. In this way, the incredible, unheard of gifts of God are made easier to comprehend. This marvelous language is the way the truths of the Gospel are explained. It is also an amusing way of speaking.

Let us look at other details in each version. Matthew introduces the theme of the glorification of the Son of Man and the time of the final judgment with the image of the 12 tribes of Israel. Matthew and Mark add the saying about the last and the first (Mt 19:30; Mk 10:31). Mark, as well as Matthew, uses the expression 100%. Luke only speaks of "much more" in the present age.

The three narratives assure us that the disciples are going to receive eternal life, together with the present marvels. It is very good news for those who have left all at great cost. Given the contrast between abandoning all and receiving all, we have a language both paradoxical and amusing.

D- Corrections made with humor

1) You do not know what you are asking ¿Can you drink the chalice of the passion?

It is common to ask a small favor in order to obtain privileges or achieve something illicitly. To attain this, families and public functionaries are pressured; often the approval of authorities is bought with money or gifts.

Let's take a look at something that happened to Jesus. Many people, even among his collaborators, treated him like a sort of monarch who could distribute privileges and quotas of power. On one occasion, James and John (or their mother according to Mt 20:20) pressed him to give them positions of honor in the Kingdom. There is a curious dialogue among them.

The scene shows Jesus placed under pressure. The mother of the interested parties kneels before Jesus and begs him to give her sons the best places in the glorious Kingdom (Matthew's

version); the two apostles try skillfully to obtain his acceptance- “give us what we ask of you” (Mark’s version). Jesus does not fall into the trap: “What do you wish?” They tell him: “To sit at your right and your left in your glory”. Jesus’ answer is clear and to the point: “You do not know what you are asking for”. Perhaps this was said with pity and compassion. Or it could be a way of saying: “don’t be stupid”. There might have been a feeling of anger in the face of such craftiness. or perhaps a sense of humor in the face of ambition in his collaborators. Ambition can often be comical and a good way to confront ambitious people is to make fun of their ambition.

Then the mother of Zebedee’s sons came to Jesus with her sons and kneeling down, asked a favor of him. “What is it you want?”, he asked. She said, “Grant that one of my two sons may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom.” “You do not know what you are asking”, Jesus said to them. “Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?” “We can”, they answered. “You will indeed drink from my cup but to sit at my right or my left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father” (Mt 20:20-23; Mk 10:35-40).

This scene illustrates an eschatological theme. The central point is the drama of the Passion and Glory of the Kingdom. The misunderstanding of some apostles with regard to the Kingdom is shown (as is their ambition). They seek to occupy the best seats as if it had to do with worldly kingdoms. Jesus, on the contrary, is the Messiah who assumes the cross. For this reason he tells them that he will drink the chalice of the Passion. He uses the metaphor of drinking... not something pleasant but rather the horrible chalice of the Passion. To those who ask for glory, he offers suffering. In this dialogue, Jesus is questioned and asks questions on his part. As in other biblical dialogues, his manner of asking questions has its humorous vein. The basic theme is absolutely serious: to live the passion and the glory. But his manner of confronting the ambition of his collaborators contains an amusing aspect: can you drink...?

With respect to discipleship, the great majority of texts indicate requirements and responsibilities. The disciples are praised on very few occasions and they never receive promises of a comfortable life, nor do they predict power or privilege. The request of James and John appears then totally out of place. They deserve a correction, a calling down. Jesus does this by means of a surprising question: “can you drink the chalice?”.

2) When you build... plan!

Generally, buildings which serve as homes and places of work are skillfully constructed and repaired by people. In the case of the poorer sector, this is done with great effort and sacrifice and with skill as well. Almost everyone knows something about construction.

The disciples of Jesus are warned that they must measure their strength and test their possibilities. The comparison is made with the constructor of a tower and then there is another short parable about a warrior king (Lk 14: 31-32). We know that a high tower requires a deep and solid base. The parable is comical because the person who builds does not calculate the cost and cannot finish it (the supposition is that the person who would build such a tower is someone powerful). The parable states that people make fun of the constructor. Those who listen to the parable can also laugh at this life experience.

“Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it. For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him saying, “This fellow began to build and was not able to finish” (Lk 14:28-30).

The parable appears to be directed to the followers of Jesus (cf. verses 27 and 33 which speak of discipleship; among these sayings are the parables of the tower and the king). These people are told that they must watch carefully what they are doing, make their calculations carefully and see if they are in any condition to follow a difficult path. The enthusiasm of being a disciple and announcing the Kingdom is not enough; it is also necessary to see the real capacity each person possesses.

Life experience is significant. The man responsible for building a tower knows that it needs a good foundation. And he must calculate all the expenses to be able to finish his work. If he does not do this, he is failing as a human being. The story is told in such a way that the stupidity of that builder is clear. For this reason, the disciple is told: calculate carefully how you will live.

3) A fool...he builds on sand

Today we consume many things that can be thrown away. They last only an instant. They have no solidity or permanent value. The momentary experience predominates, instead of projecting a life for the long as well as the short term.

You can distinguish between those who do well-grounded work on the one hand and those whose work is superficial and unstable on the other.

The Gospel speaks of two types of people. The prudent person who constructs his house on stone and rocks is the person who follows the message of Jesus. There is also the foolish person who builds his house on sand. This last house is destroyed by the forces of nature. The person who listens to the message of Jesus but does not put it into practice is acting like this. The comparison is ingenious and amusing. The person who listens enjoys this language, especially the saying about the fool and what happens to his house.

“But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house upon the sand. The rain came down and the streams rose, and the winds blew against that house, and it fell with a great crash” (Mt 7: 26-27; Lk 6: 46-49).

The passage begins with the warning: not the one who says Lord will enter into the Kingdom (Mt 7:21; Lk 6:46). Then comes the comparison between the intelligent person who built his house on rock and the fool who built his on sand. The first is evident and the second is absurd. This passage combining the normal with the foolish, causes surprise and makes us smile. Scholars like J. Jeremías tell us that it has to do with one parable having an antithetic parallelism, rather than two. This is the literary form in various parables of the Lord.

With respect to this, we are reminded that Jesus witnessed the work of his father, Joseph, who did carpentry and perhaps construction work. He is speaking, then, about something he knows well and he does so in an amusing way.

4) You see the speck in the eye of another... but fail to see the beam in your own

A good part of human communication is dedicated to disqualifying and criticizing the neighbor. For some, this is like a sport, a dirty sport, which damages the victim and also dehumanizes the person who does it. For others it is a vice: they have specialized in finding the defects of others, making these known and destroying the victims.

We also suffer from the vilifying superiority of educators, social and religious leaders and self-proclaimed benefactors. From above, from the height of their self-sufficiency, they look down on common folk. They help others in an erratic fashion and often emphasize the deficiencies of the objects of their charity.

In this biblical passage Jesus makes two devastating commentaries. First, he asks why someone sees the straw or speck in the eye of another but does not notice that he has a beam in his own. Then he asks how they will help take out the speck in the other's eye when they have a large beam in their own. These questions reveal the inauthentic existence of the one who makes rash judgments and pretends such charity.

The contrast between having a speck and having a beam in the eye is very strong one. This type of contrast is also quite amusing. But the basic motive is the unmasking of judges and unjust benefactors; this is a motive for laughter.

“Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own? How can you say to your brother, Let me take the speck out of your eye when all the time there is a plank in your own. You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye”(Mt 7 :3-5; Lk 6:41-42).

These questions synthesize a message against hypocrisy, in favor of transparency. It does it far better than a long discourse or a judicial process. The questions revolve around an absurd situation: a person who has a beam of wood in his eye. This is impossible. It is also impossible to remove a small object from the eye of another when one's own is blocked by a beam. The absurdity presented in an ingenious way, produces laughter. We do not know if the text is directed to the community of believers or to the multitude. In speaking of a brother, one gathers that it has to do with the community. However, the confrontation of hypocrisy and rash judgment has to do with general human problems. It may also be a warning to disciples who carry out a mission. They are told ahead of time not to make disqualifying judgments nor try to help others without taking into consideration their own immense limitations. In any case we have here a liberating and prophetic message told in an amusing way.

5) Jesus says to Peter: Out of my sight, Satan!

Things are not always easy among those who develop great intimacy and collaboration. At times there are sharp confrontations and the need to set boundaries. The confrontation may often be bitter or can be expressed with humor. In my opinion, when Jesus shouted at his companion and faithful disciple, Peter, and told him: “Get out of my sight, Satan”, he is serious but perhaps also a bit mischievous. We can suppose that the devil and an apostle are not identified. Then we conclude that if he is called Satan, it is to help him to take note of his error.

In effect, Peter was attempting to separate Jesus from his redemptive mission to suffer death and rise again. It was then a serious thing. Jesus' attitude is firm. Perhaps he may have felt disillusioned with the blindness and cowardice of his apostle. He must have desired to correct him and make him rethink it carefully. To my way of thinking, calling him Satan in this exaggerated mode of speech is an expression of his sense of humor in the midst of conflict with his best friends and collaborators.

He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the Law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. He spoke plainly about this and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. “Out of my sight Satan”, he said. “You do not have in mind the things of God but the things of men” (Mk 8:31-33; Mt 16:21-23).

The dialogue between Peter and Jesus is moving and at the same time, tragic. It presents us with the nucleus of the Gospel. Jesus has explained his mission, full of conflict and suffering, which

carries him to death and resurrection. With respect to the conversation, first Peter takes him to one side to speak confidentially, intending to dissuade him from his mission in the history of salvation. Peter reprimands him according to Matthew and Mark. Then Jesus reprimands Peter (Mk 8:33) and then shouts at him; or perhaps it was more sharp than a shout: “Get out of my sight, Satan”.

It is a strong confrontation. At the time the Gospels were written, Satan was the cause of evil and God’s adversary. Jesus does not say to Peter that he is like the devil or is acting like the devil. Rather, Peter is confronted harshly and directly called Satan.

Then comes another set of boundaries. Jesus tells Peter: “You do not have in mind the things of God but the things of men”. Once more the confrontation is total.

E. Preference for the woman

1) The poor widow... who gives all

We have often proven that a person with few resources is much more generous than a rich one. It doesn’t seem logical one thinks. But it does make sense. There is a spiritual reason. A poor person tends to fall back on solidarity and on confidence in God from whom all things come; for this reason the widow of whom the Gospel speaks is more disposed to share the little she has.

In this respect, Jesus was characterized by a marvelous lucidity. One day he was seated in the magnificent temple in Jerusalem observing the people there. He saw the rich give large sums of money in alms while a poor woman dropped two small coins, all she possessed, into the alms box. Total generosity! In the Jewish context, those who were alone and defenseless like the widows and orphans were the most helpless and destitute.

Jesus comments to his disciples that the widow has given more than the rich. What kind of bookkeeping is that? Two coins are more than an immense amount of money! Another amusing expression is that the rich are giving what is left over while the poor person gives what she has to live on. It is a clever critique of people who are well off but stingy.

Jesus entertains his disciples with his comments. He also opens their eyes to appreciate the poor and not let themselves be dazzled by the appearance and hypocrisy of the wealthy. He helps them to see that this woman is more generous and closer to God than the wealthy men. Here there may be a criticism of the society’s (and his apostles’) attitude toward men and general lack of appreciation of women.

Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. But a poor woman came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a fraction of a penny. Calling his disciples to him Jesus said: “I tell you the truth, this poor woman has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty put in everything -all she had to live on” (Mk 12:41-44; Lk 21:1-4).

This narrative shows the Master’s acute capacity for social and spiritual observation. While looking at the Jewish people who went to the temple in Jerusalem, he sees the difference between how the rich and the poor act. He sees the poor woman give all she has and he denounces the rich who give only from their abundance.

It is a reading that emerges from sensitivity to the world of the poor (the air Jesus breathed); and it is a way of seeing humanity with the eyes of God. God values generosity and he detests the appearances of those pretending to be “saints”.

With respect to the narrative, Luke’s version does not specify to whom Jesus is speaking. Mark notes that he is speaking to his disciples. Mark also offers the detail that the woman drops in two small coins equivalent to a Roman *as*. We find the words attributed to Jesus are the same in Mark and Luke.

Here we might emphasize the social criticism. On the one hand, it is about the temple, a place that was the religious center and also the area of economic and political power. It is significant that it was here that Jesus unmasked the wealthy and their stratagems. On the other hand, the social order at the time of Jesus was a male centered order, where men subordinated women. In this context, it is notable that Jesus praises an ignored and disregarded woman, the poor widow, and he places her in opposition to the wealthy (supposedly males) with their large donations.

2) The prostitute who kisses Jesus

So many times women are insulted for being prostitutes, while almost never is the finger pointed at those who economically and sexually abuse them: men. The chauvinistic culture uses prostitution to negate the humanity of women on the one hand, while on the other, hiding the responsibility of the male. It is an injustice that cries out to heaven. How did Jesus treat prostitutes? He said that they would enter first into the kingdom of heaven (Mt 21:31-32). Moreover, we have a moving scene in which a prostitute kisses the feet of Jesus and he reconciles her with life.

While dining in the house of the Pharisee Simon, a prostitute anoints the feet of Jesus with perfume and kisses them. Since this is not accepted interiorly by the Pharisee, Jesus throws Simon's lack of hospitality in his face (he did not wash the feet of Jesus who was a visitor), and praised the woman who had washed them with her tears, dried them with her hair and kissed them. It is a moving and sensual scene. She expresses her repentance through love and the Teacher tells her that her sins are forgiven. The woman prostitute is reconciled with life.

This scene would rejoice and console anyone in those times who was sensitive to genuine love and, obviously, animates the pardoned woman. It also cheers those who appreciate the mystery of salvation today:

Now one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, so he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at table. When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisees house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume, and as she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them. When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of a woman she is - that she is a sinner". Jesus answered him, "Simon I have something to tell you. "Tell me Teacher", he said. "Two men owed money to a certain money lender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he canceled the debts of both. Now, which of them will love him more"? Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt canceled." "You have judged correctly", Jesus said. Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss but this woman, from the time I entered has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not put oil on my head but she has poured perfume on my feet. Therefore I tell you that her many sins have been forgiven - for she has loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little. Then Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven". The other guests began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you, go in peace."

This passage contains two types of communication. The first is between the Pharisee Simon and the other diners, and Jesus. Simon had invited him to the banquet and considers him a prophet. He thinks badly of Jesus because he has let himself be fondled by the woman. This is why Jesus tells him the parable of the two pardoned debtors. The one who owed more and was forgiven more, felt a more grateful love. Simon understands this. Then he is chided for not attending to his visitor

by washing his feet, as was the custom in those places with dusty roads, and for not giving him the kiss of welcome and anointing his head. Afterwards, other people question Jesus because he forgives sins. Then the gracious Pharisee and his companions come off poorly. The other communication is deep and transforming. The woman does not speak. She attends the Master lovingly and, grateful, she kisses his feet, a humble gesture of gratitude to him who restored her to life. She anoints him with costly perfume. Jesus does not speak to her but uses her as a model of true humanity in contrast to the pious Pharisee, the host. Finally he speaks to her and pardons her sins. Because of this, she shows much love. There has been a great deal of debate about the meaning of v: 7:47 but it signifies that the pardon given excites greater gratitude and love when the offense or debt is greater. Jesus adds: *"Your faith has saved you."*

The contrast is immense. A pious and amiable Pharisee and his companions are incapable of getting on the same wavelength of love and mercy as Jesus. In last analysis they do not value the way God is. The position of the woman is completely opposed to this. Before Jesus says anything to her, she confides in his mercy and can love him totally in the gesture of washing his feet and anointing them. And the Lord restores life to her. The most despised person turns out to be the most loving and the greater believer (*"your faith has saved you"*). This said in the home of a religious leader is prophetic behavior which surprises and fills not only the woman with amazement and joy but also all those who are open to pardon and new life.

3) Whoever is without sin... throw stones at the woman... (while Jesus writes)

A constant fact in human history is the cataloging of women as sinners, transgressors and dangerous. This is usually in reference to sexual matters. The women disciples of Jesus would have been captivated with the way Jesus treated the adulterous woman. As in the previous case of the prostitute, in matters of adultery, the guilt was usually attributed to the woman, while men were considered to have no responsibility whatever. A terrible injustice.

The scene is heart wrenching. Men, teachers of the law and Pharisees, drag a woman surprised in the act of adultery (the man left in peace!). The Jewish law was drastic: death by stoning. They put Jesus to the test: does he accept the law or does he defend the woman and in this way violate the sacred law. The ingenious Teacher surprises everyone: *"Whoever has no sin, throw the first stone!"* They all leave!

Jesus' behavior is kindly. What happens to the accusers is rather comical. These people feel summoned to respond by Jesus (all of them have sinned and so cannot stone her). In the meantime, Jesus writes (who knows what) in the dust with his finger. Then he addresses the adulterous woman: *"Where are they?"* He knew well that the accusers had left, filled with shame. The good Teacher said to her: *"I do not condemn you; go and do not sin again"*. One can almost see both the woman and others enjoying this vindication.

Jesus... sat down (in the temple) and began to teach them. The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now, what do you say?" They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him. But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. When they kept on questioning him he straightened up and said to them, "If any one of you is without sin let him be the first to throw a stone at her. And he stooped down and wrote on the ground. At this those who heard began to go away, one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman where are they? Has no one condemned you?" "No one, Sir", she said. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin" (John 8:1-11).

Jesus' attitude toward sinners was always compassionate and salvific. It was not that of a judge nor of someone with the prejudices of his society. Rather he appreciated the faith of those who repented and he announced the pardon of their sins and freedom from their diseases.

The case of the adulteress is narrated only by John although its style is similar to the synoptics. There is some discussion about the place of the text within the Gospel of John. The scene is one of surveillance where the solidity of the doctrine and morale of Jesus is put to the test. He knew how to defend himself, as in other circumstances, with skillful questions and by changing the focus of the conversation. Instead of discussing the Torah and Jewish customs he changes the emphasis towards those who accuse the woman. It is a splendid move; moreover the question unmasks the hypocrisy and guilt of those who wished to kill the woman.

The mercy of Jesus, that tells the woman that he does not condemn her, includes the admonition to leave her life of sin. In this way he does not overlook the problem of the sin of adultery. But the important thing is that she not return to her sin; that is to say, that she henceforth live correctly in the eyes of God and of others. All this certainly transmits an experience of peace and joy, completely different from the severity of the Law and the inhumanity of the accusers.

4) Why are you bothering her?

One of the pillars of the man-centered patriarchal order is the alliance and the complicity among men by means of which they exercise dominion and control over women. This is done in a subtle fashion or in a violent way, depending on the male convenience; but the result is always the wounded dignity of the woman and her dehumanization, as well as the dehumanization of the man who denies his own dignity in his attack on the woman. Let us look at the case of the anointing in the house of Simon, the Leper (different from the previous story of Simon the Pharisee). A woman pours a rich perfume over the head of Jesus. She is immediately censured and attacked by the people present. They use the feeble argument that the money should have been given to the poor.

This is not the attitude of Jesus. Quite the contrary. He appears uncomfortable with the argument and acts generously and benevolently in solidarity with the woman. He says sharply: "Why are you bothering this woman?" He praises her for caring for his body and preparing it for burial and prophesizes that she will be remembered throughout the world for her good work.

This event has an amusing and joyous side. The disciples are indignant with the woman (Mt 26:8) but Jesus takes pleasure in her action and thanks her. He says something shocking: that she has prepared his body for death. It is also surprising to hear him say that she will be part of the Good News throughout the world. One can visualize the joy of the woman, rejected by myopic people but praised and loved by Jesus who makes no discrimination. Rather, he enjoys the perfume and the friendship of the woman.

While he was at Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of a man known as Simon the Leper, a woman came in with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head. Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another, "Why this waste of perfume? It could have been sold for more than a year's wages and the money given to the poor." And they rebuked her harshly. "Leave her alone" said Jesus. "Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing for me. The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me. She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial. I tell you the truth, wherever the Gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her" (Mk 14:3-9; Mt 26:6-13; Jn 12:1-8).

This scene has to do with a Jewish custom of anointing the dead with perfumed oil. This is apparently the way Jesus interprets the woman's gesture. He thanks her; moreover he assures her

that in announcing the Gospel in the whole world, they will speak of her. In this way he vindicates the loving and merciful work of the woman that has spiritual value in view of his death. Jesus also confronts the intransigence and insensitivity of the men and women present, who censure and attack the person who pours perfume on his head. As on other occasions, the Teacher places himself at the side of the woman and is in solidarity with her initiative and spirituality.

The brief socio-religious debate is charged with bad intentions. The dinner guests say things in favor of the poor: proposing the sale of the perfume to obtain some 300 *denarius* (a great deal of money) in order to give it to the poor. In John's version the whole thing is grotesque. The one who makes the argument is Judas Iscariot; and John adroitly comments that he was a thief who robbed what was kept in the common purse of Jesus and his disciples (Jn 12:4-6).

The protagonist might be Mary, sister of Lazarus as is noted in John 12:3. Mark and Matthew offer only the name of the host, Simon, the leper. In this case, as in so many others, the woman is invisible, she has no name of her own. The type of communication at the center of the scene is chauvinistic. No one talks to the woman. But yes, they speak about her. Nonetheless, Jesus does recognize her with his behavior. He does not only take notice of her presence and her good work. He also foretells that she will be part of the Good News announced in the whole world. In this way he turns the discriminatory social order on its head.

If on reading this passage we put ourselves in the place of Mary, we share her satisfaction for the Lord's recognition. Perhaps she smiled in her heart as one does even today when reflecting on this passage.

5) She is not helping me... only one thing is necessary

One of the many motives for human disputes is that we have different activities. Moreover, there is competition over which is more or less valued. In the experience of Jesus, there was a dispute between two of his friends. Martha was occupied in attending to the domestic tasks while her sister was dedicated to listening to the Master. The first becomes angry with her sister because she does not help with the work and then, in all confidence, puts pressure on her friend Jesus: "Tell Mary to help me!"

The Teacher's reaction is strange. He puts aside the request from someone who is lovingly serving him (he seems like a discourteous guest); and instead supports the idle Mary who sits there with her arms crossed. Basically he is supporting her attitude as a disciple, seated at his feet, listening to his words, the only thing of importance.

It is a counter-cultural fact. In that chauvinistic context the rejected woman cannot be a disciple of a Rabbi like Jesus. A counter-current to the prejudices and injustices of the epoch, Mary exercises the right to listen, learn and have the same dignity as the male disciple. What would Mary have felt or for that matter, the others present? I would suppose that she would have enjoyed the support of Jesus. I also imagine that the observers would have enjoyed the attitude of Jesus.

As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister named Mary who sat at the Lord's feet, listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me". "Martha, Martha", the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her"(Lk 10:38-42).

We are in the home of Martha and Mary, sisters of Lazarus with whom Jesus is linked by friendship; he loved them (Jn 11:5); he even wept for Lazarus (Jn 11:35).

The sisters have different activities. Martha receives and attends to her guest: Jesus and perhaps also the disciples since Jesus often travels with his collaborators. She carries all the

responsibilities of a home (the kitchen, and other tasks). Meanwhile Mary sits and listens to her friend and Teacher. One would think that Jesus as a guest would value highly the kindness of Martha but in the face of her request that Mary, seated doing nothing, should help her, Jesus comes out in defense of Mary.

This is inexplicable behavior in the eyes of Martha and of many sexist listeners who probably attribute a servant role to the woman and do not accept her status as a disciple. This is another case where Jesus opts for the rights of the woman who has been left behind by opposing the injustices of his society.

6) The women run with joy

One of the aggressive caricatures used against women is that of “whiner”. This image abounds in the media. In general women are said to cry easily while men are said not to cry. This is of course false.

On the other hand, the woman is seldom presented as the carrier of genuine joy and a sense of humor. There is a common prejudice that a woman conquers with her seduction and the sweetness of her smile while, at the same time, commercial advantage is taken of her beauty in the use of feminine stereotypes.

Now in the paschal history of Jesus, there are abundant examples of the way women give testimony to the Resurrected Christ. All are frightened (“sad and weeping” Mk16:10) Their friend and Lord has been killed. But the women do not remain paralyzed. They are going to visit him in the sepulcher. A messenger of God (an “angel”) announces to them the Resurrection and then they run, filled with joy to give the good news to the apostles. The men and other women do not believe them (Lk 24:11). Women are the first evangelizers and they nourish joy.

After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. There was a violent earthquake for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightening and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became as dead men. The angel said to the women “Do not be afraid for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here, he is risen just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples: “He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him. Now I have told you”. So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them. “Greetings”, he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshipped him. Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me” (Mt 28:1-10; Mk 16:1-8; Lk 24:1-11; Jn 20:16-18).

The empty tomb, the meeting of Jesus with the women, his message to his disciples and his appearances to them are narrated in a special form. These are narrations arising out of faith and give testimony to the Resurrected Jesus. They are not journalistic descriptions nor historical analysis.

I emphasize the meeting of Jesus with the women, Mary Magdalene and Mary mother of James (according to Mt 28:1 and Mk 16:1), Salomé (Mk 16:1), Joanna and the rest (Lk 24:10). They recognize him (others doubt or do not believe); Jesus manifests himself to them and they are commissioned to tell the other disciples. There are then three aspects: the vision of faith, the revelation given to them and the first post-paschal evangelizing mission. All of this is experienced and accomplished by women disciples.

The stories speak as much about fear as they do about joy. The women are frightened (Mk 16: 5,8; and fearful Mt 28: 8); they are also happy and are carriers of “a great joy” (Mt 28:8). Their sensitivity and charisma allow them to live their faith in the Resurrected Jesus with greater depth.

F. The last will be first

1) The first... will be last

Luck is one of the principal beliefs in today's secularized world. Many people attribute to luck what really has another explanation. Such a belief is an expression of a vague hope for happiness and replaces the Christian vision of the providence of God. One form that this belief takes is to say: everything changes rapidly in a mysterious way.

This belief can be enlarged upon, in my opinion, by a biblical proverb: many of the first will be last and the last will be first. What does this mean? Each evangelist adds this proverb to a different narrative (Mark: the promise that whoever leaves everything will have eternal life; Matthew: the parable of the workers in the vineyard; Luke: sayings about the few that will be saved). The proverb certainly presents a radical change but does not explain the concrete details.

It is about a totally opposite situation. It may mean that the socially important people will not count for anything and vice versa. It might also mean that those religiously proud of their virtue (even the disciples themselves) will end up last and vice versa. In whatever case, the order of who is above and who is below is turned absolutely upside down. This has a comic aspect since those who consider themselves first (and often despise others) wind up as insignificant. The neglected and rejected will obviously jump for joy and laugh in the face of these changes.

Many of the first will be last and the last will be first (Mk10:31; Lk13:30; Mt 20:16).

The Gospel proverb comes perhaps from a saying common among the people. It has been included in a number of different texts. For this reason it may be interpreted in a number of ways. One basic version is Mark's and it can be applied to believers and to disciples: do not be arrogant nor believe yourselves to be the first to be saved. Matthew's version is introduced at the end of the parable of the workers (which explains the goodness of the Savior God); in this case the added proverb does not correspond to the parable. With respect to Luke, the proverb comes just after the sayings about salvation; few Jews will be saved, but the gentiles will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. There are also differences in the terms. Mark and Matthew: many of the first will be last. Luke notes "there are" the first and "there are" the last. The other version of Matthew speaks of "many who are called" and the "few that are chosen" (Mt 22:14).

The important element is the antithetic parallelism. That is to say, the play between two poles: first-last, last-first. This means that everything changes, a transformation that is made in a surprising and radical way. This causes reactions from listeners, both those of yesterday and today. Those who are the "first" are horrified and annoyed while those considered to be "last" are content and even laugh for joy.

2) The least... is the greater

Comparisons are often odious. In the frame of modernity, the priority given to the market economy increases competition between human beings. We measure each other using a scale of success. This is a form of comparison, another would be comparing the human and the supernatural.

There is a saying of Jesus in which he compares John the Baptist with others. No one born of woman is more important than John. He lived in the desert and lacked any goods; precisely with respect to this, he is said to be superior to the wealthy people of this epoch. "How can this be?", his listeners think, an amusing saying but there are more surprises. Then follows the "but": but greater than John is the least in the Kingdom. Again the contrast between the great and the small is put forward. Paradoxically the small is superior to the great. Another amusing adage.

I tell you: Among those born of women there is no one greater than John; but the one who is least in the Kingdom of God is greater than he (Lk 7:28; Mt 11:11).

The scene presents Jesus conversing with the people about his cousin and prophet John the Baptist. The Lord praised him saying that he was more than a prophet. Then he asks the people if they went out to the desert to look for a rich man, a rather amusing question (comment in section V, C, 4). Further on we find the saying about the great and the small. Luke speaks of the Kingdom of God while Matthew uses the expression “of heaven” (the name of God is not used as a form of respect).

The juxtaposition of the two sayings is rather strange. The first exalts the Baptist. The expression “born of woman” is the normal expression used in that epoch to indicate belonging to the human condition. In concrete terms, John is considered the greatest among the Jews. Then we are presented with an apparent devaluation of what was said. The “but”: the least person in the Kingdom is greater than the Baptist. This means that the situation in the Kingdom totally surpasses any human condition, because the smallest there is greater than the highly praised John. This collection of images ranging between greater and less is amusing. One factor that may have affected this saying is the tension between the followers of John and the followers of Jesus. It is possible that the disciples of Jesus may have used this saying against those who exalted the Baptist.

3) May the greater ... become a servant

Throughout human history various forms of hierarchy have existed. One is that of love and service, another the one who governs and the simple citizen; another, the capitalist and the worker. In any one of these, the one beneath is subordinate to the one above, the one who is “nothing” to the one who is “all” and the one who is “less” to the one who is “more”.

With his prophetic critique, Jesus confronts the political hierarchy, the totalitarian governments, and the powerful who oppress. He says this to confront the snobbery of some of his collaborators and the indignation of others towards those who ask the Lord for privileges. According to Luke, the disciples discuss who is the greatest among them (22:24).

In face of this, Jesus warns them not to act like those powerful lords but on the contrary, the greater should become the one who serves, and the first become the slave of the rest. Anyone would be daunted. But for the one who makes no pretense about being first or about crushing the rest, the saying is amusing. The criticism of the social snob then becomes humorous.

When the ten heard about this they became indignant with James and John. Jesus called them together and said, “You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant and whomsoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mk 10:41-45; Mt 20:24-28; 23:11; Lk 22:24-27).

The Teacher had collaborators who fought among themselves. In this case it was a fight about their superiority in the group, to have the first place in Glory (Matthew and Mark); or about who was the most important (Luke). In any case, Jesus does not scold them directly for their discussions. He poses something far deeper. He makes them see the hierarchic injustice in the world. Then he teaches them how to behave among themselves.

The contrasts are sharp: the great man- the one who serves, the first - the slave (Matthew and Mark), the greatest-the least, the one who commands- the one who serves (Luke). There are no half-way measures: not more or less humble, nor more or less great, nor more or less small. No! The disciple of the Lord must be a servant, must be small.

The model is the same Lord. The Son of Man is a servant who gives even his life (Mark and Matthew). This is the principal point of this Gospel teaching. Now, language that paints such radical contrasts leaves the listener astonished. We are also entertained by the pretensions to greatness of countless people, including many believers. It is ridiculous to try to be “great” in the eyes of the world while pretending, at the same time, to follow in the footsteps of the Son of Man on the cross.

V. Surprising behavior

Jesus’ mode of living and speaking communicates a fantastic piece of news: it has to do with the surprising encounter with and the revelation of a Loving God. This has been noted already when we spoke of the Kingdom banquet and in the manifestation of God as Father (aspects 2 and

3). Now we will look at an unusual activity of Jesus with humorous ingredients in various areas: childhood, enmity, wealth and healing. And we will also look at the fascinating language of parables and proverbs.

My focus is that used in many reflections on humor. When something does not correspond to the normal course of events, when there is incongruity and surprise and when this occurs in a human group disposed to enjoy the novel and the humorous, then these people smile and relish the incongruity. But there is room for other attitudes like fear of the new, intolerance and the rejection of what is considered out of the ordinary.

It is necessary to consider not only the objective fact, if it has humorous facets in itself, but consider as well the subjective and intersubjective disposition which is to say, the way each individual assumes a humorous fact and how this is communicated among human beings. Now, the synoptic texts, as we have insisted throughout this work, testify to and proclaim the Good News. They are a call to the new life that Jesus, the Son of God, dead and resurrected, has transmitted to the ecclesial community. Those who have heard this message and those who receive it today discover amusing characteristics.

I see incongruent elements with respect to childhood, enemies and wealth. On the one hand there are stereotypes and prejudices: children are socially inferior compared with adults; the enemy need not be loved but rather confronted and conquered; wealth and the rich are the most important things in life. On the other hand, we have unusual, surprising, out of the ordinary sayings and actions on the part of Jesus and his followers. In the following pages I will comment on various types of behavior that include amusing ingredients.

Here I am commenting in a synthetic fashion but it is necessary to pull out the incongruities and their humorous dimension in each biblical passage. For example, when the collaborators of Jesus debated about who was the most important, he takes a child and tells them that whoever receives a child, receives the Teacher himself. Certainly there is inconsistency here: the least important in the eyes of the culture at that time is the most important, according to the words of Jesus. This is amusing for children and for those who put themselves in their situation.

With regard to the parables and the proverbs, these speak of the arrival of the Kingdom, of the requirements of discipleship, and of other important points in the message of Jesus. In some cases there are droll expressions such as the question: A blind man lead another blind man?; or the parable of the corrupt administrator who is praised.

I also want to emphasize the surprising relation between illness and good humor. A very efficacious way to get beyond any malaise is optimism, good humor and imagination (that refuses to imprison itself in the malaise). Many medical experts recommend laughter as a therapy against a number of psycho-physiological illnesses. All of this seems very relevant for faith today. Very often the religious structure is monotonous and non-creative. It does not tolerate surprises and almost runs away from pleasure and joy. The way Jesus acts is refreshing and liberating for the religious order as is the way his followers and admirers act and enjoy his salvific work.

A. Playing with children

1) Do not hinder the children from coming to me... Those who are children enter the Kingdom

Why did the children come to Jesus? To listen to his discourses? To receive rules? No. They came together with their mothers and fathers, to be caressed and blessed. Jesus was pleased to be with little people. He probably played with them.

It's clear that the message and the action of Jesus was centered in the Kingdom of the God of Love. A few clarifications fit well here: unlike the Jewish custom of discriminating against them, boys and girls are the preferred members and inseparable from that Kingdom. The biblical narrative is neither condescending nor sentimental; nor does it have our modern vision of the child as the future of society.

Two attitudes of Jesus call our attention: he strongly forbids his collaborators to impede the access of the children to himself, while, on the other, he tenderly gathers the children and embraces them (according to Luke). With respect to this last, after experiencing some fear on being repudiated, the children would have been happy and smiling, together with a loving Master. It is then a joyful scenario.

People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this he was indignant. He said to them, "Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the Kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them. (Mk 10:13-16; Mt 19:13-15; Lk 18:15-17).

This narrative has two fundamental points: the relation Kingdom-child and the sacramental action of Jesus. Many biblical texts speak to us about the Kingdom of the God of Love, the new element here is presenting the child as the standard for entering the Kingdom. Another important point is the gesture of prayer, blessing, the placing of his hands on the children (as he did with the sick and those on the margins of society). This will be imitated by the Church in its sacramental practice in the gesture of the imposition of hands.

A second point (which I am emphasizing throughout this work) is his joy and good humor. This must have been the experience of the boys and girls embraced by the Lord. In the New Testament they are not permitted to speak (except where they cry out in Mt 21:15-16). However, we can read the expression of their delight while enjoying the preferential love of the Savior. The narrative is heavy with emotion. The disciples quarrel and reject the children (according to Luke 10:16). Jesus becomes annoyed (Mark). Then he lovingly embraces the children (Luke 10:16), and he lays his hands on them (Mk 10:6; Mt 19: 13, 15). This scene is filled with contrasts (between rejection and acceptance) and includes the joy and good humor of the children and their families.

I add another interpretation. With respect to receiving the kingdom and entering into it: it must be received as a child would receive it and, given this, it is possible to enter. This carries along with it a criticism of those who felt (or feel even today) they have some religious right to God's blessing. Another question has to do with the poor as a sacrament of the presence of Jesus (Mt 25: 31ff), in the same way that the child, or rather "becoming as a child" before God, as the standard and sacrament of the reception of the Kingdom.

2) In face of the discussion about who is more important... Jesus chooses a child

Vanity and "airs of superiority" are the bread of every day: each person aspires to excel over the rest, to be successful. Today's democratic world conserves many hierarchies and forms of discrimination. In this context we direct our gaze to the world of Jesus.

Certainly the friends of the Teacher from Nazareth have shown themselves as vain and have committed many errors. One was the discussion about which of them was superior to the rest. With pity and perhaps with some humor and mischievousness, Jesus asks them: "What have you been discussing?" (Mk 9:33) This question puts them up against a wall. It obliges them to uncover their meanness and small mindedness.

What does the Teacher say and do? Something surprising and rather humorous. He indicates the least person as the most important. He then, in effect, takes a child into his arms (Mk 9:36), he identifies with the child and teaches them that (in a paradoxical way) here lies greatness. In this way, Jesus not only puts vain people in their place but, above all, explains his and the Father's predilection for childhood; and in the process he makes us smile in face of the stupidity of vanity.

An argument started among the disciples as to which of them would be the greatest. Jesus knowing their thoughts took a little child and had him stand beside him. Then he said to them, "Whoever welcomes this little child in my name, welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. For he who is least among you all he is the greatest" (Lk 9:46-48); MT 18:14; Mk 9:33-37).

The gospel narratives show surprising behavior in Jesus. He does not act like a boss who distributes privileges nor assumes the criteria of superior/inferior. On the contrary, he leaves people open-mouthed when he shows his predilection for children. In Jewish society, this was unheard of. The highest value was attributed to older people and not to children, to men and not to women. Jesus does not tolerate these discriminations. Moreover, he proposes another order of life, based on the preferential love of God for these little ones.

The message goes in two directions: according to Matthew, one has to become like a little child in order to enter the Kingdom (Mt 18:4); according to Mark and Luke the message is that whomsoever receives a child, receives Jesus and the Father. This is the central content. This is not just an emotionally sentimental scene regarding a few children. Rather, in the face of a sterile debate among his disciples, Jesus communicates something fundamental about how God is and the nature of his Kingdom, and consequently how disciples and believers should be. Then, in the process, he presents the child as the carrier of these truths.

A few details should also be emphasized. In Matthew's version, the disciples ask (in an impersonal way) who is the greatest; both Matthew and Luke speak of the child in the midst of the group; in the versions of Luke and Mark there is a discussion and Jesus intervenes; in addition, Mark describes Jesus tenderly embracing the child. Mark also has the surprising phrase that states that if one desires to be first, he must become the last of all.

It seems that contrasts and disassociations are deliberately put forward. This is not about a neutral, tranquilizing and one-sided message. On the contrary, the individuals are appealed to and shocked as the dominant social schemas fall apart and are replaced by a different vision of the human and the divine. In a special way, the distance between the "vain-greatness" of the disciples and the "least-greatness" exalted by Jesus has its humorous facet.

3) Before the indignant priests... Jesus enjoys the cries of the children

Frequently the social order does not support (but rather represses) free, healthy expressions from the marginal areas of society. One form of resistance is to cry out in joy.

In the scene of the messianic entry into Jerusalem, various elements are interwoven. On the one hand, the multitude that joyfully receives and greets Jesus; on the other, the economic-religious system of the Jerusalem temple, harshly critical of the prophet from Galilee. Another factor is the constant healing action of Jesus ("some blind and lame drew near to Jesus and he cured them"). Moreover, something scandalous is happening in the eyes of the Guardians of the Law and the Temple: some children joyfully praising the Messiah.

Let's pause at this scene. The priests of the Temple and the scribes of the Law, their faces filled with anger, cannot tolerate the expressions of praise for Jesus on the part of the children. Jesus seems happy in the midst of the clamor and cries of the children. There is a short dialogue where the words of Jesus show a spark of humor: "Out of the mouths of children and nursing babes" the greatest truths are heard (and not from the venerable guardians of the temple and the law!).

When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, "Who is this?" The crowds answered: "This is Jesus the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee". Jesus entered the temple area and drove out all that were buying and selling there. He overturned the table of the money-changers and the benches of those selling doves. "It is written", he said to them, "My house will be called a house of prayer, but you are making it a den of robbers". The

blind and the lame came to him at the Temple, and he healed them. But when the chief priests and the teachers of the Law saw the wonderful things that he did and the children shouting in the temple area, "Hosanna to the Son of David", they were indignant. "Do you hear what these children are saying?", they asked him, "Yes", replied Jesus, "have you never read, "From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise?" (Mt 21:10-16).

The dialogue here is a confrontation. The responsible people of the Temple reprove the liberty with which the children cry out acclaiming Jesus, they also chide Jesus with the question: "Do you hear what they are saying?" It appears to be a rhetorical question because if they were shouting, surely Jesus heard them. The Temple leaders then are not questioning Jesus, rather they are complaining about the behavior of the children.

The clever and genial response of Jesus is made on the basis of the scriptures of the Torah. He cites a verse of psalm 8 where the creatures praise Yahweh in his works of creation and salvation. That is to say, what the leaders claim to respect –the word of Yahweh- is cited against them. It is certainly a skillful response. It is a type of humor that unmasks the established order. Jesus is subverting the position of the Temple.

B- To love one's enemies

1) Happy are you if they hate you... jump with joy

Contemporary society promotes transient, superficial moments of happiness. It does not assume the reality of suffering. Nor does it know how to face up to conflicts with their heavy burden of sorrow.

If we turn our gaze toward the beginnings of Christianity, we see incessant persecution, martyrdom and mistreatment. How did they see all of this? The New Testament texts do not speak to us of people and communities filled with bitterness and depression. Quite the contrary, they tell us that the first Christians had a faith filled with confidence in a new life, in the midst of profound contradictions. Out of this evil something very good came forth.

It is unheard of today that someone hated and beaten might feel happy and even jump for joy. Yet this is what Jesus said in the discourse on the Beatitudes. He said this for his contemporaries, and he says it today to each believer through his Spirit. Am I happy when I suffer for the sake of the Gospel or for the sake of the kingdom?

"Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven" (Lk 6:22-23; Mt 5: 11-12).

This does not refer to just any indisposition. It has to do with suffering "for the sake of Jesus"(Matthew), or "for the sake of the Son of Man" (Luke). This is not unheard of. The prophets have also suffered persecution in the history of Israel. As for the future, this is not something to grumble about. On the contrary, this beatitude portends happiness and notes that those hated will have great recompense in heaven. This is the heart of the message.

It appears to me that this is not only a promise. Those who heard these words were punished and had to face persecution, even martyrdom with joy in the Lord.

Luke's version is directed precisely to the disciples. Four beatitudes are directed to those who concretely took upon themselves, poverty, hunger, weeping and hatred. In Matthew's version there are nine beatitudes directed to an indefinite third person and "spiritualized"(Matthew speaks of: the poor in spirit, hunger for justice).

As for the violence suffered, Like mentions hatred, expulsion, denouncement and attacks against the good name of the person; Matthew mentions injury, persecution, maledictions, lies. In the end, there are many forms of suffering occasioned by discipleship and by being believers (being a Christian was considered something evil).

With respect to future happiness, the expression “in heaven” refers to being happy in the presence of God and is neither an expression of escape nor is it fatalistic. On various occasions the New Testament text uses the expression “heaven” instead of “God”, as a sign of respect.

2) Do good to those who hate you

We are accustomed to being opposed to our adversary and even to feeling the right to destroy the enemy. We are surrounded by a “culture of death” which justifies all types of violence.

In these circumstances, the message of Jesus today is madness and seems incapable of application. One might say that evangelical love is perhaps foolishness, completely contrary to the dominant mentality.

Well then, what happened in the time of Jesus? In contrast to certain Jewish customs (“eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth”), Jesus defined himself by mercy and invited his followers to do good to those who hated them.

This has been put into practice by many martyrs today. In the case of P. Juan Alsina, during the political and economic dictatorship of Chile, he looked into the eyes of the one who shot him and forgave him. Certainly he did “good” to the one who shot him.

The biblical passage is not a laughing matter but it does show the most profound happiness in the midst of the experience of doing what is good, even when one is despised and destroyed.

“But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you” (Lk 6:27; Mt 5:43-44).

This teaching forms part of the spirit of the Beatitudes. It is not simply a moral directive; nor a tactical approach to getting on well with the neighbor/adversary. Jesus speaks on the basis of his eschatological mission. These teachings are only understood from the perspective of the God of the Kingdom.

The second part of the Sermon on the Mount (Lk 6:27-45) begins with the normative expression: *“I tell you”*. It has to do with a fundamental teaching. The problematic has to do with the followers of Jesus, soon to be called Christians. They are hated and mistreated because of being Christians. It has nothing to do with personal conflicts for other motives.

The legal process in Judaism must be taken into account. The Law had intolerant elements. These were badly interpreted in the sense that Matthew notes: Love the neighbor and hate the enemy (Mt 5:43). This is not what Leviticus states in 19:17-18, nor is it found in other parts of the Law which instruct the reader that it is not necessary to love one’s enemy.

With this background, Jesus formulates a commandment: to love one’s enemy. There is nothing sentimental about this, nor is it only an interior attitude. Concretely, one is to do good things for the enemy and treat him with love (*agape*: a Greek expression). This is to say it is a commandment that implies real love.

3) If anyone strikes you on one cheek... turn to him the other also

This shocking expression can be understood as a sort of joke. Or it may be considered an exaggeration. Another problem is that it appears to legitimate being victims (such as the poor, women or children) who suffer violence and tolerate it with pseudo-religious explanations.

The biblical phrase has a different meaning. It forms part of the great discourse of the Beatitudes. The fundamental meaning is that one assumes the cost of being a disciple of Christ, and suffers without a vengeful attitude.

It is a formula so shocking that it remains engraved in the imagination of believers. From time to time one hears this phrase. Unfortunately, it is badly used in human conflicts. I insist that the sense of it does not explain an ordinary action, nor does it legitimate abuse nor encourage us to remain passive in the face of social injustice. Rather it has to do with an aspect of violence suffered patiently by those who give testimony of their faith, motivated by the fidelity of God.

At the same time, persons and groups that propose pacific non-violence often suffer the aggression out of a deep sense of liberty and as an efficacious form of protest. Here the life of Mahatma Gandhi and so many others who practice his same spirituality is outstanding.

“If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic. Give to everyone who asks you, do not demand it back” (Lk 6:29-30; Mt 5: 38-41).

This passage does not present a human tactic for supporting violence, robbery, and abuse. Rather it has to do with a dimension of spiritual practice and ethics that comes from the Gospel. Were it otherwise, the biblical text would be misunderstood as passivity.

Luke and Matthew present this in various concrete ways: to bless the one who curses us, to pray for those who mistreat us, to turn the other cheek to him who strikes us (Luke), to give one's cloak, to go two miles with the one who obliges us to walk one (Matthew). Everything goes against what one would instinctively do. This is perceived as possible only where there is a spiritual-ethical praxis that corresponds to the Revelation.

Perhaps these Gospel phrases stir up some incredulity and mockery. They can also cause laughter in the face of what appears to be impossible and superhuman. And so it is for it does not respond to human guidelines. It responds to Jesus' way of life.

C- The devaluation of riches

1) Although one might have it all... objects do not give life

Each epoch of human history has its own peculiar characteristics. In looking at our present situation, it appears that the priority is given to money and the accumulation of wealth. There are even Christian churches (and some Pentecostal churches) in which prosperity and fortune are signs of God's blessing. The separation between God and Mammon is forgotten.

The context of Jesus was very different. Nonetheless, covetousness also existed and it was qualified as idolatry (Ef 5:5; Col 3:5). We are given a humorous dialogue in which Jesus is asked to convince a relative to share an inheritance. Jesus replies with some humor: “Who has made me an arbiter between you?” He then adds that even when one has a great deal of wealth, life is not assured. This sort of dialogue sets off sparks.

Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.” Jesus replied, “Man who appointed me a judge or arbiter between you?” Then he said to them, “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.” (Lk 12: 13-15).

Here we have a singular way of teaching. Jesus takes advantage of this life experience. It is something that many people have experienced: family conflicts over inheritances. In the case narrated by Luke, the younger brother demands the inheritance, he exacts it from his older brother who prefers to maintain the inheritance intact rather than divide it into parts.

It is comical how Jesus complains because people take for granted that he act as judge. He asks who has designated him for that function. But the central point is his calling their attention to guard against covetousness. Material goods do not assure us of a good, full life. It is a moral teaching present in many parts of the Gospel. So it is that out of an experience of life he arrives at a serious ethical question. In my opinion, this is excellent pedagogy.

2) God calls the rich man a fool

Generally the rich are respected and admired. Many workers depend on those who have money, they are subordinate to their employers and even imitate them.

In the context in which Jesus grew up, there were landowners, powerful groups linked to the Temple, those in charge of tax gatherers and other wealthy men. Out of this reality emerged the parable of the foolish rich man. What happens to him is sad and at the same time rather amusing.

The scene contains humorous details. The rich man destroys his granaries in order to construct even larger new ones. Here he gathers the enormous amount of goods produced over a period of time (and these become immediately useless to him). It is curious how he converses with himself: *"You have enough goods to last for many years"*. But that very night he dies. Even God seems to be playing tricks on him. He says to him *"You fool"*, and then adds a question: *"Who will get all these things if you die tonight?"*

Jesus told them this parable: "The soil of a certain rich man produced a good crop. He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I'll say to myself, 'You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat drink and be merry.' But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?' This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself instead of working for God." (Lk 12: 16-21).

The parable has to do with death and it might appear to be a simple warning about the drama of death. However, it is much more than that. As in other parables, the background is eschatological time, that is to say, one must act in accord with the salvation that God offers now. It is not worth the trouble accumulating earthly goods nor living for oneself (Lk 12:21); rather one must live deeply related to God. This is the teaching placed at the end of the parable.

With regard to the narrative (vs16-20), it offers a very interesting dialogue that takes place in the interior of the rich man and also God's intervention which mocks him. He who had it all turns out to have nothing. And that is laughable.

The story could be analyzed today in psychological terms. The landowner is self-centered. No one is important to him outside of himself. He is the only one who matters along with his basic needs for food and drink. But what he accumulates does not give him life. He dies and is left with nothing. God's judgment is unyielding: this rich man is a fool.

3) Only one thing is necessary... give everything to the poor and follow me

Each social institution, financial business or personal life plan, determines its priorities with regard to action. There are various types of priorities. One common denominator is the modern cult of "success", with its quantitative indicators. Keeping this in mind, we turn to the time of Jesus and to his priorities. His message and his actions were centered in the Kingdom, in discipleship and in the love of God. The consequence of this was his preference for the poor who were his priorities. Within this frame of reference, human existence, material goods, etc. were given their true value. Regarding this, there is a humorous dialogue, replete with a certain incongruity that brings a smile to the lips. A rich man says to Jesus: "Good Teacher". Instead of responding courteously, Jesus

stops him short: “Do not call me good, only God is good”. His unexpected response is in contrast to the respectful and affectionate tone of the rich man. Then the rich man continues in a solemn, subjective manner: “What must I do to enter into eternal life?” In the face of this question, Jesus responds from another plane (he calls to mind the objective commandments); then there is another peculiar change. The rich man humbly responds that he has fulfilled the Law. Now Jesus looks at him lovingly; but again he changes the level of the conversation and says to him: “Only one thing is lacking: give everything to the poor and come and be my disciple.” The conclusion does not offer a “happy ending”; the rich man goes away sad.

As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. “Good Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” “Why do you call me good?” Jesus answered. “No one is good – except God alone.” You know the commandments: “do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do not defraud, honor your father and mother.” “Teacher”, he declared, “all these I have kept since I was a boy.” Jesus looked at him and loved him. “One thing you lack,” he said, “Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” At this the man’s face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth (Mk 10: 17-22; Lk 18: 18-25; Mt 19: 16-22).

The principal theme is the relation with the poor as the crux of the behavior of the believer and as a condition for following Jesus. For the legalistic background surrounding Jesus, any lack of concentration on the Law would have been scandalous; on the other hand, for the multitude of simple people who were drawn to Jesus, his preference for the poor would be very Good News. This was News that would have gladdened their hearts. With regard to the following of Jesus, it is true that the rich man went away sad, but others, who have left everything for the sake of the Kingdom, will be happy on hearing this dialogue.

The selective memory of the commandments is a curious thing. Instead of emphasizing the principal ones, love of God and neighbor, the text reminds us of the moral norms: do not kill, do not steal, etc. The only exception is Mt. 19:19 that includes love of neighbor.

Although the dialogue is short and contains incongruities, there are a few elements of mutual appreciation. The rich man treats Jesus as a good Teacher and kneels before him (Mk 10:17). At one point, Jesus looks at the rich man lovingly (Mk 10:21). It is worth adding here that this was someone of importance with a great deal of wealth (Lk18: 18,23;Mt19:22; Mk10:22); there is only one mention of his being young (Mt 19:16). The scene is then worth defining as that of the rich man who did not follow Jesus.

Another aspect I would like to emphasize is the self-centered posture of the pious rich man: his concern is how he, as an individual, should fulfill the Law and win eternal life. The posture of Jesus is radically different: to give all one has to the poor, which is to say, encounter and solidarity with the other and then, the following of Jesus, the encounter with the Other.

4) What did you go out to the desert to see... did you go to see a rich man?

Jesus again fills the heads and hearts of his listeners with questions. It has been said already that Jesus’ manner with the people often employed questions and expressed good humor. This is very different from the doctrinaire and legalistic attitude that predominates in some ecclesial contexts today. Which is better? Without a doubt, the methodology and the attitude of Jesus.

On one occasion, on speaking about a prophet, precisely his cousin John the Baptist, who walked about poorly clothed in the desert areas, Jesus formulated clever and witty questions. Question: “What did you go out to see in the desert where there is nothing?” He continued with some humor, “Did you go out to see a reed swayed by the wind?” Not much interest in a reed!

Another humorous question: “Did you go out to see a man dressed in fine clothes? That sort of person doesn’t walk through the desert! This is an unusual mode of speech.

Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: “What did you go out to the desert to see? A reed swayed by the wind? If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear expensive clothes and indulge in luxury are in palaces. But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you and more than a prophet... I tell you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John; yet the one who is least in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than he” (Lk 7:24-30; Mt 11:7-15).

This passage exalts the prophet John (Lk 7:8; Mt 11:9-10). It underlines his humble condition, his presence on the margins of society and his being the principal person in the world. This is to say, a poor man who is a prophet, is the most important. Further on he becomes more precise: the least in the Kingdom surpasses the great prophet John.

Luke’s version indicates that all who were baptized by John acknowledged the justice of God’s way; with the exception of the Pharisees and doctors of the Law who had not been baptized by him (Lk 7: 29-30). Matthew’s version ends with a surprising and enigmatic saying about the violence suffered by the Kingdom and the violent who acquire it. He also identifies John with the prophet Elias.

In general terms, these and other passages show a critical view of the wealthy on the part of Jesus. The truth of the prophet comes from the poor and from the salvation that God provides. This is said with a great deal of humor by means of the questions and implications already noted.

5) They will not be convinced... even should someone rise from the dead

Frequently we have pleasant informal conversations about death and the activities of those who have died. I have been impressed during my contacts with people in poorer areas that jokes and laughter form part of their experience with the dead (wakes that include good humor, humorous anecdotes about the dead, games played on the feast of All Souls among Andean children, which include dolls made of bread, etc.).

Let’s take a look at the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. It appears that Jesus made use of an oriental narrative about the inversion of social conditions that takes place after death. With regard to the parable, it is not a teaching about death as such, nor is it about the characters of the rich man and the poor man. The critical question has to do rather with the attitude and the destiny of the rich man and his five brothers, insensitive to the hunger of the poor and condemned to the torments of hell.

The story has images of horror and sadness. But the conclusion has a humorous saying attributed to father Abraham: “These people will not believe even if a dead man were to appear to them.” This is to say they are totally insensitive and not even a miracle would make them change:

There was a rich man who dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate there was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man’s table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried. In hell where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side... ‘Son remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony’... ‘Then I beg you father, send Lazarus to my father’s house, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them so that they may not also come to this place of torment... If someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent’. Abraham said to him, ‘If they do not

listen to Moses and the prophets they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead” (Lk 16:19-31).

The central problematic in this horror story is that the five brothers of the rich man will not be converted even if Moses, the prophets or some dead person like Lazarus should appear to them. An urgent message is thus delivered to those who listen to the parable, that they change their lives in order to receive salvation and not be unbelieving and foolish like those rich who will be condemned. The setting of the scene of the dead corresponds to the Jewish imagination. Lazarus whose name signifies “God helps”, rests in the bosom of Abraham, that is to say, at his right in the banquet of the next life. There the guests see one another and talk together; the rich man who is in torment and asks for a drop of water in the midst of the flames; the poor man is consoled. There is a radical change, since previously Lazarus was hungry, full of sores, begging in the street near the mansion of the rich man. According to the feeling of that epoch, Lazarus was a sinner who as a consequence was suffering illness. But all this changes totally in the place of the dead and this causes great surprise in those listening to the parable.

Although the narrative is terrible and makes it seem impossible to avoid the catastrophe that will happen to the rich, one hopeful element is that Lazarus, the afflicted sinner (in Jewish eyes), has been saved. The final saying attributed to Abraham is a humorous detail.

D- The joyful parables

1) You are given to understand the mysteries... Though seeing they may not see and though hearing they may not understand

Insensitive people make us uncomfortable. For example, when someone who has good eyes is incapable of seeing something extraordinary. Each one of us is familiar with this problem: at times a person can be rather dense and humanly or spiritually indifferent.

In the case of Jesus, we find him to be deeply and contagiously sensitive. We can see this for example in his use of the parable. It is not a dry and neutral form of communication but rather his use of strong images moves the listener, questions him and calls him to conversion. It also makes us laugh when it reveals the dull-witted and stubborn blindness of human nature.

Taking up the prophecy of Isaiah 6:9-10, Jesus shows how people who have eyes do not see, have ears but do not hear. This insensitivity is really lamentable and at the same time, a motive for laughter.

His disciples asked him the meaning of the parable of the sower. And he said to them: “To you it has been given to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of God; but to others I speak in parables so that though seeing they may not see; though hearing they may not understand” (Lk 8:10; Mt 13:11-15; Mk 4: 11-12).

It has to do with a dialogue: the disciples ask Jesus why he speaks in parables (according to Matthew) or that he explain to them the parable of the sower (Luke and Mark). Jesus responds citing a prophecy of Isaiah and draws a contrast between his followers, including the twelve and the rest of the people who do not understand the arrival of the Kingdom of salvation.

The contrast between the “you”(the disciples- men and women) and the “rest”, those who simply do not know the Kingdom, is noteworthy.

What is the basic problem in the transmission of this teaching? It appears to be the strange disbelief of the Jewish people. For the primitive Church it was almost incomprehensible that God’s chosen people did not accept the announcement of the Good News. Seeing they do not see; hearing they do not hear! It is unfathomable. It is shocking. It causes surprise and even laughter.

This passage does not indicate that Jesus teaches in a way that people do not understand. The entire reason for his Gospel is that humanity should listen and change their lives. The parables are a privileged mode of making known the mysteries of the Kingdom. As C.H. Dodd notes (in his book *Parables of the Kingdom*, 15) Jesus couldn't want the people to misunderstand him. His mode of life was precisely a salvific presence in the midst of his people.

2) A corrupt administrator... is praised

What can one do in the face of a rogue? Besides the indignation one might feel, one can confront the delinquent through humor and irony.

Jesus narrates the case of the corrupt administrator who misused the funds of his master's properties and falsifies the documents of his debtors. This parable has details and exaggerations proper to the popular language of his time.

What is the fundamental question? By some chance, is the Teacher giving us a rogue as a model? Or is he asking us to imitate his astuteness? The fundamental thing is the crisis which implies the salvific presence of Jesus (the eschatological crisis). In face of this, one must act shrewdly. This is what the delinquent does in this parable and it seems that Jesus is suggesting that his hearers act with similar shrewdness. At the same time there is, in my opinion, a humorous criticism of the wealthy, of tax gatherers and others obsessed with money.

Jesus told his disciples: "There was a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his possessions. So he called him in and asked him, 'What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your management because you cannot be manager any longer'. 'What shall I do now that my master is taking away my job? I'm not strong enough to dig and I am too ashamed to beg. – I know what I shall do so that when I lose my job here, people will welcome me into their houses.' So he called in each of his master's debtors. He asked the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' Eight hundred gallons of olive oil," he replied. The manager told him, 'Take your bill, sit down quickly and write four hundred.' Then he asked the second, 'And how much do you owe?' 'A thousand bushels of wheat,' he replied. He told him, 'Take your bill and make it eight hundred.' The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light. I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into the eternal dwellings" (Lk 16:1-8).

Scholars show that the original parable includes only versicles 1 to 8, followed by explanations about the use of money and serving only God (ver. 9-13).

The original parable has rich details about a case from life experience during the time of Jesus and its objective is to warn the listener that in this eschatological moment of the presence of Jesus, it is necessary to act shrewdly, risking everything. The manager or administrator is praised (8a) along with shrewd people in general (8b). This parable may have been directed against the wealthy (as appears in ver. 9: unjust riches) since there is much exaggeration in the quantities owed. All of this seems to be said with irony and humor. The parable might also have been interpreted as "speaking in reverse": Do you see what the unjust administrator did? Well then, you are not to do likewise."

The explanations (ver, 9-13) are directed to the community of disciples. It is more of a moral than an eschatological teaching: be careful with your use of wealth! Luke's text reunites various sayings about money and riches.

In speaking of debts, there is much exaggeration here. One owes one hundred measures of oil: this would correspond to the oil from 159 olive trees (worth around a thousand *denarius*!). The other owes 100 measures of wheat, the harvest of 40 hectares (worth 2,500 *denarius*). These are

immense debts and have to do with an exaggerated and humorous mode of speech (typical of the popular culture in the time of Jesus).

3) Joy on encountering the treasure and the pearl

The joy of the Kingdom of God is compared to that of the person who finds something fabulous. Once more, Jesus' way of speaking is surprising and at the same time rather amusing. Instead of diffusing wordy, complicated elaborations about divine things, Jesus uses examples from everyday activities where something happens that fills the heart with joy (like discovering a fantastic treasure while working in the fields). This is how Jesus taught the mysteries of God.

This is about different parables having a common theme. They show joy on finding something out of the ordinary (a treasure, a costly pearl). In both cases, everything is sold in order to buy the land or the costly jewel. The behavior of the believer in the face of the salvation event must be just as surprising and open to risk. Both narratives offer not weighty, gloomy thoughts that sadden the listener but rather inspire joyful smiles because of the fantastic events that are conveyed.

The Kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it he hid it again and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it (Mt 13:44-46).

These are teachings about the Kingdom of God that erupts into daily life and unexpected surprises. The Kingdom is not synonymous with any one thing (coins or pearls). The Aramaic and Greek linguistic expressions indicate what happens with the Kingdom when someone discovers it. What is shown is then the experience of the Kingdom.

Matthew often uses the expression "of Heaven" as a respectful way of speaking of God. This expression is neither enigmatic nor spiritualistic. Rather it speaks of the loving presence of God in oblique language. In the Gospel of Matthew there are ten parables with the expression "Kingdom of Heaven".

The two examples produce an impact. A worker accidentally finds a treasure in the place where he is working. He is not a rich man (he is working on someone else's property) and does not advise the owner. Rather, he does some unusual things like reburying the treasure (not taking it to some hidden place), selling what he has and buying the land where the chest of silver coins is buried.

The seller of pearls does something similar; he sells absolutely everything he has in order to acquire the fabulous pearl. It appears to be total foolishness but it is worth losing everything in order to gain everything.

In the time of Jesus there were similar legends. Fabulous things happened. For example in the context of war or of highway robbery, treasures were sometimes hidden in fields. These stories were passed from mouth to mouth but they were often elaborated upon with fabulous entanglements (like becoming wealthy and living magnificently in a palace).

This doesn't happen in these narratives. They are brief and have a central point. It is only important to find something, to receive something that goes beyond all expectations. God saves in a surprising way similar to when one finds a treasure or a marvelous pearl. This awakens and stimulates joy; as the text tells us: "filled with joy"(13:44).

E- Amusing proverbs

1) A blind man... guiding another blind man? Won't they both fall into the pit?

This question does not correspond to some macabre sense of humor nor is it a mockery of those with limitations. It is rather the proverbial language.

We frequently use proverbs whether profane or religious. For example “God helps those who help themselves”. It has the sting of wisdom that is applicable to a particular situation. This is the charm of the proverb; it pierces concrete reality and brings to light a deep truth hidden there. In some cases, proverbial language is ironic and comical.

It seems to me that this is the case in the biblical passage about the blind man who attempts to lead another blind man. They both fall into a pit! The passage was probably directed to leaders who prided themselves as leading the rest. It is applied to the Pharisees by Matthew, the evangelist who incorporates a number of passages critical of the Pharisees. For the humble contemporaries of Jesus, it must have been a source of humor to hear persons of some prestige called blind men who fall together into a pit.

Can a blind man lead another blind man? Will they not fall together into the pit? (Lk 6:39; Mt 15:14).

The formulation of questions was a constant element in the conversations of Jesus with the people. Questions are an efficient way of stimulating conversation and Jesus was quite a questioner. A skillful question can get to the bottom of our souls. Compared with a well-aimed question, conceptual language barely touches any aspect of our humanity. Those who came to speak with Jesus also asked him questions because at times they did not understand his behavior and his message or they were confused or upset.

Luke’s narrative contains two questions (Matthew has none). In themselves they are not humorous, but rather seem tragic. Nonetheless, to the extent that they are directed to the wealthy who considered themselves superior to the rest, they are rather droll. It may be that Luke’s text is directed to members of the community of disciples, since in his chapter six there is mention of the disciples: 6:20,40. In this case, it would be an internal criticism of those who considered themselves excellent believers, but in fact were blind and could not help their neighbor.

Matthew’s narrative 15:12-14, is one of a number of controversies between the disciples of Jesus and the Pharisees who were scandalized by his message. Jesus intervenes in a straightforward way: the Pharisees are blind men who guide the blind. Then comes the humorous proverb: if a blind man leads another blind man, both will fall into the pit. For those who were listening, both disciples in conflict with the leaders of the Jewish religion and ordinary people categorized as sinners by the Pharisees, the words of Jesus were certainly a motive for satisfaction, consolation and laughter.

2) Do you light a lamp... and put it under the bed?

When a question has incoherent and absurd elements, instead of being a way of eliciting information, it becomes rather a way of making people laugh (as in the case of the lamp), or a mode of insulting or criticizing (when someone asks for example: “Might an adult perhaps be like a child?”). On asking about lighting a lamp only to extinguish it by placing it under a box or under a bed in such a way that it fails to light up the room, we are evidently faced with an illogical and humorous question.

What did Jesus wish to say with this proverb? We do not know with any certainty. But we count on the versions from the three evangelists. For Matthew, Jesus is calling the disciples’ attention to their mission to be the light of the world. For Mark and Luke the explanation is rather that what is hidden must be made known. In any case, the proverbial language indicating something impossible and illogical, made listeners in Palestine smile and today, it also strikes us as humorous.

He said to them, “Do you bring in a lamp to put it under a bowl or a bed? Instead, don’t you put it on its stand? For whatever is hidden is meant to be disclosed and whatever is concealed is meant to be brought out into the open” (Mk 4:21-22; Mt 5:14-16; Lk 8:16-17).

This is about texts with two parts: the proverb and the explanation of a strange expression. They are then, complementary images or parables.

The principal image is that of lighting or carrying a lamp into a room. This is not electric light; it is rather light from a candle, still used in so many poor homes even today. Blowing is not the best way to extinguish a lamp because it causes smoke and an unpleasant odor. In Palestine they used a small box or bowl and in this way the light was extinguished. Now here we are offered a rather shocking image: to light a lamp that serves for nothing since it is immediately extinguished or placed where it will illuminate nothing. This is absurd and a motive for laughter.

The narratives of Matthew and Luke are short and direct: there is no lamp to be lit. In Matthew, this part of the narrative placed just after the Beatitudes, speaks of being light and salt for others, that is to say, it is a call to those who follow Jesus. There is no humor. Only the principal message is expressed: the mission of Jesus and his followers to be the light of salvation for the world.

3) Do not judge; for as you judge... so shall you be judged.

Throughout human history, each culture has its schemas for judging people. This occurs in a horizontal manner among equals as in sports but also in a vertical way. Here the one with greater power often places the subordinate at a disadvantage: men usually judge women with discrimination; adults do so with youth, etc. When the social order is judged from below, from the vantage point of the victims, the unheard of and shocking occurs. This can be done with a sense of humor.

Hearing this proverb, I imagine it being said from the vantage point of those mistreated by the dominant norms. The ordinary Jewish people in the time of Jesus were judged as violators of countless laws imposed by the social and religious elites. For those who were judged and condemned, it must have been a relief that someone would judge these judges. Given the harshness with which they judged the ordinary people, they themselves would be judged with the same rigor. It is a liberating message and a source of joy for those who had been discriminated against.

The biblical proverb can be understood in a variety of ways. Matthew interprets it as a warning against those who make judgments. Luke also puts it into the context of divine mercy, pardon, the absence of condemnation. Mark includes it in his collection of parables and adds as explanation: to the one who has, it will be given (which makes it even more difficult to understand). The proverbial sayings are treated with a good deal of liberty by the biblical editors, a fact which motivates us to assume the texts in a creative manner. In any case, we must respect the background: as believers and disciples of Christ, it is not up to us to judge others; it is the merciful God who judges all. I also think that there is room for a certain sense of humor towards those who use rigid parameters. To them it is said that they must not judge or measure others. There is even room for laughter which disarms their schemas.

Be merciful as your Father is merciful. No not judge... For with the measure you use it will be measured to you (Lk 6:36-38; Mk 4:24-25; Mt 7:1-2).

Much of Jesus' teaching refers to God's mercy. At the same time, a great part of his action was dedicated to people on the margins, the condemned and the persecuted. He sat at table with these people; he healed them of their sicknesses and the effects of discrimination and called them "blessed". I consider this adequate background for testing many sayings of Jesus. This is the case with not judging, not measuring with narrow, rigid measurements because those who invent laws, make judgments and apply those judgments will be subject to the same rigidity and harshness they have used. This has its humorous side, from the perspective of those who have been victims of this harshness.

The synoptic material offers various versions. Those of Matthew and Luke speak of not judging and include the proverb regarding those who will be finally measured according to the way they have measured others. This proverb is subordinated to the teaching about mercy. In the case of Mark's narrative, there is a series of parables, grouped in chapter 4. The explanation then given is difficult to understand: to him who has it will be given, and he who has not, even the little he has will be taken away. How are we to understand this apparent inequity? As in many other parts of the Gospel, it has to do with a language rich in images, exaggeration and shocking statements. It is the way that Jesus and his community wanted to transmit both things divine and human.

F- Healing people on the margins

1) On setting free the woman bent over... the people were delighted

My attention is called to the collision between two attitudes. On one side the legalism of the representatives of the official religion, who are opposed to the liberating action of Jesus only because it occurs on the Sabbath. On the other, the believing, joyful attitude of the crippled woman and others who were present, whose belief was not limited by the arbitrary interpretation of norms.

Humorous language is often constructed on the base of contrasts. This is what occurs here. There is humor in the contrast between hypocritical people on the one hand, who lead their animals to water and at the same time are scandalized by someone who acts in favor of a sick person. And on the other, Jesus, the Jew who fulfills the Sabbath custom and at the same time exercises mercy, as in this case of healing. This contrast has its amusing dimension.

On a Sabbath Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues and there was a woman there who had been crippled by a spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not straighten up at all. When Jesus saw her, he called her forward and said to her, "Woman, you are set free from your infirmity." Then he put his hands on her and immediately she straightened up and praised God.

Indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, the synagogue ruler said to the people, "There are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days and not on the Sabbath." The lord answered him, "You hypocrites! Doesn't each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or donkey from the stall and lead it out to give it water? Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her? When he said this all his opponents were humiliated but the people were delighted with all the wonderful things he was doing (Lk 13: 10-17).

This narrative of healing accompanies a dispute about the dehumanizing interpretation of certain norms. In this discussion Jesus' sense of humor appears: he rebukes his adversaries who work in favor of their animals on the Sabbath but will not lift a finger to help a fellow human being who suffers. It is an ingenious argument. The Lord goes beyond the Jewish law of Sabbath rest which prohibits any activity; he frees a woman from the bonds of her infirmity; she happily praises God (a common theme in Luke) and those who watch are filled with joy.

This narrative, present only in Luke, is a complex one including, healing, elements of exorcism (the woman bound by Satan), and a dispute with the representatives of the Law. There are a number of narratives where Jesus heals on the Sabbath and raises a debate (Lk 6:6-11; 14: 1-6). Jesus places himself at the side of the humble members of Jewish society, sees the right to act when human compassion requires it and opposes the inflexibility of religious leaders who use the law against the welfare of the people.

Other important elements: before a handicapped person Jesus is attentive ("on seeing her...") he liberates her from a long period of suffering (heal=liberate), and he places his hands on

her, a common gesture in healing but only in this particular case of exorcism does he impose his hands.

2) Which is easier... to forgive or to make a paralytic walk?

There is profound drama here: the condition of the paralytic, the dispute over what Jesus is doing, his transcendental message: the pardon of sins. These are serious topics. However, in the midst of it all, there are very appealing factors.

Various things in the narrative make us smile: the capacity to open an area of the roof to allow the sick person to be lowered into the surprised gathering; the fact that Jesus makes public the interior sentiments of his unbelieving opponents; the cunning question he asks: "Is it easier to forgive or to cure?" and finally, after having pardoned the paralytic, he commands him to get up and walk, all of which must have seriously angered his opponents.

A significant behavioral change noted in this scenario is that "all were amazed and gave glory to God" which indicates their joy. We have then a dramatic narrative that is at the same time deeply appealing.

Some days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home. So many gathered that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them. Some men came, bringing to him a paralytic, carried by four of them. Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus, and after digging through it, lowered the mat the paralyzed man was lying on. When Jesus saw their faith he said to the paralytic, "Son your sins are forgiven". Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, "Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, "Why are you thinking these things? Which is easier to say to the paralytic, your sins are forgiven, or to say get up, take your mat and walk? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins..." He said to the paralytic, "I tell you get up, take your mat and go home." He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God saying, "We have never seen anything like this!" (Mk 2:1-12; Lk 5:17-26; Mt 9: 1-8).

The cure of the paralytic accompanies the discussion about forgiving sins (Jewish mentality attributed sickness to the sins of the sick person or his parents). It is curious to see how the paralytic is lowered through the roof (Mark and Luke). It is also humorous to see how Jesus sees the interior thoughts of the teachers of the law (scribes) and asks them somewhat mischievously: "Why are you thinking like that?" Another humorous question: "Which is easier, to pardon or to heal?" Neither one is humanly possible! All of these instances show the resourcefulness of Jesus but even more, his saving love.

The biblical experts dispute whether this has to do with one or two separate scenes (the miracle of healing and the controversy over pardon). The narrative is noteworthy because of the lowering of the paralytic from the roof, the fact that Jesus pardons and designates himself the "Son of Man". This and other narratives show Jesus' preference for healing the paralyzed and the blind. Many details are provided both by the oral tradition and the editing of the evangelists but the central issue is that Jesus performed miracles of physical healing and cast out demons.

3) Who has touched me?

The narrative of the woman with a hemorrhage shows great sensitivity both on the part of the patient and on the part of Jesus. The woman touches Jesus' cloak and "feels in her body" the

healing. Jesus “becomes aware that power has gone out from him”. In the Jewish imagination, the cloak represents the person; to touch the cloak Jesus wore was to touch him.

Some might qualify various factors in the narrative as magical. These correspond rather to a type of cultural spirituality in which physical contact has affective weight and sacramental value in the theological dimension.

Humorous features are seen in the clandestine behavior of the woman, in the question asked by Jesus and in the response of the disciples.

A large crowd followed and pressed around him. And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years. She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse. When she heard about Jesus she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, because she thought, “If I just touch his clothes I will be healed.” Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering. At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, “Who touched my clothes?” “You see the people crowding against you,” his disciples answered, “and yet you can ask, ‘Who touched me?’ ” But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it. Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at his feet and, trembling with fear, told him the whole truth. He said to her, “Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering” (Mk 5:25-34; Lk 8: 43-48; Mt 9: 20-22).

This is a very rich narrative. The woman suffering from hemorrhage is considered ritually impure but capable of achieving a cure; her behavior has what seems to be magical characteristics. Jesus feels that healing power has gone out from him, power that heals the woman.

In the midst of much physical pressure from the crowd, the question Jesus asks about who has touched him is curious and humorous and the disciples point this out to him. Our attention is also caught by the contrast between the fear of the woman and her solid faith which Jesus praises. Moreover, this questions the depreciation suffered by women in the Jewish world. There are many women that Jesus recognizes as bearers of the faith.

The biblical commentaries note the ritual impurity of that woman and the fact that she could infect Jesus. He, on the other hand, receives her and heals her. Mark’s version emphasizes popular beliefs (also Mk 7:31-37, 8: 22-26), and all the money that had been wasted in doctors. This is omitted by Luke, the doctor and likewise by Matthew whose version is very brief.

There are no explanations of any weight for the three versions of this miracle being included within another narrative (the resurrection of the daughter of Jairus). Whether there is a magical character in some attitudes is under debate. In any case, Jesus recognizes her faith (“your faith has saved you”) In the synoptics and above all in John, the miracle comes with faith (Jn 12:37, 20:30-31).

4) Before a dead child... why all this commotion and wailing?

This has to do with a miracle of the Son of God whom the text calls “Teacher”; moreover, it has surprising features and humorous ingredients.

The fact that Jesus would enter a wake filled with wailing and lamentations and ask why they are crying is surprising. There is obviously reason for weeping and he seems to be criticizing them for their sadness. It is not strange then that those present treat Jesus with mocking laughter. After the miracle, it is said that the people were beside themselves, stupefied. One can imagine the smiling, grateful faces. The passage from death to life is a motive for rejoicing.

While he was by the lake one of the synagogue rulers named Jairus came there. Seeing Jesus he fell at his feet and pleaded earnestly with him, “My little daughter is dying. Please

come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live.”...Some men came from the house of Jairus. “Your daughter is dead”, they said. “Why bother the Teacher any more?” Ignoring what they said, Jesus told the synagogue ruler, “Don’t be afraid, just believe.”... He saw a commotion with people crying and wailing loudly. He went in and said to them, “Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is not dead but asleep.” But they laughed at him. After he put them all out, he took the child’s father and mother and the disciples who were with him, and went in where the child was. He took her by the hand and said to her, “Talitha koum”(which means, “Little girl, I say to you get up”). Immediately, the girl stood up and walked around (she was twelve years old). At this they were completely astonished... (Mk 5:21-24, 35-43; Lk 8:40-42, 49-56; Mt 9:18-19, 23-26).

We have four texts which show Jesus raising the dead to life: this case of Jairus, the son of the widow of Naim (Lk 7:11-17), Lazarus (Jn 11:1-45) and the response given to the disciples of John (Mt 11:5): “the dead are raised to life”. This was then a feature of the testimony of Jesus and this text of Mark is the oldest narrative.

In the midst of such a racket, which Mark emphasizes, in front of the body of the child, it is curious that Jesus asks the question, “Why are you weeping?” Those present respond with mocking laughter. It is also shocking that Jesus makes these people leave the place. In the end, everyone is beside themselves. It is a dramatic scene and includes aspects that make us laugh.

Mark’s version is the most original; it may describe an event in the life of Jesus. This seems to be indicated by the fact that the ruler of the synagogue is named: Jairus; this is the only case, apart from the disciples, in which someone asks for healing and his name is mentioned. Its originality is strengthened by the presence of Aramaic terms: *talitha koum* (little girl get up), and other Semitic phrases along with the absence of Christological titles.

The text in its origins is not an elaboration by the Church in order to exalt Jesus in his raising of the dead to life. If it has a theological function at all it is this, that Jesus wished the child to live and he brings her back to life. We do not know if these exact words were used: “Why are you weeping?” The intention of the texts is not to transcribe the exact expressions of Jesus. We do know that he brought the child back to life. The versions of Matthew and Luke are shorter, with the customary elaboration on the part of the evangelists.

5) If a son or an ox falls into a pit, wouldn’t you take them out?

I will highlight various points which together make up a humorous episode. Jesus goes to dine at the home of some Pharisees but they observe him with some distrust. The first contrast: a friendly meal contrasted with: a hypercritical attitude.

Then come two incisive questions. This is a recurrent element in the Gospels: through the use of questions, the outcome of the message of Jesus is humorous. The first question presents, on the one hand, the problem of the ancient revered Jewish custom of dedicating Saturdays to God by the avoidance of all activity. On the other hand, the question presents the ethics of the effective action of healing. The question and its context certainly bring a smile to the lips.

The other question is even more amusing: one’s son or one’s ox falls into a pit on a Saturday. Does one try to save them or not? It is amusing to pass from the first, more doctrinal, level to the level of daily action. It is not strange that the Pharisees remain silent. In the face of such questions, one can only be in accord with Jesus. The scene itself is frankly amusing.

One Sabbath when Jesus went to eat in the house of a prominent Pharisee, he was being carefully watched. There in front of him was a man suffering from dropsy. Jesus asked the Pharisees and experts in the law, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?” But they remained silent. So taking hold of the man he healed him and sent him away. Then he asked

them, “If one of you has a son or an ox that falls into a pit on the Sabbath day, will you not immediately pull him out?” And they had nothing to say (Lk 14:1-6; Mt 12:9-14).

Only Luke includes this miracle which provides the basis for a sharp, witty dispute. He presents Jesus asking two questions: one is more doctrinal and the other has to do with daily life. His listeners remain silent. Wide smiles are provoked by the saying in Luke 14:5, similar to Matthew 12:11 (the case of the man with the paralyzed hand and the question: “If your only sheep falls into a pit, would you not take it out?”).

Always merciful towards people who were victims of so much sickness, Jesus argues with clarity and a sense of humor. The biblical analysis notes miracles of healing within the problematic context of the Sabbath (which in general Jesus observed) and the priority he gave to mercy, in place of blind observance. There are clear signs that Jesus had a more liberal attitude in the face of Jewish legislation about the Sabbath.

In Luke’s text, the incident occurs in the house of a Pharisee, not in the synagogue or other public place, and has various elements characteristic of Luke. Some experts say that this is the work of the Christian community. However, we must not forget that it has to do with a series of traditions of an oral character. This oral tradition grew and was differentiated over time. In any case, the saying of Luke 14:5, similar to Matthew 12:11, probably comes from a tradition about Jesus and, I would add, from his controversial sense of humor in the face of the legal system.

VI. Amusement at the expense of authorities

In Palestine, at the time of Jesus, the social, hierarchic and religious order that predominated was a part of local kingdoms, regional circuits and the Roman Empire in general. This accent on the religious is not comprehensible without the economic and political background. All these factors were intermingled in the Jewish way of life that was synthesized and culminated in

the Sanhedrin with its administrative, legal, cultural and economic functions. This Jewish order was not autonomous since it was subject to much larger economic processes such as land ownership, regional commerce, political control and the tax system. Jesus confronted and interacted with the local authorities on a daily basis wherever his activities took him. On a few occasions, this included the central religious authority in Jerusalem. He did not move through the cities close to Nazareth: Sephoris and Tiberiades, nor did he interact with representatives of the regional authority though he makes reference to them at times. The ironical and comical aspects then have more to do with the realities of the everyday life of the people and, in greater or lesser degree, touch on the macro structures.

I would like to make a parenthesis here. What has just been said is very different from the humor that characterizes relations with modern authority, for example the type offered by the communications media in the form of cartoons and political jokes. This humor usually confronts directly the abuse because it has alternative social power. This does not happen in the context of the New Testament where Christians were a very small minority and it was impossible to impugn the power that controlled everything. Instead, from my point of view, we have rather an ingenious, subtle humor from the fragile, fragmented and marginal population, faced with an omnipotent authority. The humor has its social possibilities and conditioning; it may be direct or indirect, more confrontational and imaginative.

Let us consider three categories. The first, which involves taking a coin from the mouth of a fish, has to do with the Jewish Temple tax and another: giving to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, involves one of the direct taxes that were levied on those subordinate to Rome. The third has to do with an incident with King Herod, the fox, who governed in Galilee. These are three brief references but they are sufficient to establish the freedom of Jesus before the great powers.

A second category is the religious authority at the center of Judaism. It was a conglomerate of functions and personages: the actual high priest and his predecessors, the elders with great wealth, scribes or teachers with great symbolic power from all the social strata, Pharisees who enjoyed great prestige among the people, some of whom were wealthy and others relatively poor, numerous priests and Levites who carried out both cultic and law enforcement functions within the Temple. A synthesis of their problematic can be summed up in terms of arrogance. Various humorous expressions and actions of Jesus brought their injustice, ignorance and incapacity to light. This entertained his contemporaries and can help us to take a healthy distance from the religious order that places so many burdens and so much guilt on simple people, for whom God has manifested his preference.

A third dimension of humor pertains to the patriarchal hierarchy. This existed in the very mode of being Jewish, where the head of the family imposed his will on the woman, children and servants. We will look at few but very significant events. Two texts note the alternative to patriarchy, the loving father of the prodigal son and the passage about the father who gives bread and not a stone to his son. Another passage is the debate about the woman with seven husbands in which Jesus laughs at the Sadducees and also at the prevailing chauvinistic attitude that sees woman as the property of men. Further ahead we will return to the theme of the amusing story regarding religion and other aspects. In these particular texts, the emphasis is placed on the question of authority.

A. Facing up to the socio-economic context

1) Open the mouth of the fish, take out the coin and pay the tax

The enormous, luxurious Temple in Jerusalem was the center of socio- economic and religious power. Each year the adult Jewish population was obliged to pay two *drachmas* per person for the maintenance of the Temple. In this text we see Peter, approached by the tax collector to pay what his Master owed, and the humorous response of Jesus.

In the first place, there is a play on words with reference to the dominion of the rulers over their subordinates. Jesus amuses himself in his conversation with Peter; just as kings do not charge their sons, they as sons of God do not have to pay the tax for God's Temple. Then Jesus sent him to the lake to get a fish, open its mouth, take out a coin and pay the tax with it. It is a humorous way to resolve the problem.

The collectors of the two-drachma tax came to Peter and asked, "Doesn't your teacher pay the Temple tax?" "Yes he does", he replied. When Peter came into the house Jesus was the first to speak. "What do you think, Simon", he asked. "From whom do the kings of the earth collect duty and taxes- from their own sons or from others?" "From others," Peter answered. "Then the sons are exempt," Jesus said to him. "But so that we may not offend them, go to the lake and throw out the line. Take the first fish you catch; open its mouth and you will find a four-drachma coin. Take it and give it to them for my tax and yours" (Mt 17:24-27).

This event of every-day life shows the critical attitude of Jesus toward power; he is not inclined to pay the Temple tax and only does so to avoid scandalizing the functionaries. Moreover, as an observant Jew, Jesus fulfills the religious norms.

In the Roman Empire, taxes were levied on allies and foreigners, etc. but not on Roman citizens. On the other hand, Jewish Christians were against paying this tax; perhaps the situation in the first Christian communities influenced this text of Matthew. Given this background, one can appreciate the critical attitude of Jesus and his contemporaries. Instead of raising his voice and becoming angry, the Teacher acts with humor.

The entire dialogue with Peter is a humorous one. First the question that has an obvious answer; it is a fact that the sons of kings pay no tribute. Jesus replies immediately to his own question: the sons (of God) are free of any tax, as in the case of both he and Peter. This play on words must have delighted his apostles.

Then he gives him a fantastic command: go to the lake, catch a fish, open its mouth and there you will find the necessary coin to pay the tax for us both. This is an ingenious procedure.

2) Give to Caesar what is Caesar's... to God what is God's

The poorer members of the population usually look with a critical eye on the social system with its political forms of control and economic organization. They question above all the sum total they are forced to pay and the way the money is used.

In the case of the Jews, many resisted giving their money to representatives of the empire. The Zealots used violent means to demonstrate their refusal to submit to Rome. Sectors of the Pharisees also showed some resistance but through peaceful expressions. Another important group were the Herodians, wealthy and loyal to the Empire. Both Pharisees and Herodians laid a trap for Jesus with hypocritical arguments ("Teacher, you are sincere and teach the path to God"). They did not seek to learn from the Teacher; they wished rather to knife him in the back.

But Jesus does not fall into the trap. On the contrary, with clever and humorous expressions he frustrated his malicious questioners who asked if it was of obligation to pay taxes. He does not permit himself to be embroiled in the dilemma. He turns the conversation around and asks them whose image appears on the coin. They answer that it is Caesar's and Jesus terminates the dialogue with the ingenious solution: "Give to Caesar what is his."

The Gospel narrative notes that the questioners were amazed (Mt 22:22, Mk 12:17). Nothing more is said. This event from the daily life of those times was seen as humorous and continues to be so today. Jesus defeats his rude, hypocritical questioners.

Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap him in his words. They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians. "Teacher", they said, "we know that you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You are not swayed by men because you pay no attention to who they are. Tell us then what is your opinion? Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?" But Jesus, knowing their evil intent said, "You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? Show me the coin used for paying the tax." They brought him a denarius and he asked them, "Whose portrait is this? And whose inscription?" "Caesar's", they replied. Then he said to them, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's." When they heard this they were amazed. So they left him and went away (Mt 22: 15-22; Mk 12: 13-17; Lk 20: 20-26).

This debate over the imperial tax begins in a dark, gloomy way and finishes superbly. The alliance between Pharisees and Herodians acts maliciously (Mt 22:18), astutely (Lk 20:23) and hypocritically (Mk 12:15), and Jesus is aware of it all. He confronts them: Hypocrites! Why do you try to trap me? Then he changes: from being questioned, he becomes the questioner. He does not allow himself to be trapped in the nets of malicious people.

The Herodians supported the dynasty of Herod who governed Galilee at this time. They were economically wealthy and lent their services to the Roman Empire. This empire imposed the coinage that circulated in Palestine and collected taxes. The money, in the form of the *denarius* with the portrait of the emperor, was therefore, a symbol of domination.

Jesus evaded the question in order to avoid falling into the trap his enemies had laid for him. But more than evade, he cleverly changed the direction of the conversation. Give Caesar back his coin! That is to say, do not become involved in polemics about taxes, nor disputes about what belongs in the political order and what is of God. Rather, he says something ingenious which disarms his adversaries. These and also those standing around listening were left stunned. Perhaps among his listeners there were many who were critical of the imperial domination and they could celebrate the defeat suffered by the malicious Pharisees and Herodians.

With respect to this, we might remember another saying of Jesus where he does not speak so indirectly. When he presents the dilemma: God or money (Mt 6:24; Lk 16:13), he goes to the very heart of faith in God alone, and formulates the problem of the idolatry of money.

3) Tell that fox Herod: I continue to work

Jesus was ambushed, spied upon and attacked by his adversaries, not once but many times during his life, until finally it brought him to his death. At times he reacted with humorous and clever statements, as in the case we just examined about the taxes. On other occasions he responded with firmness.

Herod exercised power in the region of Galilee where Jesus and his disciples moved. He and his lover were responsible for the bloody execution of John the Baptist. He also intervened, according to Luke (23:8-12) in the process that brought Jesus to his crucifixion.

On one occasion, they tried to frighten Jesus with the warning that Herod wished to kill him. He showed his firmness and counterattacked with an amusing message of his own: "Tell that fox Herod that I will continue to drive out demons and heal the sick." His hour had not yet come. The ruler, Herod was not going to dictate the direction of his mission. In this fashion Jesus leaves the monarch and his followers speechless.

At that time some Pharisees came to Jesus and said to him, "Leave this place and go somewhere else. Herod wants to kill you". He replied, "Go tell that fox that I will drive out demons and heal people today and tomorrow and on the third day I will reach my goal. In any case I must keep going today and tomorrow and the next day – for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem!" (Lk 13:31-32).

This passage contains both a threat of death and the strong, secure posture of Jesus. It appears to be a trap set by the Pharisees. They use the argument that Herod (in the region of Galilee) wants to kill him and this could have been true. Or perhaps the Pharisees wanted Jesus to take refuge in Judea where the Sanhedrin might condemn him. In any case, there is a threat of death and a plot to liquidate the Teacher.

Our attention is drawn to the firmness and strength Jesus demonstrates before authorities with their power to destroy others. This is not due to any self-assured invulnerability or fearlessness. Rather the words of Jesus highlight his mission, using a terminology proper to his time: today, tomorrow and the third day he must continue to heal and deliver others from the bonds of Satan. This means the hour of his death and glorification has not yet arrived. This hour does not depend upon political authority. In a prophetic manner, he rejects the intervention of power. In this way he rebuffs the interference of Herod in his own messianic mission and in categorizing Herod as a “fox”, astute and deceitful, Jesus acts with liberty and speaks with a sense of humor that has political weight.

B- In the face of religious despotism

1) Who has given you authority?... I will not tell you by what authority!

Some people, including myself, have migrated to the city from a small, insignificant town. Here one can feel the discrimination and the depreciation borne by non-urban marginal people.

Let us not forget that Jesus was a rustic, underestimated provincial, without religious prestige in the eyes of certain power groups. When the carpenter from Galilee dared to enter as a Messiah into Jerusalem and act with authority within the Temple (driving out the money changers) the wealthy protest and search for a way to censure the Teacher.

They question him, “With what authority do you act thus?” He cleverly changes the conversation to another area, something he did regularly. He questions them about the Baptist in such a way that the priests and the teachers of the Law see themselves faced with a dilemma: to recognize John’s baptism or disqualify him and in this way bring the anger of the people upon themselves. For this reason they try to hoodwink him saying: “We do not know”. To this Jesus retorts: “Since you will not speak, neither will I explain my authority to you.”

It is comical how Jesus puts the Temple authorities up against the wall; he defeats them in the discussion. Finally, he weakens their authority and obliges them to confess their ignorance on not being able to answer his questions.

One day as he was teaching the people in the Temple courts and preaching the gospel, the chief priests and teachers of the law together with the elders came up to him. “Tell us by what authority you are doing these things,” they said. “Who gave you this authority?” He replied, “I will also ask you a question. Tell me, John’s baptism, was it from heaven or from men?” They discussed it among themselves and said, “If we say from heaven he will ask why didn’t you believe him. But if we say from men, all the people will stone us because they are persuaded that John was a prophet”. So they answered, “We don’t know where it was from.” Jesus said, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things” (Lk 20:1-8; Mt 21:23-27; Mk 11: 27-33).

This controversy that took place in the Temple in Jerusalem, which is to say, at the heart of power, shows, on the one hand the bankruptcy of the highest religious authority, and on the other, the intelligence and sense of humor displayed by the rabbi from a small town in Galilee. The authorities are intimidated by the genial argument offered by Jesus and are forced to declare

themselves ignorant or incompetent because of an inability to declare that the Baptist was or was not a prophet sent by God.

The debate causes laughter. The arrogant priests, elders (Matthew and Mark) and scribes (Luke) remain silent. With respect to Jesus, neither does he explain from whence comes his unique authority -to teach in the Temple and overturn the tables of the buyers and sellers. The outcome is humorous.

These narratives follow the previous messianic actions of Jesus and show the reason for the great irritation of the authorities. They saw Jesus as a simple itinerant teacher; he had no priestly function nor was he a teacher of the Law. How dare he teach them and act with authority in the Temple? This was the limit!

The despised one shows himself to be much more capable and wise than the dignitaries of the official religion. This is shown in the dialogue in which these authorities are left looking ridiculous. In the end, by not responding to his critics, Jesus conserves his dignity.

2) No one was capable of answering him or asking questions

When we as human beings argue, we frequently do not listen; on the contrary, each one defends his own position. This is very common among those who exercise social and religious power and fail to value the wisdom of the ordinary person.

In the case of Jesus, he was precisely a simple artisan, without any official role in the Temple or in the institutions of government. Why did such a humble teacher always manage to do so well in a discussion while his adversaries did so poorly? He was the Son of God. Yes, but he was also marvelously capable and free in his actions. He did not allow himself to be put down. For this reason, at least in part, ordinary, humble people like himself enjoyed his way of getting the better of his opponents ("the crowds listened to him with delight": Mk 12:37).

On one occasion, according to Matthew and Mark, Jesus put forward an unsolvable biblical problem to the religious leaders. He enters into a rabbinical discussion and leaves the experts speechless. Matthew notes that on that occasion and from that day on no one dared to ask him questions or argue with him. Without doubt, the simple humble people, despised by the religious experts, were delighted with this.

The fact that the arrogant experts in the Law were paralyzed and mute before this simple carpenter from Nazareth, turns out to be rather comical.

While the Pharisees were gathered together Jesus asked them, "What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?" "The son of David", they replied. He said to them, "How is it then that David, speaking by the Spirit, calls him Lord? For he says, 'The Lord said to my Lord sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet.' If then David calls him Lord, how can he be his son?" No one could say a word in reply, and from that day on no one dared to ask him any more questions (Mt 22:41-46; Mk 12:35-37; Lk 20: 41-44).

There is sharp controversy, in the confrontation between Jesus and the Jewish religious leaders of his time. In this case, the initiative and the question is not directed to him but rather it is he who corners and entraps them.

It is a complex rabbinical theme. The supposition is that David was the inspired author of psalm 110 which Jesus cites. There was a similar supposition that Messiah and Lord were equivalent terms in an epoch when the name of God was not invoked out of respect. Today, thanks to biblical research, we know that David did not write the psalm. Now, just as Jesus argues, there is no possible response; for this reason, no one can answer. With respect to the basic theme, the motive of the text is not to define the theme of the Messiah. Its objective is rather to show the incompetence of those who believed themselves the only ones who understood and were in control of the divine revelation.

This left those who considered themselves experts in the word of God in a very poor light. They were disqualified as teachers of the Word and the Law and remained blind to the messianic presence of Jesus. And this made them angry. But the poor, believing crowds were happy, as Mark comments: “They listened to him with delight

With respect to the different versions: Matthew shows us Jesus challenging the Pharisees and concludes by saying that no one asked him any questions nor was capable of responding. Mark shows Jesus teaching and concludes that the crowds listened to him with joy while Luke presents Jesus speaking with the Pharisees, without challenging them, concluding with only the question on the part of Jesus, without commentary.

3) *You are a teacher and you do not know?... Be born again!*

Many times I observe conversations between authorities and ordinary people. These last, unfortunately, tend to demean themselves (dehumanize themselves) in order to obtain a favor and to feel themselves secure under the protection of the powerful.

On some occasions, authority is questioned. Let us observe a case in the experience of Jesus. He is visited, clandestinely, by the Pharisee Nicodemus, the magistrate of the Sanhedrin, who wanted to converse with Jesus about profound issues. They speak about seeing the Kingdom of God (an uncommon theme in the writings of John) and of the need to be born of water and the Spirit. John the evangelist was interested in explaining baptism.

Nicodemus does not understand how one can return to the mother’s womb in order to be born again. This sounds rather humorous. Here Jesus is speaking to him about being born in the Spirit. Moreover, he reprimands him: “How is it that you are a teacher and do not know?” The proposal is sharp and clear: “You must be born from above...”

In this way, a countryman without studies, but possessing great wisdom –as in the case of Jesus- teaches a great dignitary who does not understand.

Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night and said, “Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him.” In reply, Jesus declared, “I tell you the truth, unless a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” ... The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.” “How can this be?, replied Nicodemus. Jesus replied, “You are a teacher in Israel and you do not understand these things?” (Jn 3:1.2).

Here we have a scene from life: the visit of the Pharisee to Jesus at night. We also have a discourse that John puts on the lips of Jesus. He speaks of the Kingdom and of being born of the Spirit (Jn 3:3-5) as only the teacher from Galilee would do.

The first humorous expression is provided by the Jewish magistrate who speaks about returning to the mother’s womb. Then the discourse of Jesus refers to being born of the Spirit, something unheard of in the Jewish mentality. Here Jesus insists on the theme of being born again. In the face of the incredulity of Nicodemus, Jesus questions him in such a way that the outcome is amusing: “You are a teacher and you do not know!”

4) *The just ones are... unjust!*

Each system has its specific ways of understanding what is good and just. There are those who personify these values or are identified as their carriers. In the Jewish system in the time of Jesus, the teachers (scribes) and the Pharisees put in the Law the entire weight of spirituality and daily practice. They were the guardians of “justice” and of the piety shown to God.

With respect to this, Jesus clarifies the meaning of the Law and its fulfillment, intervening in many debates. According to Matthew, after the Sermon on the Mount, the Beatitudes, Jesus explains how to obey and even go beyond the Law. This includes a controversial saying that is also humorous.

It is a warning against those commonly considered just: their justice is not in accord with the Kingdom of God. This carries with it a demand upon the disciples: let your justice exceed that of the religious leaders in order to enter the Kingdom.

I tell you that if your justice does not exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven” (Mt5:20).

The New Testament offers us a variety of attitudes toward the Law. Even the language of Jesus contains many shades of meaning. At one moment he says that he has not come to abolish the Law, and that it is necessary to obey even its details (Mt 5:17-18). Then comes a long discourse with five demands to go beyond the Law. They are expressions that have elements of authority (“you have heard... but I tell you...”).

We can say that both the narrative of Matthew and the writings of Paul suggest that the Law is no longer of use to us; with Jesus we have begun a new mode of relating with God: the justice of faith.

In verse 19, two attitudes toward the norms of the Law are presented. One is the justification for not fulfilling the least important of the norms and entering the Kingdom with the condition that such a person would be considered the “least” in that Kingdom. The other attitude is one in which everything is obeyed, even to the least of the commandments; such a person would be “great” in the Kingdom. This has to do with rabbinical distinctions repeated again by Matthew.

The teachers of the Law counted 613 norms in the Pentateuch while among the Pharisees, there was a tendency to consider some of these norms less important than others. Jesus entered this controversy with his appealing saying about the lack of justice among those who judged themselves as just.

5) Appreciate and respect... the despised foreigner

Hatred and discrimination abounds between people of different nations. It seems irrational since we are all human beings. However, the history of conflicts, wars and prejudices cause people to despise one another. There was a deep hostility between Jews and Samaritans. When Jesus was growing up in Nazareth and went to celebrate the Pasch in the Temple in Jerusalem, a group of Samaritans profaned the plaza by throwing human bones into the area. There were many prejudices and bad feelings between each nation. It is in this context, that Jesus specifically offers a Samaritan as a model of human love. This not only surprised his audience. It made them ashamed of themselves, they who considered themselves faithful and kind.

The dialogue reveals two worlds. On the one hand, the lawyer who speaks for himself: Who is my neighbor? speaks outside the historical context. On the other hand, Jesus speaks from the position of the victim who needs solidarity and demands concrete action. Finally he tells the lawyer to act like the kind –but despised- Samaritan. Once again certain persons with legal authority appear rather ridiculous. This might well have entertained many who had suffered at the hands of such authorities, unworthy of their responsibility and social position.

An expert in the Law wanting to defend himself, said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”. In reply Jesus said, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down that same road and when he saw the man he passed by on the other side. So too a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed

by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was, and when he saw him he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine". – Jesus said, "Which of these three do you think was neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" The expert on the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go, and do likewise" (Lk 10:29-37).

The narrative about the merciful Samaritan, appearing only in Luke, comes after the saying about the principal and twofold commandment. Given the hatred that existed between Jews and Samaritans, it becomes an amazing way of explaining the radical nature of love. This scene taken from life occurs somewhere along the 27 kilometers between Jerusalem and Jericho, where it seems a merchant is assaulted and, in trying to defend himself, is beaten almost to death. Both the priest and the Levite pass by, observe the victim but are not in solidarity with him. Perhaps they fear losing their ritual purity by touching what appeared to be a corpse. They are both representatives of religious power who fail to obey the commandment of love. The third pilgrim is the despised Samaritan who turns out to be the only one who fulfills the law of mercy.

The key questions, in this text, show two ways of conceiving ethics. The expert in the Law asks out of his own interests (Who is my neighbor?). The Teacher asks his questions on the basis of the interests of the victim and the appreciation for the hated Samaritan (Who was neighbor to the victim?). This confrontation between ways of seeing and living shows clearly the originality of Jesus. Moreover, it must be remembered that in the mentality of the epoch, love for neighbor did not include people from other countries and cultures. For this reason, the teaching of Jesus revolutionizes the existing mentality. Another paradoxical element is that an illustrious expert of the Law presents his question to a humble itinerant teacher and is taught by him.

C– Confronting patriarchy

1) A loving father ... before a wicked son

It is a scene from life. The details of Jewish customs indicate a concrete family experience that Jesus was told about, or that he observed.

In the face of those who criticized the way the Teacher spoke of a merciful, festive God, the parable not only shows us a father of a family who welcomes a sinful son, but also and above all questions those who are like the intolerant and self-righteous older son. This last is a sharp reprimand, a way of turning the situation around and putting things in their proper place. Here is the skillful use of narrative. Jesus directs his criticism to those who disapprove of the image of a loving God, which Jesus insistently presents. They are like the self-satisfied older son that holds himself aloof from salvation. The feast and the joy are for the "prodigal son".

There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, "Father give me my share of the estate". So he divided his property between them. Not long after, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living... "How many of my father's hired men have food to spare and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father I have sinned against heaven and against you..." - But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him. He ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. ... The father said to his servants, "Quick bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found". – So they began to celebrate. Meanwhile, the older son was in the fields. When he came near the house he heard music and dancing... He became angry and refused to go in ... - "You never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But

when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!” “My son”, the father said, “you are always with me and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found” (Lk 15: 11-32).

This parable has three principal figures: the loving, merciful and festive father (the experts emphasize his role as reconciler and forget his festive role; the narrative is filled with the details of celebration which is the underlying theme of the story). The other important figure is the elder son who turns out to be worse than the son who wasted his father’s inheritance. The parable becomes a criticism of the elder son, incapable of pardoning as his father does; in this way Jesus refers to his self-satisfied and incredulous listeners, also incapable of understanding divine forgiveness. The third figure is the younger son, who was lost and has been found and is now the beneficiary of salvation.

Happiness and festivity fill the entire narrative in Luke, the only evangelist to include this parable (15:23, 24, 25, 29, 32). Without doubt, it is an essentially festive parable that delighted his listeners, with the exception of his adversaries to whom Jesus directed a strong criticism. It makes us smile as well.

If we place ourselves in imagination at the scene with the farmer’s family, we are impressed by the contrast between, on the one hand, someone who cannot even satisfy his hunger with the leftovers of food given to the pigs, and on the other, the festivity with the delicious fatted calf. Another huge contrast is offered between the irritation of the self-sufficient son and the enormous joy of the son who is pardoned and celebrated. We are also surprised that, contrary to the legal custom of the times, the younger son demands his share of the property and then disposes of it immediately. This contrasts strongly with the unrestricted pardon of the father, again, nothing like the normal attitude of most people. It has to do then with a story filled with surprises and apparent absurdities.

Other interesting details: the father’s effusive kiss for his son is a way of offering forgiveness in the culture of those times. Giving new clothing, placing a ring on a person’s finger and eating together with a sinner were other signs of reconciliation at that time. They are concrete, inculturated signs of familial mercy and the restoration of harmony.

2) If your son asked for bread would you give him a stone?

One aspect of the patriarchy: the domination of the head of the family over the other members lies in the inequality between sons and daughters. Instead of a certain reciprocity along with distinct responsibilities that would make living together harmonious, boys and girls are strictly dominated and browbeaten. The other side of the coin is also very important, adults care for and interact with youth.

In the New Testament there is an appealing text regarding the prayer of petition which is explained in a symbolic way through the use of rather shocking questions. Jesus speaks about three unheard of cases where the father of a family acts in a repugnant way. They are absurd cases which give rise to laughter.

Would you give a stone to your son who asks for bread? Or a snake instead of a fish? Or a scorpion when he asks for an egg? The father of a family would never do this! The questions refer to impossible cases, which, for this very reason, become amusing.

Which of you fathers, if your son asks for bread will give him a stone; or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead; or if he asks for an egg will give him a scorpion? (Lk 11: 11-12; Mt 7: 9-11).

These questions surprise us; they are a pedagogical way of teaching the efficacy of the prayer of petition. Luke has three questions; the scorpion instead of the egg is proper to Luke, while Matthew notes only two. The case of the scorpion is curious since it is repugnant and of a dark color, very different from an egg.

The three questions directed to fathers of families who normally desire the best for their children, make absurd contrasts: bread-stone, fish-snake, egg-scorpion. In each case the first term is the best while the second is dangerous and noxious. They are strong contrasts and the manner of presenting them is humorous.

Then follows another harsh affirmation: you though evil give good things to your sons; well then, God our Father will always give what is good to those who ask Him (Lk 11:13; Mt 7:11). Luke says the “Spirit” while Matthew says “good things”.

3) Wife of which of the seven husbands?

Many consider that the woman is the property of a man, particularly of the husband. The problematic has its own profiles, in harmony with each culture and according to the behavior of each person.

It is a theme, which forms a part of the controversy of Jesus with the Sadducees with respect to the resurrection. His confrontation with the Sadducees was intense and constant. They ruled the powerful Sanhedrin, had priestly roles and privileges and possessed lands and wealth.

On one occasion, to confuse Jesus and draw him into a trap, they presented him the case of the woman married successively to seven brothers, in accord with the Jewish custom of raising up descendents for the first brother who died without having children with the woman. The narrative is amusing and somewhat gruesome as each brother dies without descendents and finally, the woman dies as well.

Jesus responds skillfully. At first he agrees in part with his adversaries: after death, people will not marry. Then he argues, in the rabbinical manner, on the basis of the Word of God in Exodus 3:6. God is the God of the living and this is the situation of Abraham and the other patriarchs, which alludes to the truth of the resurrection from the dead from earliest times. He uses the sacred writings to demonstrate that the venerable Sadducees are incorrect. It is probable that the audience enjoyed this controversy developed around the case of the seven brothers.

The Sadducees who say there is no resurrection came to him with a question. “Teacher”, they said, “Moses told us that if a man dies without having children, his brother must marry the widow and have children for him. Now there were seven brothers among us. The first one married and died, and since he had no children, he left his wife to his brother. The same thing happened to the second and third brother, right on down to the seventh. Finally the woman died. Now then, at the resurrection, whose wife will she be of the seven, since all of them were married to her?” Jesus replied, “You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God. At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven. But about the resurrection from the dead -have you not read what God said to you, ‘I am the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?’ He is not the God of the dead but of the living’.” When the crowds heard this, they were astonished at his teaching (Mt 22:23-33; Mk 12:18-27; Lk 20:27-40).

The discussion was difficult and complicated. On the part of the Sadducees, the strong argument was that the written Word (Old Testament) does not teach the resurrection. They then used texts from Deuteronomy 25:5-6 and Genesis 38:8 to support a sacred teaching on the Levirate: the obligation to marry the widow of a brother in order to raise up children to his name.

They ask Jesus a question, which, according to them, had no answer: “To which of the seven husbands does she belong?” Jesus does not fall into the trap. With intelligence and skill he

turns the discussion around to the principal: God is the God of the living, of the dead who have been resurrected. Once more the humble Teacher is more skillful and defeats his hostile adversaries. Luke's version (20:40) adds that they did not dare to ask him any more questions, a phrase used by Mark and Matthew on other occasions. It is a phrase that shows how the truth, taught by Jesus, conquers the dirty games played by the religious leaders of that time. This would have delighted the contemporaries of Jesus.

VII. Jests about religion

Humorous situations include many aspects: illogicalities in social power, the contrast between religious pretensions and the concrete reality, criticisms of wealthy sectors in the Temple

and other factors as well. For this reason, the humorous or witty aspects refer not only to the religious dimension but to the human condition as a whole.

What has been said has a peculiar background of its own. Many systems of life have not separated *religion* from the rest of reality, the case of Judaism at the time of Jesus, being one of them. The modern world does make this sharp separation, although there is a good deal of civil religion and many religious ingredients in the secular order. When there is no dichotomy between religion and daily life, something rather amusing, in terms of religion, touches these other dimensions. This is what we will be considering in this chapter.

I also want to underscore the political impact of humor pertaining to religion because of what has already been noted: the holistic vision and the interaction between human and spiritual factors. It is also due to the fact that in Jerusalem and in all that happened in first century Palestine, the highest religious authorities exercised great power through the Sanhedrin, the Temple, the execution of the Law and other institutions. As a consequence, to question the scribes, for example, was to confront not only a way of living out religion, but a whole social-political system. With respect to this, Albert Nolan writes: "The Jews made no distinction between politics and religion." (*Who is this man?* Santander, Sal Terrae, 1984, p. 152).

I emphasize all this because frequently the confrontations with Pharisees and other religious groups are discussed without taking into consideration their political impact. The political component in the mode of encountering religion is clear in the sense of humor present in the events that surround Jesus and in those he or his disciples provoked.

It is also expedient to emphasize a few characteristics of religious elements which, according to the evangelists, the Teacher mocked, and about which he made humorous comments and gave witty responses. One main point of the controversy was the Temple, center of socio-religious power, which employed many people from poorer and middle class sectors, where the priesthood exercised supremacy and squeezed resources from pilgrims and believers. We then have the power groups: the rich priests, the Sadducees who were losing power, the numerous Pharisees and scribes, the teachers of the Law who were laity (some with, others without wealth) and the wealthy elders who together with the priests, Sadducees and Pharisees constituted the High Court or Sanhedrin.

In the following pages I wish first to comment on the humorous elements relative to ritual action and human behavior; later, I will comment on the intense criticism of the representatives of religion. In this last aspect, let us not forget the Christian communities that began to develop and the confrontation that arose between these and the pious sectors close to the simple people, like the Pharisees. Moreover, many Pharisees were true carriers of the authentic tradition of the chosen people. They were not by any means all wrong; however, there were many sayings in opposition to them and to others who dominated the religious scene.

In this topic, as in the other aspects we have touched upon, the jovial character of Jesus brings to mind many actual life experiences. There is a type of commentary and witty, amusing expression that is common to ordinary people and to those that ecclesial sectors call the laity. Both sectors keep their distance from official religion and tend to question it with jokes, irony, double meaning, comical insinuations and the revelation of its inconsistencies. At times this seems irreverent, but in my opinion it has to do with a language of greater freedom that can be illuminated and enriched with biblical material.

There is another type of amusing language that arises from the interior of the religious system. Its more stereotyped character and the inferior quality of its humor is notable. One of its functions is to relativize the offensive and cumbersome factors within religious power and to mock those who exercise authority roles.

It bears repeating that the cheerful good humor of Jesus makes us more sensitive to the joy of living today and keeps us from being overwhelmed by the seriousness and solemnity of religion.

A- Opposition to certain forms of behavior

1) Do not swear by your head! You cannot make even one hair white or black

Where there is a strong Christian influence, the social systems make their authorities swear a public oath. Many times these are corrupt authorities: their solemn oaths turn against them and are occasions for mockery and criticism. On the other hand, so many of those who speak in the name of religion, speak a great deal about God but do not put into practice his law of love. Their words about God are empty and false.

A number of the admonitions of Jesus refer to oaths. He begins with warning against swearing by heaven or by earth and continues with not swearing by the holy city of Jerusalem. Then there is a surprising change: he moves from highly sacred themes to numbering the hairs on the head. The unexpected move from the first to the second is amusing. You cannot make a single hair of your head white or black! These sayings form part of the beautiful discourse on the Mount and their implications. According to Matthew's version, Jesus contrasts what the Law demands, on one side and on the other, his message of the Kingdom with its corresponding challenges.

You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord'. But I tell you, do not swear at all: either by heaven because it is God's throne, or by the earth because it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem because it is the city of the Great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black (Mt 5:33-36).

The passage begins with a reference to the Law: do not use the name of God falsely (Ex 20:7). Anyone listening could suppose that Jesus was ratifying such a noble principle. But he is not doing so. Rather, in a solemn and categorical way, like a new lawgiver, Jesus affirms: "I tell you..."

Then we have a connected series of warnings. Do not swear by heaven or by the earth, where God is present, nor by Jerusalem, the center of the official religion. These warnings are supported by biblical texts. In the face of these passages, any listener would feel uncomfortable because believers speak of God and swear by God, as have so many generations before us. The law itself demands this! But Jesus does not think or teach this sort of thing.

The saying is obviously meant to be humorous: do not swear by your head nor by the hair on your head because you cannot change its color. Why does Jesus speak like this in a strange and apparently irreverent manner? It would appear that he wishes to teach something very important which scandalizes the representatives of religion who pass the time talking and swearing in the name of God. The Teacher is teaching them: not to trivialize and manipulate God, that each believer should fulfill his word, that his speech be solely: yes, yes; or no, no (Mt 5:37). He does this in a genial way.

2) Give alms without sounding a trumpet... in temples and streets

At times we use impetuous language. It might be an insult or an expression of hatred. Or it might be an expression that brings to the light of day the hidden and the false.

The language of Jesus was neither insipid nor superficial. He used strong, prophetic language. For example, on numerous occasions he showed the duplicity of his contemporaries and unmasked the hypocrites. And he did so with a sense of humor, as is the case with the saying about sounding a trumpet when one gives alms followed by the statement that one hand not know what the other does.

This is about religious behavior: giving alms, or "doing justice" (Mt 6:1). It is a pious attitude, arising out of faith but not necessarily transparent. It can be false and worthy of reproach. The fact that people giving alms are criticized makes us think that such was the case in the era of Jesus.

Jesus has no problem about direct speech. He directly opposes the hypocritical giving of alms. When one is generous one need not sound the trumpet in the synagogue nor in the streets in order to gain prestige. Nor does the left hand need to know what the right hand does. These two expressions are amusing.

In the end, the teaching is: give alms discreetly and secretly. This will be appreciated by God the Father who knows all that we do.

So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you (Mt 6:2-4).

The giving of alms has both human and spiritual dimensions. In the first, there may be a desire for prestige (to be honored by others) and, at bottom, this is not then a religious act but merely pride and hypocrisy. This biblical passage is sharply clear: do not give alms to gain human prestige.

Pious actions must be done in secret and it is on this “ground” or sphere of action that we meet God. The Father knows what is done discreetly and He rewards it. This is the spiritual dimension.

There are two amusing expressions. The first has to do with seeking publicity and vainglory for the good that is done, sounding the trumpet in the street. The other, giving with one hand without the other knowing what is going on: an impossibility! These sayings of Jesus must have amused and delighted his listeners.

3) Do not pray to be seen and applauded

Many feel that the heart of the behavior of the believer is prayer. This occurs in many religious systems as well as in Christianity. In prayer, human realities and concerns are manifested and these shape dialogue with God, with whom we speak and to whom we listen. Since Jesus practiced Jewish devotions and since his mission had a spiritual accent, it is surprising that he shows a certain caution with regard to prayer. In his era, there were fixed moments in the day when each person stopped whatever he was doing to pray, irrespective of where he was; We see this today among Muslims all over the world. Jesus recommended that one should pray in secret; something he had already said with respect to almsgiving. Now he repeats this in regard to the principal element in our intimate relation with God.

I suggest that this is no call to hide nor is it one to privatize our faith. Rather it opposes hypocritical religion that is used to gain power and prestige. The most sublime act can be manipulated for the most perverse motives: to gain superiority over one's neighbor. The criticism is sharp and amusing. It is directed against those who use public places like temples, street corners and plazas to show off their religiosity. For those who listened to this criticism, above all those who did not belong to pious groups and detested hypocrisy, the sayings of Jesus must have been amusing and entertaining.

When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. When you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father who is unseen. Then your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you (Mt 6:5-6).

En the context of Palestine, the Jewish population did not pray only in synagogues and in the Temple in Jerusalem, but also in public places like the plazas in the cities and small towns. The problem is that this prayer had as an objective to be “seen and applauded”, which is to say, the religious gesture was an instrument for obtaining benefits and human power. Such a prayer has no value; it is not communication with God.

The title of Father for God is central to the message of Jesus and in the practice of faith, which he taught to his followers. Prayer is a simple, automatic and sacred activity. It has to do with the relation between believers and God the Father. In fact, the face of God manifested by Jesus is that of a close, loving God whom we can call “*Abba*”, *daddy*.

With respect to the concrete form of prayer, only the place is indicated, in one’s room, alone, with the door closed. All this is said in contrast to the previous arrogant and hypocritical behavior of those who prayed to be “seen and praised”. The themes of acting in secret and of the reward are also touched upon as they were in the text about almsgiving (Mt 6:4).

4) Do not pray with many words... God already knows what you need

In today’s world, many do not pray at all; but there are many others who pray regularly. Some sectors are fanatically pious and in these there are abundant explanations about God and sacred invocations. I find this personally disagreeable. God is a mystery, not an object for arbitrary manipulation.

On one occasion Jesus criticized the pagans who used an excessive amount of words in their prayers. He criticizes them because he presumes that they feel they will be heard all the better for the excess. They do not realize that God already knows what each person needs before they ever ask. Why are the pagans criticized and not the Jews who come under fire in other texts in Matthew? Perhaps the text is influenced by contacts with pagans who formed part of the Christian communities after Pentecost. In any case, the manner of speaking about useless and ridiculous religious activities is amusing. Moreover, Jesus emphasizes the closeness of the Father to all human necessities and it is within this context that Matthew places the “Our Father”.

And when you pray do not keep babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him (Mt 6:7-8).

This is the only case, in the synoptic texts, containing criticism of the pagan spirituality caricatured as babbling and useless prayer. It is probable that it caused many smiles among his listeners and in the first Christian communities.

The biblical passage also surprises us for the contrast between gentiles and Jewish Christians. These last made a caricature of the gentiles. We must not forget that there were many long prayers within Jewish pious practices that were equally questionable.

The principal problem was the use of an abundance of verbiage in dialogue with God. This happens in many religious systems. The amusing factor is to realize that the religious gesture does not guarantee contact with God and our being heard. Many times this is not understood by devotees of certain devotions and long-winded prayers.

It also has to do with a commentary about the prayer of petition. The good God, the loving and attentive Father of all believers, knows well what we need before we make our petitions.

5) When you fast... don’t put on a long face

Both the secularized society and the nonconformists within the Church criticize religious activities, but there is diversity in the content and the motives of those who do so. For my part, I have often heard criticism of the sacrificial, guilt-ridden attitudes manifested by many believers. I agree that there are grave problems: making a religious gesture of sacrifice, as in corporal self punishment, does not automatically signify that one will obtain divine favor. Rather, it might signify an unhealthy attitude, a denial of the value of the human body. It may also express an attitude of proud superiority with regard to others we deem less good than ourselves. Another problem is that religiosity could be reduced to a sentiment of guilt, thus detracting from its value. This is not evangelical. On the other hand, there are positive forms of fasting.

In the case of biblical fasting, this implied not eating from the sunrise to sunset. A very difficult sacrifice, above all for those with good appetites. The saying of Jesus is not against fasting but against those who make a public drama out of their fast and are hypocrites. They make sacrifices to call the attention of others to themselves and pass for good, pious people. This criticism of religious hypocrisy provokes our laughter.

When you fast do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father who is unseen; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you (Mt 6: 16-18).

Biblical fasting is a religious, public activity. According to the law of the Israelite people (Lev 16: 1ff; 23: 27ff, day of Expiation) there is one day in the year for the cleansing from all sin. In the time of Jesus, to fast twice a week was a sign of deep piety. It was also something radical: no food during the entire day from sunrise to sunset. In the case of other nations with other religious systems, ashes were placed on their heads and external demonstrations of sacrifice were made.

With regard to fasting, Jesus says that one should not go about with a sad face, nor try to impress other people. Rather, it should be done secretly and discreetly, as was the case with almsgiving and prayer (Mt 6:3-4, 6).

But there is more. It is suggested that one perfumes the head and washes oneself instead of going about sad, that is to say, show yourself content, irradiate joy. This custom of washing and perfuming oneself characterizes the preparations for a party (Mt 9: 14-15). This means that when fasting one should go about as though preparing for a feast or a celebration. This manner of speaking surprises and amuses.

6) On the Sabbath... are we allowed to do what is good?

Each nation or people have things that are highly sacred to them. If one does not put oneself in their situation, it is impossible to understand them. For example, Saturday is like any other day of the week for us. This however, was not the experience in Judaism; Saturday, the Sabbath, has always been highly sacred, as are other elements. No profane activity can be performed on the Sabbath, the sacred day because it was dedicated to Yahweh. Nor was it allowed to heal the sick, except in grave cases, according to the rabbis.

But Jesus heals a man with a paralyzed hand on a Sabbath day. He does so by his word alone: "put out your hand", he does not touch him or make a gesture of healing as was his custom. He looks with anger on the Pharisees and they make plans to kill him. It is a dramatic scene.

But there is an amusing element; Jesus asks his adversaries if it is lawful to do good on the sacred Sabbath day. What a question! In this way, they are placed in an uncomfortable position. His enemies are silent; they cannot reply. For those who were observing the scene as well as for us, today, who read the narrative, Jesus' defense of the paralytic seems both ingenious and appealing.

Another time he went into the synagogue, and a man with a shriveled hand was there. Some of them were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal on the Sabbath. Jesus said to the man with the shriveled hand, "Stand up in front of everyone." Then Jesus asked them, "Which is lawful on the Sabbath, to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" But they remained silent. He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out and his hand was completely restored. Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus (Mk 3: 1-6; Lk 6: 6-11; Mt 12: 9-14).

The adversaries of Jesus were relentless. They included the scribes and Pharisees, according to Luke, the Pharisees according to Matthew and Mark adds the Herodians a group that pursued a policy of capitulation to Rome. Matthew notes that the Pharisees reprimand Jesus ("Is it lawful to cure?") According to Matthew, one can help oneself in the case of harvesting and eating, (12: 1-8) and one can and should help one's neighbor, in the case of the shriveled hand (12:9ff).

Mark includes the fact that "Jesus looked around at them in anger, distressed by their stubborn hearts" (3:5). Matthew mentions that it is lawful to save a sheep on the Sabbath (Mt12:11-12) and therefore, with greater reason, a human being. Each of the synoptics notes that Jesus has the sick man extend his hand and with that, the hand is cured. Therefore, unlike the rabbinical teaching that accepted healing action only in extreme cases, Jesus heals all the sick. In this way he goes beyond the religious leaders and they, scandalized by his actions, begin to: search for a way to eliminate him (Mt 12: 114; Mk 3:6) or find a way to deal with such a man who disobeys the Jewish norm (Lk 6:11).

Now, the inhabitants of Galilee did not look at things this way; they were more accepting of acts of mercy. For them, Jesus' way of acting would be well received and his manner of treating his adversaries, who were left speechless and bewildered, would have been considered amusing. As a matter of fact, the question of the Teacher is ingenious: on a day considered sacred, is it considered lawful: to do good and save others or, on the contrary, to destroy life?

7) *Fools: which is more important, the gold or the sanctuary?*

Those of us who are not submerged in the legal world are impressed by legal debates with their traps and indecisiveness. Many times I have observed humble rural people trying to read complicated legal documents without understanding them. It is very sad to see how the laws are badly used against the poor.

During the epoch of Jesus and the first Christians the custom of taking oaths was debated, particularly in rabbinical and pharisaical contexts. It was the form of taking oaths that was under dispute, which is to say, the pronouncement of mere words without giving importance to the underlying sense of the oath. As the saying goes: to get lost in the details and lose sight of the heart of the matter.

Jesus is indignant: "Blind guides!" It makes no difference if one swears by the Sanctuary or by the gold within it." His indignation is expressed in the form of skillful and humorous questions: which is more important, to swear by the Temple or by something within the Temple; by the altar or by the offering on the altar? These are absurd and witty predicaments seen with the eyes of those who have little to do with the legal system.

Woe to you blind guides! You say if anyone swears by the Temple it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gold in the Temple he is bound by his oath... Which is greater, the gold or the Temple that makes the gold sacred? If anyone swears by the altar it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gift on the altar he is bound by his oath. Which is greater the gift or the altar that makes the gift holy? Therefore he who swears by the altar

swears by it and by the one who dwells in it. And the one who swears by heaven, swears by the throne of God and by the one who sits on it. (Mt 23:16-22).

These statements are serious. They treat of very sacred things. They are not jokes. But the way the Teacher and his community face up to the debate in which the secondary replaces the central issue is humorous. The questions of Jesus are skillful and they unmask the absurdity of the legalistic norms.

There are two pairs of similar quandaries: the sanctuary and the gold guarded there; the altar and the offering placed there. To swear by the first term is said to bring no consequences, but to swear by the second element (gold, offering) brings with it the obligation to fulfill the oath... It is a formal discourse and a casuistic absurdity.

Unfortunately, this type of sophistry undermines a great deal of religious activity. Jesus censures falsehood to its face in issues such as oath taking, not in the formula used but in the fundamental intention behind it.

8) *They pay a tenth of their spices... but neglect justice and faith*

We pay taxes in our society and in some churches, each believer gives ten percent of his economic assets and this is often difficult for us. With regard to this, we don't make jokes but rather complain.

In this rather annoying area, there is a controversial and humorous biblical saying. The law of ten percent of human production is applied to significant things of some size. With regard to mint, dill and cumin, these are seeds so small that they do not fall under the law of ten percent, except in the case of meticulous and fanatical individuals. In this context, we are provoked to laughter at the adage about wanting to fulfill the law regarding something so minuscule, while at the same time neglecting what is more important. It is an ingenious contrast. The important issue is to live the faith and fulfill its profound law which, according to Jesus, involves: justice, mercy and faithfulness (Matthew); justice and the love of God (Luke). This is what one must do, without failing to pay the law of ten percent.

Woe to you teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices – mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important things of the law – justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former (Mt 23:23; Lk 11:42).

In this controversy, our attention is called to the fact that it is presupposed that the scribes and Pharisees (Matthew) and the Pharisees (Luke) pay the ten percent tax. The problem, not explicit here, is that these religious leaders impose a rigorous and inhuman interpretation of the entire law on the ordinary people (not only with regard to this tax). But the fundamental problem is not the ten percent tax but how to live in accord with the Law. This must not be reduced to details and exaggerations. The Law of Yahweh demanded justice and love. This is what interests Jesus and the first Christians.

Matthew's narrative contrasts mint, dill and cumin with justice, mercy and fidelity in language typically Jewish. Luke's text uses a more general terminology: mint, rue and all other kinds of garden herbs, on the one hand, with justice and love on the other. In any case, the contrast is similar to that of an ant and an elephant. A very comical contrast!

9) *Full of greed and self-indulgence inside... and clean on the outside*

To pretend perfection before others while at the same time despising one's neighbor is a constant human vice. It is even more shocking in the area of religion. Things are done not from the heart but out of pride, in order to show oneself better than the rest. Or there is a double game going on, superficial benevolence with evil just below the surface behavior.

In the face of these and other forms of hypocrisy, one might react strongly. This was the case with Jesus. But let us remember, that he was an ordinary, very vulnerable individual from the community, while those he denounced –teachers of the Law and Pharisees- were seen as almost omnipotent. For this reason the valiant denouncement made by the itinerant teacher from Nazareth is so extraordinary.

The denouncement sounds rather strange: although we wash the outside of cups and plates, we are especially careful of the inside that needs more cleansing. The criticism is against robbery, greed, self indulgence (Matthew) and wickedness (Luke). The humor lies in his unmasking his adversaries, telling them that while they purify the exterior, they remain evil within. This clear condemnation must have delighted the simple people who were mistreated and despised by their religious leaders.

Now then you Pharisees, hypocrites, you clean the outside of the cup and dish but inside you are full of greed and wickedness (Mt 23:25; Lk 11:39).

This passage forms part of a list of condemnations against the religious leaders who taught and imposed the Law, and against the Pharisees. These are attitudes that were appreciated within the context of the first Christian communities that developed in the midst of a hostile Judaism.

The leaders are accused of robbery and plunder, of self-indulgence and wickedness. These are not details nor insignificant facts. They are serious accusations. The denouncements of Jesus are made with a sense of humor appreciated by his listeners, but which in all probability did not please the leaders. There is political weight in the accusations and in the humor used.

Luke's narrative takes place in the house of a Pharisee (11:37-40) who it appears, offered a friendly invitation to Jesus to dine with him at midday. The Pharisee notices that Jesus has not followed the Jewish custom of washing before eating. He is neither spying on Jesus nor setting a trap. As Luke comments, he is only surprised by the behavior of Jesus (11:38). It is here that the Teacher takes advantage of the situation to denounce those who cleanse the exterior while their hearts remain filled with evil.

10) It is what comes out of the mouth, not what comes out of the body that makes a man unclean

The predominant mentality in today's world puts the accent on cleansing the ambient, physical hygiene and the cultivation of physical beauty. The mentality of earlier times was more concerned with the concepts of pure and impure in accord with juridical and religious norms.

A highly debated point was purity regarding foods. There were behaviors among the gentiles that were unacceptable in Jewish contexts where it was forbidden to eat or even touch a camel, rabbit, pig, sea gull, crow, rat, crocodile, etc. (Lev 11: 4ff), because contact with these creatures would place them in a state of impurity.

In this context, Jesus instructs them that it is not these foods that will make them impure but rather the evil words and actions that come out of the mouths and hearts of human beings: murders, robberies, etc. Once again the really important, not the superficial is stressed.

In the debate on the pure and the impure, Jesus says something rather witty. The impure does not enter through the mouth, which is to say, all foods may be eaten; the problem is rather what comes out of the body into the toilet. This is dirty and has an evil smell. More to the point, the impure is what comes out of the interior of the human being and harms others (murder, offenses, envy, adultery and similar acts).

What goes into a man's mouth does not make him unclean, but what comes out of his mouth, that is what makes him unclean. Don't you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body? But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart and these make a man unclean... evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft..."(Mt 15:10, 15-20; Lk 7: 14-23).

This passage is about two controversial issues. One is purification before eating, the theme in Matthew's text; the other issue has to do with legislation regarding pure and impure foods (Lev 11). The most surprising to us is that Jesus does not make modifications or exceptions; on the contrary he simply does away with a Jewish norm. This was the custom implemented by the Christian community (Acts 10 and 11: the valiant behavior of Peter). This custom facilitated and permitted a free interaction between Jews and gentiles and the acceptance of the latter within Christianity.

Intense and complicated controversies are thus resolved by a humorous saying with regard to foods and their natural process of digestion and elimination from the human body. The teaching of Jesus refers to the interior purity of the human being, to issues of the heart expressed by the mouth of the individual; he confronts the impurity that comes out of this interiority. This is what the text emphasizes.

11) Why do you offend God with your tradition?

The process of secularization has distinguished the religious forms, on the one hand, and on the other, the spiritual life. Many do not participate in a religious system, but they do believe in a Supreme Being. This does not occur in traditional believers. Neither did it occur during the time of Jesus. The population was socially, culturally and spiritually religious.

Some belonged to specifically religious groups: scribes, etc., but everyone felt linked to God. The first, specifically religious groups, imposed burdens on the rest, for example, precise norms with regard to purification and foods. These had not been written in the Law of Moses but had been added by religious teachers, by rabbis, citing the "tradition of the ancestors".

A curious incident occurs when scribes and Pharisees complain to Jesus that his disciples are eating without washing their hands. Jesus responds with annoyance: "You violate the commandments of God ... but hold to human traditions! You nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down!"-these are radical criticisms. In this case as in others, we put ourselves in the place of his audience: liberating oneself from such traditions is motive for joy and thanksgiving to God.

So the Pharisees and teachers of the Law asked Jesus, "Why don't your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with unclean hands?" He replied, Isaias was right when he prophesized about you hypocrites; as it is written: 'These people honor me with their lips but their hearts are far from me.'... And he said to them: 'You have a fine way of setting aside the commandments of God in order to observe your own traditions!' (Mk 7: 5-13; Mt 15: 1-9).

This discussion contrasts a prophetic teaching with a tradition of the rabbis. In order to give support to his defense of the disciples, Jesus cites Isaias and also the commandments given to Moses. The disciples were criticized for not ritually purifying themselves before eating, a custom imposed by rabbis and religious groups and practiced, it would seem, by the more pious Jews. Since Mark is writing for gentile Christians, he makes a detailed presentation of the custom in 7:3-4. What was only a custom had been exalted to something sacred and immutable. Certainly the faith arising in the heart and the teachings of the Law and the prophets had more value than a custom. Jesus uses this excellent argument. He does not directly respond to the critics but rather, basing his argument on a reference to Isaias 29, Jesus brings to light the fact that they are hypocrites.

Along with the discussion, Jesus puts them in their place: “You violate the commandment of God because you preserve your tradition!” He puts the case to them of sons who instead of honoring their parents make an offering to God, which freed them from the obligation of caring for them. This was the custom of *corban*, an Aramaic word meaning “offering to God”. The formula “tradition of the ancestors” indicates the oral norms that the Pharisees put on the same level as the written Law (Torah).

12) This religious action... leads to condemnation

In the cities, above all in middle and lower class sectors, we are often disturbed by unwanted religious proselytizing. These people go from house to house, knocking on doors indoctrinating, in order to “save us” and convince us to participate in their forms of religion. They annoy us with their arguments and even with threats of hell fire if we continue to live in our sins.

Jewish proselytism was very intense in the past. Matthew offers an example of it. It is a shocking text that questions scribes and Pharisees with the usual text from Matthew: “Pharisees, hypocrites”, who search for adherents and converts to Judaism. However, these converts turn out to be worse than the proselytizers and are doubly condemned.

The expressions are exaggerated and witty. The criticism is directed against those who “travel over land and sea to win a single convert”. This is an exaggeration but the criticism continues, showing how the supposed convert turns out to be doubly condemned. There is an indication in passing that these religious propagandists are themselves condemned. This is too much! It was as amusing for those who were listening, as it is for us today.

Woe to you teachers of the Law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are (Mt 23:15).

The proselytizing campaigns were an acute problem in the early Church, just as they are a source of headaches for us today. These are forms of behavior of an obsessive fundamentalist nature: only those who convert to the only valid and salvific religion are of value. The rest is considered lost, without salvation. The proselytized is the one who converts, is circumcised and practices the entire Jewish Law. The outrageous and amusing factor is that this convert, this saved individual turns out to be condemned. He is doubly a son of Gehenna, of hell. These are harsh, cutting words. On hearing them, one asks why the confrontation with the proselytized is so strong. All of us have known converts who are more obsessive and fanatic than normal believers. Perhaps this is what occurred in the primitive Church: Jewish converts may have attacked it with harsh zeal and for this reason they received a similar treatment in return.

13) You have made the Temple a den of thieves

In our urban centers, the commercialization of goods and services is both turbulent and ambiguous. On the one hand it has to do with the means of survival for so many people; on the other, those who manage these businesses are often engaged in dishonest activities.

In earlier times, commercial interchange had different characteristics. For example, in the Jerusalem Temple there was a good deal of buying and selling of animals for sacrifices, money changing, transportation of goods, etc. A sacred place was often a type of market.

After his messianic entrance into Jerusalem, Jesus intervened violently against abuses in the Temple courts. One reads but can hardly believe it. Before a large number of people and the many forms of commerce and business that were carried on there, how does one man throw them out and overturn the tables? Were there many who helped him? Or did he have such moral authority that no one opposed him? It is a surprising scene.

Jesus contrasts the divine “house of prayer” with the “den of thieves”. These two realities are like water and oil; they are incompatible. Moreover, many humble, ordinary people who were in the Temple at the time must have been delighted by the violent, purifying action against those who so often abused pilgrims who came there. So then, in a spiritual sense (the defense of the Temple of God) as well as in a socio-economic sense (the expulsion of abusive merchants), the action of Jesus is prophetic and it has its humorous dimension in the contrast between prayer and plundering.

Then he entered the Temple area and began driving out those who were selling. “It is written”, he said to them, “My house will be a house of prayer but you have made it a den of robbers (Lk 19:45-46; Mk 11:15-17; Mt 21: 12-13; Jn 2: 13-16).

The counter positions in this prophetic action are the following: house-den, prayer-banditry, God-merchants. Jesus interrupts the business, overturns the tables of the money-changers and throws them out. It is not moderate action; there is no doubt that it is a violent intervention.

In the eyes of those who went piously to pray at the Temple and were mistreated by the buyers and sellers these contrasts must have offered a liberating experience. The confrontation of the powerful wealthy was certainly not acceptable to them but for the simple ordinary people, it was both amusing and liberating.

We have here four texts. Lk 19:45 speaks of those who do business. Mk 11:15 and Mt 21: 12 note that the tables belonged to those who were buying and selling, changing money and selling doves, which is to say a number of people were involved. Jn 2:14-15 gives more details about oxen and sheep, doves, money-changers and adds that Jesus used a whip of cords. The number of people and commercial interests involved is impressive. According to Mark and Matthew, Jesus not only cast out the sellers but also the buyers. It would appear that many accepted the prophetic and moral authority of Jesus. His behavior would have brought joy to his listeners who went faithfully to the Temple. It is also a motive of joy for the Christian community of today. The experience of God is incompatible with dishonesty in business.

14) The hidden ... will be made known

A system of domination uses the “secret” as well as other means to impose itself on people; although at times these are used to preserve intimacy and confidentiality. On the other hand, the secret and discretion can be employed in adverse contexts and in the face of persecution, as was the case with the first Christians besieged by the surrounding society.

The hidden shall be made known, seems like a proverb and it is presented in various ways by the evangelists. The versions of Mt 10:26; Mk 4:22; Lk 8:17 presuppose the action of the followers of Jesus; evangelization arrives cautiously to few persons, but one day it will be manifested universally, without obstacles. Another version makes reference to the hypocrisy of the Pharisees: what they say in a hidden way will be made known (Lk 12:2) and before them it is necessary to be cautious and speak secretly. But the day will come when all shall be known. The language used by Jesus offers contrasts with its amusing characteristic: the covered will be uncovered; the hidden will be known, what is said in the dark shall be heard in the light, the secret will be shouted from the roof tops. The contrasts are amusing.

Meanwhile people were gathered in their thousands so that they were treading on one another. And he began to speak, first of all to his disciples. “Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees -that is their hypocrisy. Everything that is now covered will be uncovered, and everything now hidden will be made clear. For this reason whatever you have said in the dark will be heard in the daylight, and what you have whispered in hidden places will be proclaimed on the housetops” (Lk 12:13; 8:17; Mk 4:22; Mt 10:26).

In today's language proverbs can also be used in various ways. The original saying has eschatological and prophetic weight: the hidden will come out into the light or be made public. The different versions of the Gospel have added the sense of a teaching.

With respect to the biblical text, its significance within the primitive Christian community is important; it refers mainly to the evangelization that will no longer be limited and will be carried out publicly and will, moreover, unmask human evil and hypocrisy.

The texts of Mark 4: 21-23 and Luke 8: 16-17 put the parable of the lamp first and then the proverb regarding the hidden that will be revealed: the truth, which many neither understand nor accept, will be revealed.

In any case, the amusing factor is the inversion of things, that is to say the use of sharp contrasts where something becomes its inverse. What is said in secret will be shouted from the rooftops, what is kept hidden will be known.

15) *The proud... will be humbled*

One of the most unbearable attitudes in the human being is that of arrogance and pride. Although the person may be unaware that they are acting this way, others do perceive it. This is said in a human sense. With respect to the spiritual dimension, pride separates us from God and our neighbor, since one acts self sufficiently and fails in solidarity with others.

If someone is placed above others or thinks he is, and then finds himself put in the last place, or if someone at the end of a line is brought to the first place, there are strong reactions. One can complain if one was in a superior place to begin with, or enjoy the change if one were last in line. It is comical in any case.

The Gospel message is implacable: God rejects the proud and favors the humble. This saying appears in various passages: the contrast between the Pharisee and the publican, the criticism of religious leaders and the demand that the disciples not have themselves treated as superior; and finally, the question of the placement at the wedding feast. In each case, there is a call to humility: not as a private attitude but as a mode of relating with others on an ethical plane. But the fundamental issue is eschatological: God will act with preference regarding the humble and the last will be given first place. In the face of such an announcement, the listeners are delighted.

He spoke these words to some people who prided themselves on being virtuous and despised everyone else, "Two men went up to the Temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood there and said this prayer to himself, 'I thank you God that I am not grasping, unjust, adulterous like the rest of mankind, and particularly that I am not like this tax collector here. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes on all I get.' The tax collector stood some distance away, not daring to raise his eyes to heaven; but he beat his breast and said, 'God be merciful to me a sinner'. This man I tell you went home again at rights with God; the other did not. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the man who humbles himself will be exalted" (Lk 18: 9-14; 14: 11; Mt 23:12).

This scene, related only by Luke, concludes with the saying about the proud and the humble. The scene is amusing because the person who esteems himself so highly and despises his neighbor so much, hoping to put God in his favor, winds up condemned. The contrary occurs with the person who considers himself a sinner; this one is justified by God.

This saying has been placed at the conclusion of various evangelical texts. Luke 14 places it in the narrative about the seats at a banquet while Luke 18 puts it in the scene of the Pharisee and the publican and Matthew 23 includes it in the debate with the religious leaders along, with a few recommendations to the disciples.

The formula of the saying has an eschatological character. God's intervention transforms human reality: the one who exalts himself is humiliated and vice versa. There is also a humorous

aspect: the value of the one who exalts himself is less and vice versa. In this way everything changes radically.

16) *Hunger surpasses the religious law*

In the face of basic need, religious and moral norms are very often contradicted in the name of the higher right to life. This happens particularly with regard to poor sectors that must confront such needs. They affirm their right to life, though this might defy something legal or sacred.

In the biblical narrative a commonplace event is the motive of a great debate. The followers of Jesus feel hungry and while passing through a field, they eat what they gather there. But it is the Sabbath and they are forbidden to carry out profane activities, such as preparing food for eating. The Pharisees are spying on them and they denounce the followers for violating the sacred law of rest.

Jesus responds with his usual skill. He asks them questions that support the illegal action of his disciples. His questions are based on an incident in the life of King David and the fact that the Temple priests work on the Sabbath. The text does not offer the reply of his adversaries; they seem to have been defeated by the ingenious arguments of the Teacher.

Placing ourselves within the scene, we can feel the joy of those who have transgressed the law and are defended by Jesus. His witty questions that defeat his adversaries are ingenious.

At that time, Jesus took a walk through the cornfields one Sabbath day. His disciples were hungry and began to pick ears of corn and eat them. The Pharisees noticed it and said to him, "Look, your disciples are doing something forbidden on the Sabbath." But he said to them, "Have you not read what David did when he and his followers were hungry- how he went into the house of God and they ate the loaves of offering which neither he nor his followers were allowed to eat, but which were for the priests alone? Or again, have you not read in the Law that on the Sabbath day the priests break the Sabbath without being blamed for it? Now here I tell you is something greater than the Temple. And if you had understood the meaning of the words: What I want is mercy, not sacrifice, you would not have condemned the blameless. For the Son of Man is master of the Sabbath" (Mt 12:1-8; Mk 2:23-28; Lk 6: 1-5).

This is one case among many where the religious customs are against life. In the concrete it has to do with the hunger of the disciples who like Jesus were itinerant evangelizers. They were often hungry in their travels and the scene appears to have to do with a walk to the synagogue on a Saturday. On this occasion, they were taking apart the grains of wheat or corn with their hands, which is to say preparing the food for eating. Luke's text explains the action of removing the grains with their fingers, a violation of the law of rest.

I would like to emphasize the skillful questions Jesus uses to counter-attack his adversaries who are spying on and criticizing the action of the Teacher's followers. He does not use the human argument: that his disciples have an urgent need. Rather, he uses biblical references, in Matthew there are three. The first is highly relevant because David and his companions eat what is not for them; moreover, they eat the Temple bread, meant only for the priests. The second question is even sharper and humorous: the religious functionaries within the Temple itself, violate the law of rest. The third biblical reference is from Osee in favor of mercy rather than a ritual gesture. This language must have delighted the disciples.

The scene concludes by relativizing the sacred law and affirming the supremacy of the Son of Man. Mark's version presents the Sabbath as in favor of the human being and not the contrary. It is a radically humanizing principle.

17) *They demand a sign... They will receive none!*

Although modernism surrounds us with its reason, science, technology and secularism, it continues to have affection for extraordinary deeds and miracles. Stories of intervention and divine apparitions abound.

In the context of first century Palestine, there was a strong apocalyptic sensitivity concerning announcements about the end of the world. On the other hand, groups opposing Jesus laid traps for him, asking him, for example, to perform miracles. The Lord was no fool; he knew the stratagems of his enemies.

When they ask him for a sign from heaven, he sighs profoundly (Mk 8:12) and explicitly refuses to play the role of the magician, a role that contradicts his liberating mission. This is Mark's version. In Matthew it is said that they will have the sign of Jonas, in reference to the resurrection on the third day.

Let us remember that the devil tempted him in this way (Mt 4:1ff). In the scene I am discussing, those who put him under pressure are the Pharisees and the wealthy Sadducees, according to Matthew. Jesus does not permit them to threaten or deceive him. He says a categorical no! Those who were not in accord with these religious leaders must have enjoyed and applauded the valiant attitude of the Teacher.

The Pharisees came up and started a discussion with him; they demanded of him a sign from heaven, to test him. And with a sigh that came straight from the heart he said, 'Why does this generation demand a sign? I tell you solemnly, no sign shall be given to this generation'. And leaving them again and re-embarking he went away to the opposite shore (Mk 8:11-13; Mt 16: 14).

The texts mention the Pharisees (Mark), the Pharisees and the Sadducees (Matthew), but the saying of Jesus is directed against "this generation" (Mk 9: 19; Mt 11:16). This is to say, that the common people and not only the Jewish leadership sought certainty and apocalyptic signs.

On the part of Jesus there is unconditional negation: his no in Mark and his indirect no in Matthew after giving the sign of Jonas. This shows his liberty in the face of religious pressure and the far-fetched sentiments of the common people. It also shows his union with God who does not give signs to satisfy popular expectations. In today's terminology, his attitude does not descend into populism nor accept a fever for miracles, which so often deceives marginal sectors.

In comparing the texts, Luke's is simple and direct. Matthew's version is richer and has a humorous aspect. It speaks in fact of atmospheric signs and climatic predictions. In these predictions, the people are correct but they do not do as well with the *kairoi*, the signs of the times. With respect to them they are awkward and blind. A strong contrast is put forward between seeing concrete signs due to the colors of the heavens, and not seeing messianic signs.

B- Representatives of religion

1) They place burdens on people ... and they will not move a finger

Incoherence is one of the worst vices of believers like us. Many times we talk well but our actions are not coherent with our faith. Even worse, representatives of religion crush people (with legalism, guilt, dualism that denies the human, chauvinistic attitudes, etc.). It is necessary to use a critical eye with all those who transmit laws and religion.

One constant in the Gospels is that Jesus confronts teachers of the law and Pharisees. Let us look at a highly liberating case. Both the Pharisees and the scribes interpreted norms with a great deal of rigor. This hurt and crushed people.

Jesus tells them some direct and harsh truths: you speak but you do not act as the Law commands; you put heavy burdens on people which you are not willing to move, even with a finger.

This is to say, they are false and not consequential and they oppress the population with their religious traditions.

We have here, in my opinion, political humor. He tells the people not to imitate religious authorities because they are not consequent. He also tells them that they are oppressed by these representatives of religion, this is the way he conscienticizes and liberates them. This is a language with political weight and with humorous expressions (like not moving a finger).

Then addressing the people and his disciples Jesus said, "The scribes and the Pharisees occupy the chair of Moses. You must therefore do what they tell you and listen to what they say; but do not be guided by what they do: since they do not practice what they preach. They tie up heavy burdens and lay them on men's shoulders but will they lift a finger to move them? Not they! (Mt 23:1-4; Lk 11: 45-46).

The scribes said that their traditional teaching came from the work of Moses. This supposed origin does not possess an historic seal, rather it is a way of legitimating a religious function. They taught the Torah, the Law, but they did so in a legalistic and rigorous way. There was also incoherence between what was said and what was done. In this passage Jesus was not attacking the scribe's labor of teaching although he does so in Mt 5: 17ff and in other places. The confrontation is based on the distance between the word and concrete action and the way they laid heavy legal burdens on the shoulders of ordinary people. These truths are presented without pretexts or subterfuges. They are valiant, prophetic expressions and I imagine that they delighted the listeners. They liberated them from legal burdens.

Matthew's text is extensive and has many elements; almost the entire chapter 23 is directed against the leaders of the Jewish people. Luke's version is brief and is preceded by a brief dialogue with a scribe or lawyer. However, the previous expressions and those coming after verses 45-46, refer to the Pharisees.

2) They do not enter... nor allow others to enter

For many people, spiritual and religious organisms are mediators of a rich experience of God for the community and for the mission to the world. On the other hand, they often fulfill a counter-function: they are not a source of communication with God, nor with human history. This is damaging for they try to control spiritual life and do immense harm to people. They are perverse oppressors.

Jesus constantly censures these counterfeit religious forces of evil. In a special way, he did so against those who controlled Jewish legislation. It must be remembered that the Law synthesized fidelity to Yahweh. Those who managed the legal dimension presented themselves as intermediaries with God. With respect to this, Jesus makes various dramatic and often humorous pronouncements. The gravity of the situation is that the scribes or teachers of the Law closed the access to the Kingdom of Heaven to so many people, according to Matthew (23:13), and these same lawyers or experts in the Law took away the key to knowledge, as Luke tells us (11:52). This is scandalous and dramatic. At the same time it is amusing. Those who will not let the people enter, have not entered themselves. Those with the key are not able to open the door for themselves. The language is ingenious and ironic.

Basically, the issue is that there be free access to the love of God; and that no human organism (in particular no religious organism) should be allowed to impede communion with the God of life.

Woe to you experts in the Law, because you have taken away the key to knowledge. You yourselves have not entered, and you have hindered those who were entering (Lk 11:52; Mt 23:13).

The confrontation with the hypocritical scribes and Pharisees has various levels. The long text in Matthew 23:13-32, contains seven condemnations directed against both groups, while the text in Luke 11:52 refers only to the scribes and may be the original text. This forms part of a list of denunciations in Lk 11: 37-54. Another difference is that Luke speaks in the past tense (did not enter) and Matthew in the present tense (do not enter; this suggests that he is speaking about what is now occurring in the Christian community, where those of Jewish origin were mistreated by the Pharisees and the scribes. In Luke there is a final commentary (v. 53-54) on the relentless persecution and entrapment suffered by Jesus. The scene is a dramatic one.

The symbol of the keys to heaven (Mt 23: 13) is present in the mission given to Peter. But in this case, there is no control over the Law and access to God but rather, a positive ecclesial mission (16:19).

In these circumstances, Jesus speaks with a comic or ironic tone: “You have the key and you do not enter! (Luke). You close the Kingdom of Heaven to the rest and do not enter yourselves! (Matthew) Those who consider themselves the owners of the access to the Kingdom of Heaven, that is to say, access to happiness with God, remain deprived of this contact. The experts who listened to this were obviously filled with anger against the one who spoke these truths. On the other hand, the ordinary people listening, often mistreated, blamed, and excluded by the leaders of religion, must have been content.

3) Blind guides... they strain out the mosquito and swallow the camel.

In many cultures of the past and of today, one way of telling amusing tales is by emphasizing the contrasts between extremes. This could include: the fat and the thin, the sacred and the profane, the very small and the enormous.

This last contrast is found in a Gospel saying from Matthew that compares the minuscule mosquito with the immense camel, the largest animal known in the region of Palestine. But not only is there this contrast; what causes laughter is that someone can preoccupy themselves with the detail of straining out a mosquito when drinking some liquid and on the other hand, swallow a camel.

Here we have two contrasts that would be amusing for Jesus' listeners. One is the contrast between the guide and the blind person. Anyone who makes himself a guide cannot be a person who lacks the capacity to see. A second amusing contrast is found in the person who carefully strains out the diminutive insect and then swallows an immense camel. These ridiculous cases are the motive for laughter. They have to do with a statement against the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law, part of a list of denunciations and threats found in Matthew 23: 13-22.

Woe to you teachers of the Law and Pharisees, you hypocrites!... blind guides who strain out the gnat but swallow the camel (Mt 23: 23-24).

In this chapter of Matthew, the series of lamentations (Woe to you!), constitute prophetic denunciations and threats. They are seven warnings with a common heading in all but the third: “Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!” They denounce, threaten and condemn. Moreover, in a few cases, this is done with absurd and amusing phrases. The prophetic denunciation is accompanied with some humor. It is based on life experience. Many jars or decanters had their own filters thus guarding against foreign objects getting into the container and later being swallowed. Well, the fanatical Pharisees, obsessed with details, were likewise concerned with filtering out any elements that might be unclean or impure. There was a great deal of legislation about things pure and impure regarding foods (Lev 11:20: “All four footed winged creatures will be abominable to you”) For this reason, those with a pharisaic mentality were careful about filtering out mosquitoes. It was a casuistry that reached the extreme of the absurd. Such prevention was accompanied by another ridiculous act: swallowing a camel. Something impossible.

4) *Vipers: how can you who are evil say something good?*

In our society, there is a deceitful attitude, demagogical, hypocritical and inconsistent. People who have this attitude often speak well but do not inspire confidence. This happens all too often.

For this reason, one demands coherence between words and deeds and between word and reality. Truth and credibility are too often scarce among those with power.

In the Bible, the word has depth; it is a solid, dynamic reality. If we compare this with what is happening in today's world, language today is disposable, diminished and cheapened. Moreover, in the Bible, the word flows from the heart where there is sentiment and knowledge.

In the conflict with the representatives of religion, Jesus brings their inconsistencies to light. Since they are evil in their hearts, how can they speak and act as they should? It is harsh criticism of those who have a monopoly over the religious word and are able to control people through their teaching.

They are called vipers, serpents filled with malice and treason. Their teachings are also disqualified and, in a very radical way they are called evil. This language must have angered them; on the other hand, those who had no confidence in them and were mistreated by religious authorities must have found these sayings highly amusing.

You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him (Mt 12: 34-35; Lk 6: 43-45; Mt 7: 16-20).

The section of Matthew 12:33-37 shows the inconsistency in the speech/action of the Pharisees. As has been noted, in the world where Jesus moved, the word was not merely a verbal expression. The word came out of the heart and was as firm as a rock.

Then, speaking and acting were almost synonymous. Speech showed the inner being of the person. For this reason, the evil person could not speak or act in a good way. In this sense, the biblical saying disqualifies the Pharisees who are like serpents. It was believed that this animal was evil, with consequent evil behavior. The Pharisees were therefore like serpents. It must be remembered that John the Baptist treated them in the same way (Mt 3:7), and following the seven criticisms (Mt 23), they are once again categorized as vipers (23:33). For the contemporaries of Jesus who well knew the malice of the Pharisees, it must have been highly amusing to hear Jesus tell them some hard truths.

5) *They come to you in sheep's clothing... but they are ferocious wolves*

One way of fooling one's neighbor is by simulation. It might be a structural action: in the case of economic publicity and political propaganda that pretend to do what is good but deceive us from day to day. It may be some individual form of behavior, for example when a person pleases another in order to gain some unlawful favor. These are real events in today's world and we should have a critical attitude before them.

With regard to these facts, the message of the New Testament offers us healthy warnings. When someone presents himself as completely positive in his exterior appearance we must examine his deeds because evil can be brilliantly disguised.

The language of Jesus is clear: be cautious before those who come dressed as timid sheep but are really ferocious wolves. Jesus uses a comparison with animals very familiar to his listeners. The sheep gives many benefits while the wolf only brings misfortune. This is a comparison with very dangerous people of his times, perhaps false prophets (Matthew) or some other type of leader

who did not bring forth good fruits, who deceived the population (Luke 6:43-45). Thanks to these warnings it is possible to keep our distance and laugh at insincere people who try to deceive us.

Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruits you will recognize them...Every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit (Mt 7:15-19; Lk 6: 44-45).

The passage makes a humorous comparison between the human and the animal worlds. The fundamental problem is very grave: The rapacious wolves that destroy the sheep are put on a par with the religious leaders who pretend to be good yet do irreparable damage. It has to do with terrible things, but the denunciations are made in such a manner that they make us smile. They do not permit us to be trapped by the deception of those who come disguised as good while in reality they are a destructive power (a rapacious wolf, a thief).

With respect to the original passage, it is difficult to know exactly to whom they are referring. Matthew mentions false prophets perhaps from the time of Jesus, or perhaps people who were confusing the primitive community. What evil things were they doing? The explanation that follows refers to the "concrete fruits", be they good or evil. In Mt 7:17 there is a warning directed to the disciples and those close to Jesus; while a similar text about good and bad fruit is aimed at the Pharisees in Mt 12:33. In Luke 6:43-45 the comparison with the fruit of trees is attributed to language emerging from the heart of the believer.

6) Do not believe... the false christs and prophets

Periodically, liberating personalities arise in both the social as well as the ecclesial dimensions. They offer solutions to thorny problems, act in spectacular ways and often deceive many. Their appearance usually draws many to submit and subordinate themselves to these pseudo-liberators. In the face of these situations, there is urgent need for conscientization and the exercise of one's right to fight against deception

The chaotic era that surrounded Jesus of Nazareth and the early Church had its false prophets and false messiahs. The texts do not tell us exactly who they were or anything about their spectacular works. What we do have are warnings against false personages, that is to say, there will be conflicts and controversies like those that happened at that time.

This appears to be relevant when one takes into consideration the proliferation of religious movements in our day and in a wider sense, the appearance of all kinds of "liberators" at this time of millennial change.

On the other hand, the call to avoid being deceived frees us from being subject to false personages. This implies the joy of being free in the face of deceit in the religious dimension.

At that time, if anyone says to you, 'Look here is the Christ!' or, 'There he is!' do not believe it. For false christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect- if that were possible. See I have told you ahead of time. (Mt 24:23-25; Mk 13: 21-23).

This text also had application in the Church after the death of the Lord. As happened previously, there were false prophets but certain personages appeared who attributed to themselves the messianic role. Not only did they define themselves deceitfully, they also performed spectacular feats that fascinated ingenuous individuals. This brought with it confusion and divisions among the believers.

We see this problematic in two types of narratives: the question of the self-proclaimed messiahs (Mk 13:5-6; Mt 24: 4-5), and the more general topic of the false christs and false prophets with their marvels (Mk 13: 21-23; Mt 24: 23-25).

The texts warn against false persons and also indicate that, were it possible, even many of God's elect would be deceived. Which is to say, there will be conflict within the believing community. Given these heart-breaking situations, it is well to be warned ahead of time to enable us to act in a critical fashion.

7) *They are like beautiful whitewashed tombs... but are full of everything unclean*

A correct evaluation of an authoritarian culture would indicate that it exalts images and appearances and overlooks what is fundamental in life and death. We might call it a "light" or superficial culture, in which, for example, the human being, particularly the woman, is classified in accord with physical appearance.

Each cultural scenario has its criteria. At the time of Jesus, the religious position of the community was highly valued. If then the leaders were categorized as being as rotten as the corpses in the tombs, this was to say that they had no value, that they gave off a bad odor and were dead.

A saying of Jesus directed against scribes and Pharisees makes a humorous, symbolic criticism: they are like cleanly whitewashed tombs, beautiful but...(the but is of great importance) inside there is corruption. Then he makes a general criticism: they seem just from the outside but inside they are filled with evil. In my judgment, the first criticism with its symbolic language that compares them with well-decorated tombs, is rather amusing. The second criticism is more basic since being just was an important norm for the good Jew; for this reason, if a religious leader does not have this quality, he has no value.

Woe to you teachers of the Law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs that are beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean. In the same way you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness (Mt 23:27-28; Lk 11: 44).

In the Jewish world, the cultural-religious practice with respect to the dead and tombs was extremely rigid. Any contact with these made a person impure. Partly for this reason the tombs were whitewashed to prevent anyone from drawing near and touching them unknowingly, thus becoming ritually impure (Lk 11:44).

The statement against the religious leaders (scribes and Pharisees) is crushing: they are accused of being hypocrites and not fulfilling the Law (Mt 23:28). This was the limit in regard to those who represented the Law. For this reason it was a profound criticism, using a language that would have been amusing for Jesus' listeners. Imagine, the highest leaders are said to be rotten!

Matthew's version is very strong while Luke's is gentler. Matthew's text forms part of the 7 curses against the "hypocritical scribes and Pharisees". This last expression is rather a caricature, reiterated over and over, because there were some decent people within the sector of the Pharisees.

8) *They consider themselves just... but they are detestable*

Today we are more sensitive to the self-esteem of others. There is also great concern with regard to the arrogance and pride common among those in wealthy sectors and among those who imitate them in more popular areas. In itself, pride is ridiculous and deplorable. But even more regrettable is that it brings with it a scornful attitude toward others. The pride of one humiliates the other who is considered inferior.

Luke's text reflects the tone of Matthew against the Pharisees. They are criticized for being people who pretended to be just but were not. Moreover they are rebuked: God knows their hearts. There is a contrast made between the apparent and being inauthentic before others on the one hand, and being evaluated by God, who cannot be deceived, on the other. Finally another contrast: what is humanly exalted is abominable in the eyes of God.

These contrasts do not please the religious leaders at all, but certainly did give pleasure to the ordinary Jewish people. The population was so often considered unfaithful to the Law and catalogued as sinful and impure. Those who judged the common people like this are themselves judged by the Teacher, who was a witness of the true God. This very likely pleased and calmed the believers of that time.

The Pharisees who loved money heard all this and were sneering at Jesus. He said to them, "You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of men, but God knows your hearts. What is highly valued among men is detestable in God's sight" (Lk 16: 14-15).

Our understanding of the Pharisees is full of prejudices: we tend to categorize them all as false and hypocritical. The texts of the New Testament reflect their opposition to the message and the person of Jesus and the many controversies and conflicts that the first Christians suffered at the hands of Pharisees and other leaders. This is certain but it is also true that there were numerous Pharisees who were just and pious people, in the best sense of the word. In general, they did not possess much in the way of material possessions, they were usually poor.

It seems that their principal problems were self complacency with regard to fulfilling the Law, considering themselves more faithful to God than the common people, and a tendency to despise them. A self-centered religion invalidates any relationship with God, who is the Mysterious Other.

With respect to the details of the text, Luke tells us that the Pharisees were devoted to money; this may arise from the editing since Luke 16:1-13 is dedicated to the theme of riches. There is a passage of transition (14-15) followed by 3 sayings with different aspects of being just before the Law (16-18). The saying against the Pharisees is not centered in the statement on riches but rather in the theme of justice, having no relation with that of poverty/riches. The justice that is being spoken of here, means fidelity to God and his revelation. The attractive aspect of the text 16:15 lies in its depreciation of vanity and pride.

9) First in the Temple ... and at the banquet

In the human condition, one type of recognition consists in the supremacy of some over others. The modern world exalts the one who controls science and technology. In the case of the power groups in the Jewish society –sustained by the tradition and the Law- the highest recognition was given the religious leaders. Jesus and his followers developed another mode of recognition: the primacy of the “last”.

A point reiterated in the Gospels is that the last in this world are the first in the Kingdom, the preferred in the eyes of God. From this point of view it is comical and humorous to see how the important on earth –as was the case with the teachers of the Law and the Pharisees- sought and received the first places. A humorous saying of Jesus refers to their vanity and their biases: they rush to get the first places in the Temple and at banquets.

Jesus said, "Beware of the scribes who like to walk about in long robes, th be greeted obsequiously in the market squares, to take the first seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets; these are the men who swallow the property of widows, while making a show of lengthy prayers. The more severe will be the sentence they receive (Mk 12:38-40; Lk 20:45-47; Mt 23: 5-7).

Once again we have a censure of the power of the teachers and the Pharisees. It may have been communicated to the multitude (Lk 20:45) or to the people and the disciples (Mt 23:1). In Matthew the saying forms part of the detailed and long imprecations of Chapter 23 and is preceded by the general cautionary statement, “They do all their works in order to be seen” by others. Then it

says how they seek and occupy the first places. It has to do then with the recognition of their supremacy.

The texts of Mark and Luke which are identical, close with the sharp warning “their sentence will be the more severe” (Mk 12:40; Lk 20:47). There is an eschatological tone. Just so, with respect to the Kingdom, the last will be first and vice versa.

We are surprised by the signs of vanity: they use the ostentatious cultural garment, the *tallith*, as they walked through the streets. Authorities were accustomed to the required exaggerated greetings and bows on the part of passers-by in the streets, while they sat facing the people in the Temple and occupied the first places at banquets, where they enjoyed the best foods. It is then a list of vanities and prejudices, which are the basis for the mockery and humor in the sayings of Jesus. Before all this, the Gospel message establishes an alternative: equality before God, human fraternity and even more, the primacy of the last.

10) Those who are healthy ... do not need a doctor

Today fundamentalism has arisen once again. In the economic area, only the capitalist trade is valued; in the religious dimension, a line is drawn between the good and the evil, sinners and the saved. A totally different position is that which knows how to value diverse human and religious paths and recognize that God loves everyone.

Among the scandalous actions of Jesus, his custom of eating with public sinners is the one that stands out. To share a meal was a clear sign of communion and mutual acceptance. After calling Levi (Matthew) as a disciple and apostle, Jesus goes to dine at his house where there are many publicans, the official tax collectors so hated by the people. As one would expect, Pharisees and scribes complain about such comportment. Such a scandal!

Jesus loses no time in justifying his action; it seems to me that he is laughing at his critics and ironically qualifies them as “healthy people”. He tells them that “the healthy have no need of a doctor.” Moreover, he affirms his salvific mission: his presence calls sinners, loved by God, to conversion.

Levi held a great reception at his house in honor of Jesus and with them at table was a large gathering of tax collectors and others. The Pharisees and the scribes complained to his disciples and said, “Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?” Jesus said to them in reply, “It is not those who are well who need the doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the virtuous but sinners to repentance” (Lk 5: 29-32; Mt 9: 10-13; Mk 2: 15-17).

Since the publicans managed money in collecting taxes and committed abuses and their leaders obtained money illegally, the population had a poor opinion of them and considered them sinners. This gave a motive to the religious leaders to confront Jesus who dined with them and treated them as friends. It was scandalous that he should enter the home of people who did not follow the Jewish food norms. In this way Jesus and his followers were made impure. For this reason they oppose him indirectly through his disciples. But Jesus finds out and confronts them skillfully.

The Teacher’s saying would be surprising for a listener of that time and for those of us who hear the words today: “The sick and not the healthy need a doctor!” This is evident for anyone who suffers from a physical illness. The language offers a contrast between sickness and health on the day to day level, and between the sinner and the just in the religious dimension.

The curious and attractive element is that the saying is applied to the despised publicans. Their health is given attention. This is the way God acts; he saves those who seem most lost; God prefers the sinners and the despised. On the other hand, and here is the irony of Jesus, those who

consider themselves just will not receive attention. So that the scribes and Pharisees are left looking ridiculous; this amuses the disciples and the other listeners.

11) What must I do?... What does the Law say?

Contemporary society promotes romantic love in which only the sentiments are valued, by using a number of means. It is a way of hiding the day to day discontent of this unjust and alienated civilization. I consider that this limited type of romantic language proliferates because human misery has grown.

There is an immense thirst for true love. With respect to this, we are moved by the fact that Jesus has indicated that the foundation is the love of God and neighbor.

The controversies with those in charge of the Law arrive at their most profound point when Jesus treats of the commandment of Love. The lawyers try to put Jesus to the test (Mt 22: 35; Lk 10:25). They ask a strange and insidious question: “Which is the principal commandment?” (Matthew and Mark) or “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” (Luke). For those who recognized him as Rabbi, Teacher, it almost seemed like an insult to ask such a question. In a very intelligent way Jesus responds with another obvious question : “What does the Law say?” (Lk 10:26). The lawyer responds correctly with a text from Deuteronomy 6. This dialogue has an appealing aspect.

Jesus does not fall into the trap the experts of the Law have laid for him. He does not respond with legalisms nor with the weighty number of laws that had to be fulfilled. For those who were present, there must have been a great deal of joy in the affirmation of the fundamental principle of the Jewish religion and the implicit rejection of the legalism of the Pharisees. Today’s community of believers likewise enjoys this Good News. God is Love and this is also His Law.

There was a lawyer, who to disconcert him, stood up and said to him, “Master what must I do to inherit eternal life?” He said to him, “What is written in the Law? What do you read there? He replied, “You must love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, with all your strength and with all your mind and your neighbor as yourself”. “You have answered right”, said Jesus “Do this and life is yours” (Lk 10:25-28; Mt 22: 34-40; Mk 12: 28-31).

Today the great majority of people are not crushed by religious laws. We are surrounded rather by a permissive atmosphere and by personal convictions. For this reason it is difficult for us to imagine the legalistic context in which Jesus found himself. It was not only the attitude of numerous Scribes and Pharisees who taught the Law but large sectors of the population had assumed this perspective. Even Jesus in his little town in Galilee and in his pious family atmosphere had been impacted by this mentality.

Jesus is questioned a lawyer or expert in the law with his own agenda (in Luke), an insidious Pharisee (in Matthew) a pleasant scribe (in Mark). In the case of Luke whose Gospel dialogues with Christians from a pagan background, the question is formulated in Greek terms concerning “eternal life” and not with regard to the Law which would have been understood by the Jewish Christians.

The responses cite the same norm: Love. Further on, Jesus affirms that the one who so acts will live (Lk 10:28), and is near the Kingdom of God (Mk 12:34). Luke’s narrative continues with the beautiful parable of the good Samaritan which leaves the listener without any doubt. Fidelity to the Law –faith in God- has little to do with legalisms or the self-satisfaction of fulfilling norms. It has to do rather with concrete love, as in the case of the good Samaritan. In this way one will live in and arrive at the Kingdom.

VIII. Humor in the midst of conflict

Aggression and discrimination are often disguised by humor in a number of ways. Races and marginal cultures (Negroes, mestizos, native cultures) are often hit with humiliating and demeaning jokes. Women are caricatured and humiliated by supposedly amusing sayings and gestures. This happens in daily conversation, the mass media and entertainment. The heart of the

matter is social violence in areas of gender, race and culture. Humor becomes a deadly arm that promotes human conflict and subtly legitimates it.

Another link between situations of conflict and humor is that of facing up to injustice with ironic, amusing and critical behavior. One sees this in family problems, in censuring authoritarian governments, in protests made by a center for study or work or in the surrounding society.

For example, in Peru, the fall of the Fujimori government was announced with symbolic and festive acts like throwing black bags at the houses of members of this corrupt regime. The bags with the photos of Fujimori and Montesinos carried the inscription: "Throw the garbage in the garbage."

Let us see how aggression and conflict were faced in the mission of Jesus. We have already seen the confrontation with religious authorities and religion. Now we will look at other factors.

In sociological terms, we can appreciate that the movement begun by Jesus transforms aggression. Here the crucial point is to transcend generalized hatred through radical love. (G Theissen: *Sociology of the Jesus Movement*, Santander, Sal Terrae, 1979, 93ff). To this I would add the transcending of conflict through good humor and indirect criticism that often accompanies it.

Concretely, we will look at four aspects. One is the confrontation of natural human fears. It is humorous to see how Jesus, the Teacher, on seeing his fishermen friends terrorized by a sinking boat, turn to them and ask why they are afraid. Another example is when they confuse him with a ghost walking on the water.

The major conflicts develop around the mission of the Kingdom. Jesus does not provoke them. Rather the social order and human evil are turned against Jesus. He responds with a prophetic attitude and his message filled with truth and love. He also responded with a dose of irony and humor. For example, his speech was full of witty remarks about giving praise, about persecution and fear ("all the hairs of your head are numbered"). He also told his followers to be wise as serpents and simple as doves.

Another area where conflict can be seen is in apocalyptic language. Here we find threats of catastrophes of all kinds, in view of the day of salvation. Since it is a language of exaggeration and contrast, it contains elements of humor. For example, the saying about the coming salvation... but no one knows anything about it (so is it or is it not close?); the curious saying about the majestic Temple of which it is said that nothing shall remain, and the proverb: "there where the body lies, the vultures gather".

Another dimension has to do with the violence that kills. This is appalling but the horror can be reduced through playfulness and a sense of humor. Here the instance that stands out is the remark of Jesus with regard to building monuments to the prophets one's forefathers murdered. The collection of these commentaries does not trivialize conflict. Although conflict can destroy, it can also be transformed. One way of doing so is through good humor.

A- The helplessness of human nature

1) *The waves are covering the ship... ¿Why are you afraid?*

The mass media attack us constantly with many stories of terror which turn our stomachs and cause us to avoid them. It is a secular mode of elaborating fascinating images that are a substitute for the religious experience of the transcendent.

A bible story can seem like a horror story. Everything is immense and terrible: the waves are so big that the water sinks the fragile boat and the disciples are very afraid. They wake Jesus and accost him with the harsh phrase: "Don't you care that we are on the verge of sinking?" On his part, Jesus responds with sharp words of his own: "Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?" It is a dialogue full of recriminations. Jesus admonishes the waters of the lake: "Quiet now!" and there came a great calm. It is like an act of exorcism; from terror to absolute tranquility.

In this incident, the words of Jesus surprise us. When there was a great deal of reason for fear, Jesus asks why they are afraid. The question doesn't fit! It is also amusing to see him shout at the water which then grows quiet.

With the coming of evening that same day, he said to them, "Let us cross over to the other side. And leaving the crowd behind, they took him just as he was, in the boat; and there were other boats with him. Then it began to blow a gale and the waves were breaking into the boat so that it was almost swamped. But he was in the stern, his head on a cushion, asleep. They woke him and said to him, "Master do you not care? We are going down!" And he woke up and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Quiet now! Be calm!" And the wind dropped and all was calm again. Then he said to them, "Why are you so frightened? How is it that you have no faith?" They were filled with awe and said to one another, "Who can this be? Even the wind and the sea obey him" (Mk 4: 35-41; Mt 8: 23-27; Lk 8: 22-25).

As we all know, this happens at the Lake of Galilee, so extensive that it was called a sea. A number of curious things occur before the miraculous action: the giant waves and the water that enters and is about to sink the boat; Jesus sleeps although water is dousing everyone; he rests as though the boat were not moving. The disciples are terrified and the Master does nothing! The disciples speak to him roughly: "Do you not care that we are sinking". After the miracle, the friends of the Lord continue to feel fear; they do not understand who it is who has acted to solve their problems. Everything is appalling.

The narrative of Mark is the basis for both Matthew and Luke. Matthew puts the plea: "Save us!" into the mouths of the disciples (Mt 8:25), instead of the criticism: "Master, don't you care..." (Mk 4:38). At the same time the words of Jesus seem harsh. Instead of compassion for his terrorized friends, he questions them unsympathetically. They have no faith!

In this story, a miracle before the powers of nature, there are aspects similar to the exorcisms. Jesus silences the malignant forces in the winds and the waters. There are also events in the Old Testament which support these acts. On the other hand, Matthew and Luke are both derived from Mark, making it difficult to affirm their historicity.

2) It is a ghost... It is I!

Despite all the scientific progress, humanity continues to have to confront natural calamities and the adverse forces of nature. Those who work the earth and sail the seas prove this to us. In large cities, one is less aware of these problems except when earthquakes and floods endanger us.

The Lake of Galilee is relatively small but has strong winds and storms. On one occasion, the companions of Jesus find themselves hardly able to row against a strong wind. Jesus, who stayed on land to pray, begins to walk toward them on the water. In the midst of the drama there are three humorous elements. The disciples are frightened and cry out, they think it is a ghost walking on the water. The Teacher tries to pass them by. Moreover, he talks to them and tells them not to be afraid. There was plenty of reason for their fear, a ghost at dawn, walking on the water, anyone would be frightened out of their wits! This miracle has the character of a manifestation or an epiphany: the Lord says: "It is I" and this gives them courage. The narrative could be influenced by the apparitions that would come after the resurrection, or perhaps it was elaborated by the primitive Church.

Directly after this he made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to Bethsaida, while he himself sent the crowd away. After saying goodbye to them he went off into the hills to pray. When evening came the boat was far out into the lake, and he was alone on the land. He could see that they were worn out with rowing for the wind was against them; and about the fourth watch of the night he came towards them, walking on the lake. He was

going to pass them by but when they saw him walking on the lake they thought it was a ghost and cried out, for they had all seen him and were terrified. But he at once spoke to them and said, "Courage, it is I! Do not be afraid." Then he got into the boat with them and the wind dropped. They were utterly and completely dumbfounded, because they had not seen what the miracle of the loaves meant; their minds were closed (Mk 6:45-52; Mt 14: 22-27; Jn 6: 16-21).

What is most important in this narrative is that Jesus manifests his saving nature with respect to the elements of nature, walking on the waters and calming the winds that kept those rowing the boat from advancing. It is a dramatic story that follows the multiplication of the bread and fish. The fourth vigil of the night occurs between 3 and 6 in the morning and had they been on the lake since sunset, they had been rowing for some time. We note that everything is centered in the drama and in the epiphany and the miracle is not explained. There is only the comment: "he calmed the wind". What is important then is not what happens in nature but the relation between Jesus and his disciples.

Each version ends with something particular to the evangelist. Mark states that the disciples did not understand the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves, that is to say the messianic dimension. Matthew includes the incident of Peter trying to walk on the waters and his later statement affirming Jesus as the Son of God. For John, "immediately the boat reached the shore where they were heading".

B- Conflict in the mission

1) If everyone praises you, be cautious! This is how they treated the false prophets

Human communication includes many deceptions and flaws along with its marvels. Frequently it is more interested in prestige, the accumulation of money, besting one's neighbor and other traps. The contrast is authentic and truthful communication.

Those who have great responsibilities are often praised in order to obtain favors. In the face of this, one is uncomfortable. The list of *Happy are they* followed by the *not so happy* (Luke 20: 20-26) includes an affirmation about praise. Jesus warns that when they applaud us something occurs that is similar to what happened with the false prophets.

An affirmation with contrasting meanings sounds humorous. On the one hand all applaud (you are doing well!) but on the other hand it is about praise for those who were worth nothing, as in the case of the false prophets (you are badly off!).

Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for that is how their fathers treated the false prophets (Lk 6: 26).

The sad or unhappy affirmations from Luke are directed against the rich, those who ate well, who laughed and were praised. In the first three cases there is retribution, for example the satisfied will feel hunger. With respect to the praised, they are neither threatened nor promised anything. Rather they are reminded that their ancestors treated the false prophets in this way.

The entire message has a prophetic seal. It carries with it a denouncement of false prophets. This occurred in the long history of Israel and, according to the text from Luke, it will also occur in the Christian era. This requires discernment. The one who is the object of much praise ("when all speak well of you") may be a deceiver, a false prophet.

The heading of the text mentions the disciples (Lk 6:20), while Matthew mentions the multitude and the disciples as the receivers of the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5:1). But the second part of the text in Luke does not seem to be directed to the followers (the majority were poor and persecuted) but to another group of people. It reveals the misery of the wealthy, censures those who

appear totally happy and shows that the overly praised are false. These affirmations must have brought many smiles to the faces of listeners.

2) *I send you like sheep... in the midst of wolves; be wise as serpents... and guileless as doves*

In Latin America, centuries lived under the aegis of an authoritarian religion have favored the development of a comfortable mediocrity. The mission has been carried out by the sectors of power. On the other hand we have had holy people and prophetic communities that have suffered persecution and marginalization. The mission of the first apostles and of the Christian communities was carried out in the midst of conflict. They were small minorities of believers in the midst of a hostile world. There was a great deal of courage and martyrdom.

In these circumstances, the missionary sending is neither gloomy nor alarmist. On the contrary, it includes sayings that both animate and encourage those who have a difficult mission. The collection of proverbs with their comparisons with animals (Matthew) have three humorous contrasts: sheep in the midst of wolves (you are good but danger surrounds you); prudent as serpents and, at the same time, guileless as doves. In other words: be very astute and at the same time, totally confident!

I am sending you like sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore, be prudent as serpents, and guileless as doves (Mt 10:16; Lk 10:3).

Matthew's very rich language has three proverbs; Luke has only the first with respect to sheep and wolves. Many cultures (including biblical literature) elaborate proverbs and fables with animals. This often says a great deal about the human condition in a symbolic way. Matthew's text has surprising imagery. There are pairs of contrasting realities: sheep-wolves, serpents-doves. Moreover, the persons sent on mission are compared with very different animals. The one sent must be a sheep, a serpent and a dove; the combination is peculiar. The bottom line is that the Christian mission develops in the midst of many tests and conflicts. It is enough to alarm us. But the Lord does the sending with words that strengthen and help one walk with prudence, and evangelical courage.

3) *Do not fear those who kill the body... the hairs of your head are all numbered*

In these areas violence, both structural and sporadic has eliminated many people. In the perspective of the believer, we have had many martyrs. Many of their testimonies indicate that they had no fear of death. Their courage animates us.

The first people who followed Jesus were like him, victims of attack and persecution. The Lord warned them and assured them that he would vindicate them and save them (Lk 12:6 "No one is forgotten before God") in this theme, there are two humorous elements. In the first saying about those who kill... but cannot do any more (one might respond that they have done enough evil already!), "nothing more" implies that the murderers are not omnipotent: one can even laugh at them. With regard to God's fidelity to the victims, the saying concerning the hairs of the head being counted is humorous. It is impossible to count the hairs and in this figurative way Jesus shows that God's care is absolute.

I tell you my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. But I will show you whom you should fear: fear him who after the killing of the body has power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you fear him. Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. Indeed the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows (Lk12:4-7; Mt10:28-31).

It is the context of persecution and murder that causes terror and weeping. In the face of this, Jesus and the Church of his followers were categorical: trust in God who saves those who suffer unjustly. They were not cowards. They were not promised they would be rescued from pain but from definitive elimination. This eschatological teaching uses an attractive comparison. The disciples are compared to little birds that are sold at a low price in the market but despite their apparent insignificance, God does not forget them. The same occurs with the believing victims of persecution, because even the hairs of their heads are counted. In this way the message passes from the care of creation (little birds) to the care of people; from the salvation of nature to the salvation of humanity.

God is more powerful than human evil. This saying has an amusing element: the hairs counted. In a situation of conflict it is healthy to be firm in one's faith and to keep one's sense of humor. Matthew's text uses the Greek terms for "body and soul" (10:28), which are not used by Luke who directs his narrative to the Hellenist sector. The Jewish belief in Gehenna is also noted.

4) When you are detained... do not worry

The secularized world makes a clear division between the powers: representatives of civil society, from the military, the judicial system, the religious, the business sector, etc. While exercising their legitimate authority, they all too often harm the population. In biblical times, these powers overlapped, for example: the religious authority was likewise judicial and political. Both Jesus and his followers suffered from this situation.

With respect to this, there is a surprising recommendation. When you are arrested, imprisoned, subjected to judgment, whipped... don't worry! Anyone would begin to calculate how to assure his survival; think about who among one's powerful friends might help; about what to say in order to avoid punishment and imprisonment. Well, you are told that you must be completely tranquil, certain that the Spirit of God will take care of it all. It is a relief; one can breathe freely and even smile and await joyfully any threat or violence.

When you are brought before synagogues, rulers and authorities, do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say, for the Holy spirit will teach you at that time what you should say (Lk 12:11-12; Mt 10: 17-20; Mk 13: 9-11).

These texts reflect the happenings in the Church after the resurrection of Jesus, when believers were taken to synagogues and Sanhedrins (by the Jews) and before Roman governors and kings subordinate to them (gentiles) (Mt 10:17-18; Mk 12:9) and were whipped with 39 lashings as happened to Paul on five occasions (2Cor 11:24). These were times of great conflict.

C- Apocalyptic crisis

1) He is near... but no one knows, neither the angels nor the Son

The human being vibrates more with his illusions than with his reality. This fact is taken advantage of by the million-dollar gambling industry. Many pass their days dreaming of winning lotteries and other fantasies.

None of this existed in the time of Jesus. But there were apocalyptic images. Salvation would come after a cosmic and historic catastrophe. This implied an intense desire for the "day of the Lord". They were profound illusions.

After the short parable of the fig tree, comes the announcement that salvation is near. The kingdom is coming! (Luke); the Son of Man is coming! (Mark, Matthew). It is coming with all the certainty that the signs give: the leaves that bloom on the fig tree and announce summer. The

contrast with the fig tree is amusing; it is also humorous to say that something is near but that no one knows.

Certainly the anxiously awaited salvation is coming, but no one knows the day or the hour. It appears to be a contradiction. The certainty is joined together with uncertainty. For this reason, one must be vigilant and prepared for the great “Day of the Lord”.

Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that it is near, right at the door... No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son but only the Father (Mk13:28-32; Mt24:32-36; Lk21: 29-33).

In Jesus’ scenario, the fig tree, in contrast with others like the olive, loses its leaves each year. These bloom again, green and beautiful in spring, announcing the coming of summer. In this sense, it is a sign of salvation and is used in the Gospels to speak of the imminent salvific day of the Lord. Contrasts of this type were very pleasing to those who listened to Jesus.

Luke tells us that the Kingdom of God is coming (21:31). Mark (13:26,29) and Matthew (24: 30,33) refer to the coming of the Son of Man, typical of apocalyptic literature. Without doubt the day of Salvation is near (“at the door!”). Nonetheless, no one knows the details- neither the day nor the hour. Neither the angels know this nor does the Son. The language is curious. It might be supposed that the Son of God would know. No, only the Father knows.

2) Friends and family will denounce them... but they will not lose even a hair of their heads

The great wars are both horrible and stupid but to my way of thinking, betrayal at an intimate level is far worse. It is almost impossible to understand how those who have enjoyed close bonds with others can come to be irreconcilable enemies.

In the case of apocalyptic conflicts there were heart-rending divisions within friendships and families. Fathers denounced their children, and their sons killed fathers and mothers. They are facts that turn the stomach and cause immense consternation and sadness.

In the midst of this terrible scene of hatred and murder, the Good News comes into flower. Thanks be to God, those who persevere shall be saved. A humorous saying is added to this: “Not even a hair of your head shall perish”. There will be killing, but you will not lose a hair!

You will be betrayed by parents, brothers, relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death. All men will hate you because of me. But not a hair of your head will perish. By standing firm you will save yourselves (Lk 21:16-19; Mk 13:12-13).

These are not isolated calamities. The whole universe and all human beings will be affected by the upheaval and transformed. The Son of Man will arrive and a new epoch of well-being will begin. Such apocalyptic predictions terrorized people. The intention was good: it was a call to conversion and preparation for salvation. But the images terrorize. The most serious, in my judgment, is that those who are most bound by ties of love, mothers, fathers, children denounce and kill one another.

The texts of Luke and Mark include hatred “for the sake of my name”, persecution because of their discipleship; both texts also speak of perseverance which signifies salvation. Only Luke includes the amusing expression about the hair of the head (see other similar expressions in Mt 5:36; Lk 12:7; Mt 10: 30).

On the other hand, Mark’s version is more crude in relating that parents and children will kill each other. In this respect, the apocalyptic literature makes very clear the conflictive elements that salvation brings. Too often the believer’s situation is shown in a cloying, superficial light. These texts and many more do not allow for an ingenuous attitude among the followers of Christ.

3) Do you see these grand buildings? There will not remain a stone upon a stone

The large cities and metropolitan areas of our continent have majestic mega-constructions, while at the same time, the majority live in miserable shacks. These metropolitan areas are magnificent and miserable at the same time.

Let us take the case of Jerusalem, with its important Temple. It had been rebuilt after the exile and before the birth of Jesus. During his life it was under construction by King Herod the Great who had walls constructed with gigantic stones.

On one occasion, the disciples were left open-mouthed before these enormous edifices. The response of Jesus is a prophetic announcement with a spark of humor. He says: "Do you see them?" Well, the time will come when not one stone will be left on another! He first reaffirms the greatness of the Temple and then immediately predicts that it will all be destroyed. To go from one extreme to the other causes surprise and perhaps laughter. Moreover, Jesus uses a very exaggerated expression: not a stone will remain upon a stone.

As he was leaving the Temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Look Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!" "Do you see all these great buildings?" replied Jesus. "Not one stone here will remain on another; every one will be thrown down (Mk13:1-2; Mt24: 1-2; Lk21:5-6).

The first disciples came from the rural zone of Galilee; with reason these provincials admired the immense constructions in the city of Jerusalem. The Temple was its greatest expression. King Herod the Great began to construct the Temple 20 years before the birth of Jesus and finished it some years before the Roman Empire destroyed it in 70 AD. The gigantic stones, the adornment and offerings (Luke21:5) in the sacred precincts were impressive. The dialogue is amusing. One (Mk 13:1) of the disciples (Mt 24:1) points out to Jesus the constructions. One would suppose that Jesus already knew them. Jesus asks: "Do you see all this?" Evidently they did since they were pointing them out to the Teacher. This curious question is followed immediately by the warning that the majestic Temple will be totally destroyed, as it was in the year 70. Our attention is also caught by the expression "Stone upon a stone". It is symbolic, exaggerated language which signifies total destruction.

4) Where, Lord?... Where there is a dead body there the vultures will gather

The scientific attitude predominates today, however, paradoxically it is accompanied by many peculiar ideas and fantasies. There are horoscopes, esoteric practices, occult sciences and other beliefs that have no real basis in reality. These are due in part to the human tendency to prophecy and plan for the future. Likewise, in traditional societies, such as first century Palestine, there was much prophecy and magic. These point to moments and places of extraordinary events, phenomena strengthened by the apocalyptic atmosphere.

In this apocalyptic ambient the contemporaries of Jesus asked about when and where the manifestation of the Son of Man would occur. We have the narrative in which Jesus is asked "Where?" and he responds with a strange refrain: "Where there is a dead body the vultures will gather"(Mt 24:28). It is an outrageous dialogue. The response could have been gentle and reasonable. But it wasn't. Rather it was enigmatic and since it treated of a serious matter, it is somewhat amusing.

They said to him: "Where, lord?"- Jesus responded: "Where there is a dead body the vultures will gather" (Lk 17:37; Mt 24:26-28).

This saying in the versions of both Luke and Matthew, form part of the apocalyptic narratives. Both the Pharisees (Lk 17:20) and the disciples (Lk 17:22) converse with the Teacher about the arrival of the Son of Man. They ask about *when* and *where*. Luke's text begins with *when* (17:20) and arrives at *where* (17:36). The principal figure is the Son of Man, a figure announced from the time of Daniel in his messianic, apocalyptic prophecy (Dn7:13ff). Matthew's text offers a frightening image: "For as the lightening comes from the east and flashes to the west so will be the coming of the Son of Man" (24:27). Luke tells us that the Son of Man "will be like the lightening which flashes and lights up the sky from one end to the other" (17:24).

Then we have the proverb. Luke mentions a body, Matthew speaks more figuratively of a corpse. Here the vultures will gather. It is a scene that inspires terror. A major part of the Apocalypse is dedicated to the announcement of calamities. But this may also be understood as a very clear manifestation, just as it is clear that a body exists when we see vultures gather to feed upon it. In the same way, in the coming and arrival of the Son of Man, there will be a clear expression of his presence.

D- Violent death

1) You make monuments for the prophets which your ancestors murdered

Honors that are given to the deceased leaders of a people are often empty and hypocritical. Those that praise them are at times from the very same social sector that opposed them, even to being responsible for their deaths. This has happened, for example in Central America, in the case of the heroes and martyrs, treated shoddily during their lives, but praised after death. Such aberrations should be denounced. The Gospel message motivates this. The criticism is directed against those who kill the prophet Jesus and eliminate his followers. During the centuries included in the Old Testament, prophets were seldom killed. The major problem occurs in the New Testament.

It is an ironic criticism directed against the descendents of the murderers who wash their hands by building tombs and adorning monuments in honor of God's messengers, murdered by their ancestors. Those who listened to the criticism understood the irony and enjoyed it.

Woe to you teachers of the Law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You build tombs for the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous. And you say, "If we had lived in the days of our forefathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets". So you testify against yourselves that you are the descendents of those who murdered the prophets (Mt 23:29-32; Lk 11:47-48).

Irony is a form of humor. This biblical passage makes an ironic criticism of those who construct tombs and adorn monuments and are themselves the descendents of the murderers. Matthew's text is the last of seven maledictions against the teachers of the Law and the Pharisees. The language is peculiar, the argument forced and seems similar to that of the rabbis.

There are two criticisms. The first is for having tombs and giving honors to God's messengers in whose deaths they are, to some extent, involved as descendents of the murderers. This is a hypocritical mode of action. The second criticism which contains rabbinical language, is directed against their insistence on their innocence when they are actually giving testimony against themselves. It is an exaggerated argument.

Luke's version is more concise but he likewise accuses them of being involved in the murder of the prophets by their ancestors: "They killed them and you build their tombs" (Lk 11:48). Here again we find the humor of irony.

2) *You stone those sent to you by God... I have longed to gather you together as a hen gathers her chicks... but you were not willing*

Some contrast violence and peace. They are certainly different. In my experience and vision there is greater distance between violence and tenderness. The first destroys, the second implies communion and liberty.

Moreover, tenderness is the best way of disarming the violent. This is shown in the struggle against dictators and when protesting youth put flowers in the muzzles of the soldiers' guns.

In the biblical scene we are considering, I see both violence and tenderness. First Jesus complains against the chosen people, represented in the holy city, who killed and stoned the prophets. Then he expresses his great love, using the beautiful comparison with the hen uniting her chicks under her wings. Such tenderness makes us rejoice and smile in thanksgiving for God's goodness.

Jerusalem, Jerusalem! You who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often have I longed to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! (Lk 13:32; Mt 23:37).

Jerusalem is the sacred city of the Jewish people. The criticism leveled at the city is applicable to the people themselves. In its history there were cases of stoning and the murder of prophets: for example, Zechariah in the days of King Joas (2Chronicles 24:21). Hebrews 11:37 also notes that they stoned and tortured prophets and others but there were few cases. The text reflects rather the persecution against the prophet, Jesus and the first Christian communities.

With respect to the symbolic use of the hen and its chicks, it is attractive to compare the loving presence of God with a mother bird's protective care of her chicks. It is a way of speaking of the feminine aspect of God.

After these sayings, Luke and Matthew include expressions of a messianic, eschatological character (Lk 13:35; Mt 23:38-39). The Son of Man will come, salvation will come. Luke's version points particularly to a suffering Church that awaits the coming of the Lord. Matthew uses it as the starting point for a long eschatological discourse (24:1- 25:46).

IX. A sense of humor in the face of death/life

Throughout human history and in its diverse cultures, death has been experienced and understood in very different ways. This biological, spiritual, social event has in fact a number of meanings.

Religious expressions accompany the process of death. The Judeo-Christian tradition has elaborated a variety of interpretations.

We have then an experience and a structure of great complexity with many dimensions. One factor not taken into account by many analysts of the human condition is the comic and festive dimension of death. This is very evident in some symbolic systems, in particular in the cultures of poorer nations. These simpler, poorer styles of living know how to combine the dramatic with the comic, sadness with a sense of humor.

The theme of death appears in many moments of the ministry of Jesus. It appears explicitly as violent death, suffered by Jesus himself and anticipated by the planned persecution of his adversaries. It is also present symbolically in the rigors of the discipleship and the mission and in the way that Jesus manifests the presence of God by raising the dead.

In the following paragraphs I will bring out some humorous threads in the fabric of death/life. The surprising and attractive threads are accompanied by the objectives and the content of each evangelical narrative. These do not trivialize death nor do they elaborate ironic phrases about it. Rather they speak of the saving mission that carries with it pain and death and the new Pasch of liberation. Within this framework there are humorous threads.

My focus is that of death/life. This arises from what we have assimilated: the Christological sense of death as the seed of life. It also arises from what the popular religions of Latin America teach me, in particular the Aymara and Quechua modes of confronting death: in them *to die* is to begin a new existence, in an anthropological, cosmic and spiritual sense. Death then cannot be disentangled from life and is not its negation. Because of this fact we use the terminology death/life.

The chapter has two sections. The first contains the contrast and complementarity between death and life in terms of the conditions of discipleship and the mission of the kingdom of God. The second section offers texts with regard to the path followed by Jesus in his death and resurrection. This is the principal mystery of our salvation. It cannot be reduced to one or the other aspect. It cannot be treated as a merely human, amusing fact. But it is fitting to consider the element of joy, so often hidden and repressed by the sacrificial, somber presentations dominant in Christianity. In the forms used by simple people to commemorate death, there is both deep pain and uncertainty along with great hope and joy.

A- From death to life

1) The one who wishes to gain his life will lose it... he who loses his life will find it

The contemporary world gives priority not to the person nor to the Christian faith but to success, whatever the cost, whoever must be conquered to accomplish it. Material triumph is what counts, especially making money, achieving social success and excelling over the rest. Whoever does not succeed in this way is seen as a failure, worthy of mockery and scorn. In these circumstances we are questioned by the message of Jesus who calls us to follow him, to carry the cross and lose our lives. It is a radical call, the radical character of love that gives its life for others.

With respect to this, there is a fascinating formula. Its meaning, concise and to the point: the one who wins loses and vice versa. The text is: "Whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but the one who loses it for my sake and for the Gospel, will save himself." This is the paradox of following Jesus with his cross and his salvation, expressed in an extraordinary form.

Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said to them, "If anyone would come after me he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?" (Mk 8:34-37; Lk 9:23-25; Mt 16: 24-26).

The message has a sequence: confession of faith in Christ, announcement of the passion and the requirements of the discipleship. With regard to the requirements, they are directed to those who were disciples (Matthew), to the people and to the disciples (Mark), and to all (Luke). These demonstrate different accents.

One of the various expressions that shock today's listener is that of "denying oneself". It has nothing to do with depriving oneself of one thing or another but of something much more radical: assuming the Paschal mystery. In this era of self-esteem, it is fitting to vindicate the evangelical call to live for Jesus, for one's neighbor and not for oneself.

With respect to the process of losing oneself/saving oneself, the evangelists offer a number of clues: for Jesus and for the Gospel (Mark, which presupposes the evangelizing mission of the early Church), for Jesus (Matthew and Luke). It is not then a case of suffering and dying for its own sake. Everything is directed to the Lord.

The following of Jesus brings with it the cross. This was a mode of capital execution in the Roman Empire. It does not have to do then with a pious attitude toward carrying one's problems. The issue is serious, a life and death situation that has socio-political ramifications.

My focus is on the astonishing saying about losing/gaining. I interpret it with the help of the following phrase which is an excellent, sweeping question: What good is it to gain the whole world and ruin one's life? This then does not have a personal aspect only. There is the question of "gaining the world". For this reason the following translation fits: the one who gains loses, the one who loses gains. This has its own measure of humor.

2) Cut off your foot... it is better to enter life crippled

We are surrounded by a culture that gives great value to immediate pleasure and self-satisfaction, for this reason it is classified as hedonistic and narcissistic. However, within it many people make great sacrifices to study and work. There exists then a tension between instantaneous happiness and efforts to achieve what one desires over the long or short term.

For today's mentality, self-discipline and the recognition of personal sin causes great difficulty. It must have been just as strange for those who listened to the message of Jesus to hear his words about cutting off one's hand or foot or plucking out one's eye. This has nothing to do with an invitation to self-mutilation. It is a strong warning. If anything makes you sin (your foot or anything else) you must do something severe and harsh in order to enter the new Life. It is a surprisingly, exaggerated statement that moves one to conversion and puts Life (Mk 9:43, 45) and the Kingdom (Mk 9:47) at the top of the priority list. This is the intention of this passage which also has its comic dimension: without a foot one would limp badly. But I must insist that the saying is a call to conversion and fidelity, not a joke. However, the figure of a limping gait is a humorous way of getting something very serious across to one's listeners.

If your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell (Mk 9:44; Mt 18:8).

This message suggests the alternative of going into Life or into fire. This last alternative is said in a variety of ways. Mk 9:43, 45, 47 speak of *gehenna* which was a ravine in the southern part of the city of Jerusalem where a constant fire burned the refuse of the city. For this reason it was a good image for punishment by fire. Mt 18:8 speaks about "the eternal fire", while Mk 9:44 mentions the "fire that is not quenched". The counterpart or contrast is Life or the Kingdom of God, which constitutes the goal of this call to conversion from sin. Mt 18:8 (hand or foot) has united the two sayings of Mk 9:43,45. This passage speaks of temptations and sins in the experience of believers, in a concrete and symbolic fashion. No one is attracted to a place of fire but entering into a new life is very attractive. It is not a rational message but rather emotional and practical. It calls the believer to act with firmness and in a radical way.

3) If you sin with your eye, pluck it out... it is better to enter the kingdom with only one eye

Our eyesight is highly valued. We also admire the blind who develop fantastic abilities, sensitivity and contact with reality; a capacity greater at times, than many who have the gift of sight. It is a gift we sometimes rediscover only when we are forced to use glasses, as in my case.

At times the eyes are used for evil purposes and to sin. In a consumer society that offers so many useful and useless things, one can also sin with one's eyes by letting oneself become fascinated by publicity and its idols.

But let us listen to the message of Jesus. Besides speaking of the hand and foot, he also warned against sinning with the eyes. The expression is very harsh: gouge out your eye and throw it away (Mt 18:9). Then there comes another expression just as strong: better to enter with only one eye into Life than go to *gehenna* where the worm does not die and the fire is not quenched! (Mk 9:48) A dreadful scene! It is not said to terrify but to call to conversion.

Once again, it is about calling the listeners to conversion, a change of life. This is the important thing. At the same time, since it is an exaggerated expression (gouge out the eye and throw it away!) it causes surprise and brings a smile to the lips.

And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched (Mk 9:47-48; Mt 18:9).

The background is the strong counter-position between the Kingdom of God and *gehenna* which is a symbol for hell. Anyone would want to go to the first and not the second. But one obstacle to this is that the eyes commit sin. In the face of this fact, one might suggest not falling into such an error or evil. Or one might suggest a subjective conversion. The biblical text does not do this. It presents rather a few rough images: violently plucking out an eye from the head and being thrown like trash into the fire. It is a chilling thought but since it is an exaggeration, it also causes laughter.

Mark's version speaks of the Kingdom while Matthew uses the expression Life. Then, where he explains the horror of Gehenna, Mark cites an eschatological text from Isaias 66:24: "They will look upon the dead bodies of those who rebelled against me; their worm will not die, nor will their fire be quenched and they will be loathsome to all mankind". This is similar to a terror movie. Nothing here is pleasant, the imagery is terrible. However, language so completely out of the ordinary not only makes us uncomfortable, it can also strike us as comical and entertaining.

4) Let me bury my father... No! Let the dead bury the dead

In our day-to-day dealings with one another, there are attitudes that are more provocative than others. For example, the tearful cries of a child, or commenting about the terrible errors of someone present. These are motives that cause people to react strongly and passionately. The provocation may be positive when it helps people to grow and better themselves.

One statement of Jesus that has provocative features is the one he made when a disciple expressed a desire to go and bury his father. He does not console him nor does he converse with him about what happened. He does not offer a gesture of solidarity to help him triumph over this dramatic situation. The only element is a remark about the need to be a disciple and announce the Kingdom (Lk 9:59, 60). In passing he says something unacceptable to the son of the deceased: "Let the dead bury the dead!" Is Jesus insensitive, discourteous, or what?

At bottom, the theme is the total, unconditional following of Jesus. The family and the past life of the disciple have no value; the only thing that matters is the call and the eschatological mission. To make this clear, Jesus speaks in an unacceptable manner (the son should not bury his

father). The family members of the disciple, on hearing such a dialogue, would have been scandalized by the words of Jesus; while those who assumed these eschatological demands would have found this conversation shocking and somewhat amusing.

He said to another man, "Follow me." But the man replied, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God" (Lk 9:59-60; Mt 8:21-22).

The Jewish culture had great respect for parents and at death they were buried with great devotion. Jesus does not speak against this custom. Rather he uses a play on words: let the dead bury the dead; it sounds absurd and at the same time causes laughter. It is not possible that a corpse should get up and prepare the tomb for another corpse. In fact it is not an impossibility if one does not take it literally.

It is in fact a manner of teaching the truth of discipleship and the mission (Mt 8:22 speaks only of the following; Lk 9: 59-60 mentions this and likewise the mission of the Kingdom). In substance, this is the theme and not the behavior toward the dead. Nonetheless, for the listener, this is a sort of "black humor"; it seems to laugh at something very sacred, the obligation to assure that one's parents rest in peace.

5) He is not the God of the dead... but of the living

The following is a discussion between the Sadducees and Jesus. This brings to mind much of the religious controversy that exists in our society today. These are disputes that have intensified with the presence of fundamentalist groups in the evangelical and Catholic sectors. Their fanaticism and proselytizing puts obstacles in the way of any dialogue or collaboration between believers. The greatest difficulty is that the different ways of visualizing God are mutually incompatible.

The Sadducees were a very powerful socio-religious group in their exercise of priesthood in the Temple. They were rich aristocrats, opposed to the laity, among them the major part of the Pharisees with their oral interpretation of the Law. The religious vision of the Sadducees did not include belief in angels, spirits or the resurrection. They were strong, harsh critics of the Teacher from Galilee, prophet from a marginal province and not a priest. For them Jesus was a nobody. In this debate, Jesus bases his words on what God said to Moses: "I am the God of the patriarchs" (considered as living persons); consequently God is the God of the living. He says this to show the lack of logic between the position of the Sadducees and God's words to Moses, indisputable leader of the Israelite people. This incongruity would sound amusing to the lay listeners who were mistreated by the priestly caste. Jesus also criticizes the Sadducees, telling them frankly that they are wrong. Such a remark made by a non-priest to the wealthy clerics of the Temple, produced amazement and amusement in his listeners.

Jesus said to them, "Now, about the dead rising- have you not read in the book of Moses. In the account of the bush, how God said to him, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob'? He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. You are badly mistaken (Mk 12:26-27; Mt 22:31-32; Lk 20:37-38).

I would like to highlight the lack of symmetry in the debate. On the one hand, we have the aristocratic Sadducees, members of the priestly caste in the city of Jerusalem. They represent the wealthy landowners and support the government of the Roman Empire in Palestine. On the other hand, we have Jesus who comes from a little town in the outlying province of Galilee; he is not a priest but rather seems to be a subversive.

With respect to this text, we have commented on the central issue of the debate over the case of the woman who was successively the wife of seven brothers (V, C3). Here we will only

consider the final section of the dialogue where Jesus bases his words in the revelation of God to Moses (Ex 3:6). What better argument?

Jesus' words have two aspects: they give testimony to the God of Life or the Living God and also affirm that the great ancestors are alive, which is to say resurrected. He does not dispute the details about how this happens. Rather he speaks to the central issue: the fact that God is the God of the living and that the founders of the Jewish people are alive. Moreover, as is noted in Lk 20:38b, "for Him all (the dead) are alive".

B- Passion and Resurrection

1) Jesus mounts an ass... The Kingdom of David is coming!

People today have many and diverse fantasies with regard to Christian salvation. One attitude trusts in saving the "soul". Another posture is that of those who are concerned with the here and now that is not functioning as it should and must change for the sake of the common good. Another belief is that Christ saves us. Moreover, there are those who are assured that only a few will be saved, those who know the doctrine and fulfill the laws. On the other hand, there is the perspective of integral salvation and liberation.

During the time of Jesus there were also a number of attitudes towards salvation. One pole represented the messianic expectation that emerged from the great powers; another was the eschatological vision that came from the grass roots, the little ones, those mentioned in the Sermon on the Mount and there were many shades of difference between both poles.

One moment filled with meaning was the messianic entrance into Jerusalem, the capital. The narrative tells us nothing about what Jesus thought and felt but we are told what the enthusiastic crowds do and say. They shout with joy "hosanna" and they are happy (Lk19:37). They spread their cloaks and olive branches on the road in homage to him. We can suppose that the authorities saw all this with alarm and suspicion; however, for the disciples and the common people it must have been a messianic experience.

One can notice various contrasts: a rural artisan from Galilee enters the sophisticated ambient of the religious center of Jerusalem and is acclaimed by the people; they say the Kingdom of David has come (Mk11:10), the king (Lk 19:38). Jesus comes dressed like a poor provincial peasant, seated on a donkey! The scene is a humorous one.

They brought the colt to Jesus, they threw their cloaks over it and he sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road while others spread branches they had cut in the fields. Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!" "Hosanna in the highest!" Jesus entered Jerusalem and went to the Temple. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve. (Mk 11:7-11; Mt 21:6-11; Lk 19: 35-38).

We know well that Jerusalem was the center of the social and religious powers; it is to Jerusalem that the humble, prophetic Jesus comes. His entrance in this place has religious aspects: he is acclaimed with Hosanna!, a shout with messianic content which here does not have its original meaning of a plea for help in a difficult situation. There is mention of the kingdom and of the king and branches are spread on the road reminding one of the Jewish feast of Tabernacles.

Titles are used that refer more to a kingdom than acclaim Jesus as king. Mt 21:9 declares: "He who comes in the name of the Lord. Mk 11:10 exalts the kingdom of David that is to come. Attention is on the arrival of the Kingdom, not particularly on Jesus as King. The gestures and words are of a religious character. Mt 21:10 notes that the whole city is moved and asks about

Jesus. And the response of the people was: It is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth... that is to say, a nobody who makes a messianic entrance.

2) The Teacher says... *"I will celebrate in your house"*

Many will sharply separate religiosity from celebration. The first is seen as spiritual, the second profane. This does not happen in the customs of many peoples of Latin America where faith and celebration go hand-in-hand. Such was also the case in the paschal meals in the time of Christ.

The paschal meal was not only a pious ritual of the Jewish people, but also a festive occasion. Like any other thing of this nature, it was a moment for diversion and pleasant conversation among the people at table. In this case the Twelve apostles and probably other invited guests, such as the women who accompanied Jesus. The case of the Last Supper was special; here Jesus celebrated his Pasch, giving a radically new meaning to the Jewish custom. But this does not mean that it was not a festive meal.

The form in which Jesus sends his followers to prepare the ceremony for him and his disciples in a strange home seems rather bold. It had to do with a number of people who would be spending a good deal of time together, eating an entire lamb. In a manner that seems a bit daring, Jesus sends a message: "I am going to celebrate the Pasch with my disciples in your house". The text has no details; it only speaks of the preparation (and the Eucharistic meal). It seems fitting to presuppose that there were festive aspects, in accord with the Jewish custom of the time.

On the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Where do you want us to make preparations for you to eat the Passover? He replied, "Go into the city to a certain man and tell him, 'The Teacher says my appointed time is near. I am going to celebrate the Passover with my disciples at your house.'" So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them and prepared the Passover (Mt 26:17-19; Lk 22:7-13; Mk14: 12-16).

This passage speaks of the preparation for the Last Supper, which has a paschal character and whose context was the immanent death and resurrection of the Lord. The Eucharistic narrative refers to this happening.

In regard to the preparation of the paschal supper, this is left to the disciples (Mk 14:13) which Luke 22:8 specifies as Peter and John, while Matthew speaks about the disciples in general. They speak of preparation and nothing more (Mk 14:12, 15, 16; Mt 26:19). There are no details about the sacrifice of the lamb and the preparation of the food (bitter herbs, etc). In this way the narrative is centered in the event that will be the paschal Supper of the Lord, rather than in the Jewish customs.

All of this has a number of curious elements. The indication of the place is a sign: follow a man who is carrying a jug of water (Mark and Luke). Then they speak to the head of the house; they give him the Teacher's message (which makes us think that it may have been one of the disciples for whom the word would have been meaningful and who, with great pleasure, would loan his home for the feast). One factor that strikes us as amusing is the rather peremptory, authoritative message to the effect that Jesus intended to celebrate the feast in this man's house. It seems a bit overconfident.

3) You come with clubs and swords... Am I leading a rebellion?

Many unjust and humiliating arrests have occurred during these last years. The economic-military dictatorships and organisms of repression have acted fiercely and systematically against youth, migrants, indigenous peoples and blacks. These have been instances of great fear and despair.

From these experiences in our own day, we go back in time to the circumstances of Jesus' arrest. The scene was violent (we see one of the followers of Jesus take a sword and cut off the ear of one of the attackers), although the event also had ambiguous and even ironic instances.

In my opinion, the worst factor was the betrayal of Judas, the way in which he greeted Jesus with a kiss and Jesus who called him friend (Mt 26:50). The worst betrayal is that of a good friend.

In the interior of this horrible drama there is a detail I would like to emphasize. The question that Jesus asks of his unjust attackers is the expression of sharp criticism and irony: "Have you come out to arrest me with clubs and swords as though I were leading a rebellion?" They accused Jesus of violating socio-religious aspects of the Law but there was no motive to consider him a dangerous rebel or a thief. With this ironic question Jesus morally disarms the authorities that are arresting him.

While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve arrived. With him was a large crowd armed with swords and clubs sent from the chief priests and elders of the people. Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: "The one I kiss is the man; arrest him". Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, "Greetings Rabbi!" and he kissed him. Then the men stepped forward seized Jesus and arrested him. Jesus said to them, "Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me? Everyday I sat in the Temple courts teaching and you did not arrest me. But this has all taken place that the writings of the prophets might be fulfilled." Then all the disciples deserted him and fled. (Mt 26: 47-56; Mk 14: 35-50; Lk 22: 47-53; Jn 18: 1-11).

The scene is so violent that all those who accompanied the Teacher abandoned him and fled (running in fear of their lives). In these circumstances, the fact that the disciples abandoned Jesus is as grave as the betrayal of Judas. Their panic was so great that one young disciple who wore only a tunic, left it and escaped naked, a detail given by Mk 14:52.

The violence is accentuated by the behavior of the other disciple who takes out a sword and cuts off the ear of a servant of the high priest who, Luke (22:51) tells us, is healed immediately by Jesus.

I would like to consider the interactions. One is between Judas and Jesus. Judas gives Jesus the traditional greeting of a kiss, using it as a signal to indicate who was to be arrested in the darkness of the garden (John 18:3 adds that part of the crowd were Roman soldiers who carried lanterns and torches). There are two versions of what was said to Judas: "Do what you came for" (Mt 26:50); and the reproach: "Do you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?" (Lk 22:48).

Those in charge of the arrest are the high priests and elders (Matthew, Mark, Luke), to which Mark adds the scribes, Luke, the officers of the Temple guard and John adds a detachment of Roman soldiers. Luke 22:52 notes that the Jewish authorities were there. The remainder of the texts speak of who had been sent by the authorities to detain Jesus and adds that they carried swords and clubs. John includes the fact that it was Simon Peter who cut off the ear and includes the name of the victim: Malchus.

There is no doubt that the situation was violent. In the face of this, Jesus did not use force nor did he permit that his disciples use it. One of his actions is ironic: his question regarding why they have come out to arrest him with swords and clubs when they could have done so any day when he taught in the Temple. Obviously, they had no desire to arrest him publicly in the Temple where he was deeply appreciated by so many. This question and his attitude lead me to think that an excellent way to crush violence is through the non-violence of a sense of humor.

4) "If you are the Christ tell us..."... "If I tell you, you will not believe me"

In today's exercise of the judicial power, the poor and marginated are hassled and confused, given the prejudice of the legal system, the technical language used which is strange to them and the

games between lawyers and judges. In practice, they are mere manipulated “objects” and not real subjects of justice.

Jesus was taken before the socio-religious tribunal called the Sanhedrin. The high Priests presided over 71 members: priests, Sadducees, Pharisees, and scribes. Before so many dignitaries and false witnesses, what can the humble, accused person do?

Jesus’ behavior is dignified, courageous and prophetic. The powerful tribunal indicts him: “Tell us if you are the Messiah!” This is an evident trap. The response of Jesus reveals the disbelief and inhumanity of the unjust judges. He tells them that if he confirms this, they will not believe him and if he asks them questions they will not respond. A just procedure permits the accused equal rights before his accusers. But it does not happen here. There are false witnesses (“Many gave false witness against him”: Mark 14:56). Jesus brings to light the inhumanity of this “justice”.

In face of the trap they set for him, Jesus is skillful and prophetic. He denounces the leaders of the people that accept neither the Messiah nor a just dialogue. They do not respond to questions; they only accuse the innocent. In the face of their arrogance, the Teacher’s behavior is prophetic and has a “tongue in cheek” quality.

At daybreak the council of the elders of the people, both the chief priests and the teachers of the Law, met together and Jesus was led before them. “If you are the Christ, tell us”, they said. Jesus answered, “If I tell you, you will not believe me, and if I asked you, you would not answer. But from now on the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the mighty God.” They all asked, “Are you then the Son of God?” He replied, “You are right in saying I am.” Then they said, “Why do we need any more testimony? We have heard it from his own lips” (Lk 22:66-71; Mk 14:53-64; Mt 26: 57-66; Jn 10: 24-25).

The highest authority was the Supreme Court, the Sanhedrin that decided legal, social, cultural and doctrinal issues. Luke calls it the Council of Elders. There may have been two sessions of this court, one in the evening (Matthew and Luke) and another at daybreak (Lk 22:66; Mk 15:1; Mt 27:1). Luke narrates only one session of the Sanhedrin. Here, as in many other instances, the synoptic texts offer various points of view with regard to the life of Jesus.

I emphasize the behavior of a defenseless provincial carpenter before the Tribunal of more than 50 powerful people. There are moments when he maintains silence (Mt 26:63; Mk 14:61). The Sanhedrin sets a trap for him: if he declares himself the Messiah, they will condemn him for blasphemy. He resists with dignity and does not respond. Rather he questions the members of the Sanhedrin and brings to light their lack of faith and justice: you would not believe me, nor respond to me! Then Jesus skillfully induces them to declare his condition of Son of God. In response, Jesus affirms “I am” (Lk 22:70 and Mk 14:62). Mt 26:64 tells us that Jesus says to the High Priest: “Yes, it is as you say”. With this behavior, Jesus questions an unjust authority. We could say that he resisted and even made fools of them. He did not act out of fear but with freedom.

The narratives of Matthew 26:59-61 and Mark 14:55-59 add the fact that the priests brought in people to give false witness, attesting that Jesus announced that he would destroy the Temple in Jerusalem. It was then the Sanhedrin accused him of blasphemy and declared him worthy of death (Mt 26:65-66; Mk 14: 63-64). It is debated whether or not this tribunal could condemn someone to death. In fact Jesus was brought to Pilate and from there to the crucifixion.

5) Before the accusations... the inspired silence of Jesus

Throughout history, those who manage the affairs of the world exercise a great deal of power, the power of speaking and writing those things that to them seem definitive and final. Subordinate sectors have other powers, their words, gestures and also their silences. This last I have often seen in the native populations, described as hermetic and incommunicative when in reality it has to do with their mode of resisting and exercising power.

On the basis of these experiences, I have begun to appreciate the silences of Jesus, above all before an unjust authority. At times, not speaking says more than many words. It is a prophetic gesture and can manifest inspiration and a sense of humor.

A very significant scene is shown at the palace or fortress in Jerusalem where the procurator, Pilate resided during the paschal festival. During the year he lived in Caesarea. The texts do not give details about the place or the emotions connected with it. It was the area of the representative of the Roman Empire who exercised military, civil and judicial roles. What were the feelings of Jesus in this place? What must the Procurator have felt in the presence of the prophet his wife called "just"(Mt 27:19)? One can imagine very intense feelings.

The texts of Matthew and Mark assure us that Jesus did not respond to the accusations and aggressiveness; he expressed himself through silence. We also have Luke's version where Jesus is categorized as a social agitator who did not pay taxes and wished to be King. Luke does not note the silence of Jesus but includes these accusations. Before all this, not speaking is a gesture of prophetic freedom.

Meanwhile Jesus stood before the governor and the governor asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" "Yes it is as you say", Jesus replied. When he was accused by the chief priests and the elders, he gave no answer. Then Pilate asked him, "Don't you hear how many things they are accusing you of?" But Jesus made no reply, not even to a single charge - to the great amazement of the governor (Mt 27: 11-14; Mk 15: 1-5; Lk 23: 2-7; Jn 18: 28-40).

The scene shows a good deal of asymmetry. In an edifice in the capital, Jerusalem, we have the Roman Procurator, the priests, the elders, the guards and perhaps many others on the one hand, and on the other the solitary, defenseless figure of the Galilean, Jesus.

Some of the first group speak a great deal, the other, alone, is completely silent. Mt 27: 12, 14 and Mk 15: 6 carefully note that the Teacher says nothing. Something similar happens before Herod, Jesus does not answer the questions (Lk 23:9). On the other hand, Pilate is completely disquieted: he does not know what to think or do. (Mt 27:14; Mk 15:6).

The political-religious accusations are very grave: subverting the people (Lk 23: 2,5), failing to pay taxes and passing for a king (Lk 23:2). The biblical commentaries indicate that we do not know with any security how Jesus answered, if he said or did not say that he was King of the Jews, Son of God, and Messiah. What is clear is his dignity and inspiration before his accusers and the religious functionaries who attacked him without mercy or truth. It seems that although his adversaries manage to condemn Jesus, they make fools of themselves in the process.

6) He said to the crucified thief: ... "This day you will be with me in paradise"

In reviewing the history of each nation, we are surprised and anguished by the numbers of people executed in an informal manner, outside the purview of the law. On our continent there are thousands and thousands of "disappeared" along with assaults and daily violence of our cities. On the other hand there are the thousands of people who have been killed by the so-called forces of order, in guerrilla warfare and by the paramilitary. We live in a bloody world.

Each nation and every epoch of history has its forms of killing. At the time of Jesus, the Roman forces used crucifixion. It was to this cruel public form of execution, together with criminals, that the innocent Teacher was condemned.

The dialogue between the criminals is significant. According to Matthew and Mark, both insult the Lord; Luke tells us that only one treated him ironically: save yourself and save us. The other thief rebuked the first and defended Jesus: "Don't you fear God?; this man has done nothing wrong". He then asks Jesus to remember him and Jesus makes the promise, "Today you will be with me in paradise." This dialogue must have alleviated the sufferer. Although the text says

nothing about it, I think that the promise of Jesus must have made the thief smile, perhaps even cry out in joy.

One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!" But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong." Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise" (Lk 23: 39-43; Mt 27: 44; Mk 15: 27, 32b).

It is not certain that this dialogue occurred, since only Luke mentions it. The other narratives (Mt 27: 44; Mk 15: 3) tell us that both thieves insulted Jesus, along with other people who stood watching.

In any case, the good thief vindicated the Lord who had done no wrong, and asks to be remembered by Jesus in his kingdom.

This language shows some familiarity with the theme of the mission of Jesus and responds to an image of his times: paradise. In the Persian tradition it signified a garden. In the Bible this image is used to indicate man's existence before original sin and also the place of the just.

It is surprising that Jesus responds with "today" and "with me". Without doubt, this must have consoled the one suffering this horrible execution. It is also surprising that Jesus dying and hanging there on the cross is concerned for his neighbor and assures him of salvation. He is Lord, a source of hope and joy.

7) After my resurrection... I will go before you into Galilee

Migrations and travels are often a response to emotional factors. Many travel with nostalgia from urban centers back to visit their lands of origin. We travel to gatherings of family members and friends scattered across large areas. We also travel for reasons of work, business and profession. However, here I would like to emphasize emotional and symbolic motivations.

The greater part of Jesus' life was lived in Galilee, a territory of abundant resources, water and fertile land for agriculture. Here he brought together his disciples, exercised his mission and had fewer obstacles than he experienced in Jerusalem. He went to the capital on pilgrimage and on occasions when he carried out his evangelization but it was there that he met the greatest opposition and persecution. For him then, Galilee was far more welcoming and pleasant.

Having faced the passion, having felt overwhelmed and experiencing the betrayal of his intimate collaborators and friends, Jesus now experiences great joy and consolation. In the midst of the debate with Peter, incoherent and treacherous, Jesus announces: "After my resurrection I will go to Galilee." He tells them he will go ahead of his followers. Galilee meant something beautiful and emotionally pleasing.

Galilee permitted a happy reunion filled with well-being, without anguish and suffering, having passed through the drama of the Passion. Galilee is happiness.

When they had sung a hymn they went out to the Mount of Olives. "You will all fall away", Jesus told them, "for it is written: "I will strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered. But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee." Peter declared, "Even if all fall away, I will not." "I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "today, yes tonight, before the rooster crows twice you will deny me three times." But Peter insisted emphatically, "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you." And all the others said the same (Mk 14: 26-29; Mt 26: 30-35).

This saying about Galilee forms part of the great narrative of the Passion. There is no reason for laughter here. Rather we see the stupid human opposition to the Lord, the giving of his life for love, to the last drop of his blood on the cross. The anxiety of Jesus becomes our anxiety and solidarity with the innocent redeemer. The saying about the resurrection has been incorporated within the discussion between Peter and Jesus (Mk 14: and Mt 26; this saying is not in the narratives of Lk 22:31-34 or Jn 13: 36-38).

The reference to Zechariah 13:7 – the pastor and the dispersed sheep- is related to the image of going before his disciples into Galilee (like a shepherd guiding his flock). This is a place of abundant wheat, olives, dates and pomegranates, the place of origin of both Jesus and his apostles, a warm and welcoming place. It is then an appropriate place for the happiness and joy of the resurrection.

8) He first appears to Magdalene... who informs the weeping apostles

A review of the present situation of the woman reveals that many consider among other things, that the woman is emotionally unstable, that she cries a great deal and is incapable of public responsibilities.

These are false prejudices. The woman has her own sensitivity, along with her personal qualities and her defects. Very often it is she who shows great strength and clarity of mind.

Let us take the case of Mary Magdalene, friend and collaborator of the Lord. After the crucifixion and burial of the Lord, those who had been closest to him, the apostles and women disciples, were grief stricken and almost paralyzed. It was to Mary Magdalene that Jesus appeared first, according to Mk 16:9 (Jn 20:11; Mt 28: 1, 9 speak of two women). While the apostles wept, she, filled with energy and faith goes to inform them that she has seen the Risen One But they do not believe her; they do not value the testimony of the woman. They do not value her as an evangelizer.

If one places oneself in this scene, we have on one side the weeping men, paralyzed with fear and on the other, Mary Magdalene enthusiastic and happy for having seen the Lord. Her joy and happiness is contagious. Her faith in the Lord is good news for the apostles (though they do not believe it) and for humanity today, called to believe the testimony of every woman faithful to the Savior.

When Jesus rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had driven seven demons. She went and told those who had been with him and who were mourning and weeping. When they heard that Jesus was alive and that she had seen him, they did not believe it. Afterward Jesus appeared in a different form to two of them while they were walking in the country. These returned and reported it to the rest, but they did not believe them either (Mk 16:9-13; Mt 28: 9-10; Jn 20: 11-18).

Mary Magdalene is the woman who first announces the resurrection. She communicates it to the apostles. This is a fact that is given little value. We only hear about the women who helped Jesus. They did so but they also were evangelizers. From the very beginning they had apostolic responsibility. Among them, Mary Magdalene and Mary, mother of James excelled (Mk 16:1). They received the mandate “Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee...” Mt 28:10; Mk 16: 7.

I pause here in the details of weeping and enjoying. The women weep for the death and absence of Jesus (Jn 20:11, 15) and they too are afraid (Mk 16:8). The men also weep (Mk 16:10); however, the weeping women are emphasized and the weeping men, hidden or denied. The truth is that men then as well as now, often weep and tremble with fear.

On the other hand, joy and laughter are also expressed. The Gospel narrative notes the joy of these women on the way to give the good news of the resurrection to the apostles (Mt 28:8). Nothing is said about laughter. Nonetheless, given the radical change from the cross to the

appearance of Jesus alive, his friends certainly must have jumped for joy and shared their happiness and smiles.

With regard to the text from Mark 16: 9-20, it is considered canonical but at the same time open to debate since it does not exist in important manuscripts and uses a style and vocabulary different from that of Mark. Mt 28: 9-10 and Jn 20: 14-18 have passages in common. Finally, I would like to emphasize the contrast between a group of frightened, weeping men and a few women, filled with energy and joy.

9) To the downcast disciples... their hearts burning within them

Sadness is a form of dehumanization. This is experienced every day in the absence of union in a family, the lack of money and work, the social scorn of the poor, of women, of the half cast, the native and black communities. The people are hit hardest by the sadness of hunger and sickness.

Our hearts are moved when death comes by violence. The circle of friends and followers of Jesus had to carry the burden of that death and the disillusion it brought. This is the case of the disciples of Emmaus: "They crucified him... we thought he would free Israel" (Lk 24: 20-21).

Thanks to their meeting with the Lord and the breaking of bread, these disciples overwhelmed and sad, are revived: "Were not our hearts burning within us?" (24:32). This is a marvelous transformation: from a state of total affliction they are made completely happy. This is how Jesus Risen worked in those days and will for us today as well.

Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened...Jesus said to them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?" They stood still, their faces downcast... "About Jesus of Nazareth who was a prophet powerful in word and deed before God and all the people...How the chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death and they crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel"... And Jesus explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus acted as if he were going further. But they urged him strongly, "Stay with us for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over". So he went in to stay with them. When he was at table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?" (Lk 24: 13- 35; Mk 16: 12).

In this passage, the central issue is the fact of recognizing the Savior in the breaking of the bread: here their eyes are opened (24:31) and they give testimony to the apostles (24:35). It is a fact that will be elaborated in the Eucharistic experience. The terms used in the passage do not imply simply eating together but rather the reading of the Scriptures and the celebration of the breaking of the bread as was the custom of the first Christians.

Before this, they were disciples who followed the prophet Jesus (24:19). After this event, they recognize him and believed. They excel even the apostles who saw him and did not believe (Lk 24: 31, 37, 41; Mt 28:17; Jn 20: 25). I would also like to comment on a few features of this long dialogue. They disagree with each other; they are also sad and disillusioned. The state of their spirits is appalling. Here, Jesus incorporates himself into the conversation. As was his custom, he asked questions: "What are you discussing?"(24:17), "what things have happened in Jerusalem?" (24:19); "wasn't it necessary that the Christ should suffer?" (24:26) Together with questions, he offers long explanations (all the prophets! (24:27), and breaks bread. Jesus joins the word with the salvific gesture. All of this has very gratifying dimensions. Although Jesus walks with them, he acts as if to leave them and go on alone, but they oblige him to stay because the day was almost over

(24: 29-29). The disciples are so filled with wonder that although it is nightfall they return to Jerusalem (30 kilometers distant). They are almost crazy with joy. The most important factor is radical change from sadness to happiness, because of their reunion with their Teacher and friend.

10) Touch me... A spirit does not have flesh and bones as I do

There is great curiosity with respect to death. Some perform rites of a spiritist nature in order to communicate with the dead. Various religious systems have developed a complex and rich relation with the dimensions of death. On the other hand, there is a growing number of people indifferent to death or who refuse to give it much weight. In my case, I have gone from a world that hides and denies this event to the beautiful Andean cultures where death is celebrated as another form of life.

The resurrection of Jesus is certainly a mystery of salvation. It cannot be reduced to a physiological nor psychological fact although it does have to do with the body and with the affective dimension. The heart of the matter is that God the Father raised Jesus of Nazareth and he has sent his Spirit of salvation to all humanity.

With respect to the contemporaries of Jesus, they both doubted and were baffled. Even the apostles were frightened and disoriented; they did not believe (Lk 24:37, 38, 41; Mt 28:17; Mk 16: 14; Jn 20: 19, 25). They believed they saw a spirit (Lk 24: 37). Given this situation, Jesus shows them his body and invites them to touch him. He does not give them a sermon. He brings together the word and sense communication; and he shares a piece of broiled fish. From fear and desolation, the eleven apostles move to full communion, joy and faith in the Risen One.

While they were still talking about this, Jesus, himself, stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. He said to them, "Why are you troubled and why do doubts arise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see I have." When he had said this he showed them his hands and his feet. And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?" They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate it in their presence (Lk 24: 36-43; Jn 20: 19-29).

The resurrection is of the person of Jesus and not of a soul without a body. It is of the Lord who fills his collaborators with joy. This has to do with the group of eleven apostles, after the betrayal of Judas; they are fragile, frightened men who find it difficult to believe.

The apostles imagine that they see a spirit or a phantom. Curiously, the Teacher asks them why they are afraid and why they doubt (24:38). There was reason for fear! The question seems to be unnecessary. Another curious and humorous question... do they have something to eat (24:4). If it were a phantom or a spirit it would not eat. There is then a sort of humorous dialogue. But more important, is the joy they feel and express (24:31). The bodily aspect excels in this text on the resurrection. It is not a subjective or nebulous thing. It is the resurrection of the body, as we pray in the recitation of the Credo. We are shown that the New Life of Christ and the Christian community is neither superior to the body nor anti-body, nor does it sustain the dualism of body-soul which has for so long distorted Christian spirituality.

John's narrative adds other dimensions. John notes, as does Luke, that the disciples "were overjoyed to see the Lord" (Jn 20:20). He adds the gift of peace (20:21) and the reception of the Spirit (20:22). As we know, the Spirit of Christ is joy and we can also say that it is the basis of good humor and the joy of life.

An inconclusive conclusion

Among many other things, the creative aptitude flowers in the communication of good humor. We are constantly measuring our achievements: in technology, in our professional ambient, our work output, in our family ties and in our social organization. Why do we discriminate against the other dimensions of human effort and imagination?

Very seldom do we value the great civilizing work of generating happiness and celebration. These are absent from the pages of our history texts and from encyclopedias. To my way of thinking, authentic successes in economy, education, etc. are inseparable from celebration, joyfulness and laughter.

Gladness in the Spirit...

Every creative work is impelled by of the Spirit of Jesus; this is shown clearly in our faith communities and we can experience it in the dimension of good humor, despite the fact that it is not part of the official teaching of religion. Christian salvation frees us; it also gives us joy and makes us smile. Who does this? Gladness, joy comes from the God of Jesus, and concretely it is the work of the Spirit. Therefore the image of an absolutely serious, solemn God has no value.

Jesus was happy, full of "joy in the Holy Spirit" (Lk 10:2) and the fruits of the Spirit are: "love, joy..." (Gal 5:22). This occurs even in the midst of pain and contradiction, for we embrace the "Word with the joy of the Holy Spirit in the midst of many tribulations" (1Thes. 1:6). But this has little to do with an ingenuous hilarity.

Throughout these pages I have tried to lovingly embrace the words of the New Testament, emphasizing the happiness and buoyant joy of Jesus. He is the solid rock and the fertile soil of our joyful faith. This experience helps us to confront the enormous violence in our world and together construct what is good.

This is the result of my reading of the humanity/divinity of the Teacher from Nazareth. It is only one of the possible readings and it contains my limitations and intuitions. I have considered one dimension of the human condition of the Savior, which also offers a way of drawing close to his divinity.

I insist that this is only an essay, an initial examination of the theme and I would hope that it might motivate others. For this reason I have included this section subtitled: *A conclusion that is inconclusive/ an inconclusive conclusion*. My text does not have a final period but is rather open to suggestions. I feel called by and associated with many people in the ecclesial community with whom I have rediscovered joy in the Holy Spirit in the word of Jesus. My essay is also inconclusive due to a fundamental issue. The words of Jesus open windows that look toward Mystery for us. This is not something that can be reduced to a definition or to some norm. Any good theological, biblical essay is not like a key that effectively closes the door between God and us. They are rather like windows open to fresh breezes and the perfume of flowers, to the divine mystery filled with all color and luminosity.

From violence to joy...

The surrounding society fascinates us with its entertainment industry and its comic forms, which are, in great part, dehumanizing. Aggressiveness toward women stands out particularly and is converted into a hedonistic object of consumption. We are saddened by the use of ethnic jokes which poke fun at the blacks, native peoples, mestizos and the poorer marginal areas of the cities. In the end, the entertainment industry brings with it a great deal of unhappiness and alienation. It is a symbolic aggression which penetrates and corrodes the imagination and the human heart. Discrimination in all its forms, including humor, attacks human dignity and is certainly anti-spiritual. Another type of violence is a pragmatic social change in which there is no space for

diversion since the only elements considered worthwhile are works of a revolutionary nature. Pragmatism then is deceitful and overwhelming.

There are exceptions and opportunities. Social action programs exist that do not turn their backs on the humorous nature of the human being. Some individuals, humorists, artists and media forms do a noble and genuinely entertaining task. They give the good news of hope and joy. There also exists, from day to day, a great deal of pleasant and delightful conversation. We enjoy the good seasoning of humor, an informal jest like a piquant spice or an amusing commentary on ridiculous behavior.

In my country of origin, Chile, we have the spontaneous *talla*, a mode of speaking filled with creativity and healthy humor but, at times, destructive and rude. In every cultural context there are many ways of joking, of overcoming sadness or the pain of injustice.

We cultivate the spirituality of happiness. Just as structural violence denies the spiritual, I suggest that celebration and wit are signs of genuine spirituality. This is not something superfluous, but rather has its foundation in the Gospels. It is not about a simple reading of the Bible but has to do with spiritual growth both as a person and as a community, in sharing the good humor inspired by Jesus and actualized in the Spirit.

Something similar can be said about liberation that is cultivated through joy. And this is not all, it is rather the heart of the struggle to achieve freedom and gradually construct a new, joyful reality. Integral liberation is energized by joy and living with a sense of humor, none of which emerge out of a postmodern mentality. Its analytical tendencies and argumentative attitudes seek to abandon reason and modern politics in order to construct an autonomous, hedonistic subject, without ethics, surrounded by an ideology of personal self-realization that recognizes only the value of "what makes me feel good."

I do not subscribe to this post-modern ideology. Together with many others, I am convinced of the importance of the birth pangs of transformation of our era. In many ways the people are saying "enough!" in the face of a world order in which the great majority are hungry and hopeless. Along with the protests, there are initiatives both large scale and small. We are like ants carrying our grains of earth and green leaves or like skillful spiders weaving together a better, hospitable world without exclusions.

Birth is painful, but soon after there will be shouts of joy and celebration of life. After suffering comes the warmth of the mother's smile and the response of the child. Growth will give us many surprises and make us laugh for joy.

The path traveled...

Throughout these pages we have relished meeting with Jesus and his contemporaries. I am not going to try to make a resume of what has been presented but rather trace the fundamental guidelines and remember a few points of what we have noted along the way.

The biblical writings announce, unfold and develop the fact of Jesus the Savior, within the framework of the believing community. It is not humorous material in itself but it does present passages with language, a quality of human interaction and content which include humorous elements.

We have examined 139 passages, the majority from Mark, Matthew and Luke with only a few from John. In my personal commentaries I have added some elements of biblical study that help to contextualize and bring to light the heart of each text. Without these elements one would follow a subjective and arbitrary path lacking respect both for the biblical material and the inspiration of the Spirit.

I have emphasized attractive factors in the style of speech and acting which synoptic writers attribute to Jesus and in the interaction between different personalities that appear in the New Testament texts. It is not possible to know with any certitude which words were uttered by Jesus, which are the author's and finally, those that may have come from the community of faith that

received and transmitted the Message. For this reason I have presented the “joyfulness of Jesus” in general terms.

I have grouped the biblical passages according to their principal themes and not according to the sequence and editorializing of New Testament writings. This responds to a spiritual/pedagogical- criterion. My desire was to contribute to a spiritual growth that advances step by step, without undue haste and which appreciates sparks of good humor. There were eight facets or chapters, each with its subdivisions in which the 139 chosen passages are to be found. In this way my work favors a tranquil, joyful reading. I trust that it has not been a hurried dash from the first to the last page.

I began with the central issue at the heart of the experience of Jesus: the Kingdom and its relation with God the Father (to which I added something with regard to his confrontation with Satan) (chapters one and two). Following this I worked on three levels. First: the humorous dimension in the mission of Jesus together with his followers and a number of surprising actions (chapters three and four). Second: the confrontation with authorities, structures and religious personages, with their contrasts and humorous gestures (chapters five and six). Third: Other elements of conflict in apocalyptic language, and in the drama of the life and death of the Lord (chapters seven and eight).

In many passages I have emphasized contrast, surprise, the skill of Jesus in confronting his adversaries, the joyful announcement that contrasts sharply with evil; how he discovers and brings to their attention the incongruence that exists between one thing and another, between what one presupposes and the entirely new and unexpected thing that occurs. All of this makes us smile and enjoy the presence of Jesus.

Our journey is not over. Each reader is rediscovering the joyful face of the carpenter from Nazareth which is at the same time the face of the Risen One who saves all humanity. The mystery of God has no timetable nor limits: we will always find new facets and calls. For this reason I do not offer a conclusion; rather I share the inconclusive mystery of the joyful path of each person and each nation with the Spirit of Jesus.

The marvels yet to be discovered...

The Resurrection of Jesus is the fullness of joy for the Son of Man, for his followers and for all humanity transformed by his rising. This is the central mystery of Christianity. What does this imply for the world of today?

I think that in suffering Latin America, the joy of the Resurrection offers us new perspectives and energies. Our future is neither frustration in the face of unsolvable problems, nor the imitation of the more developed societies we tend to consider happy. As Latin Americans, we have our own path to travel in the economic dimension, in our day-to-day living, in our solidarity and our spiritual path, in dialogue with the other nations of the world.

We walk together searching for concrete solutions and feasible strategies and we do so with joy and hope. The Risen One guarantees this in the measure that we respond to his joy. Let us respond to him with the gift of faith and the shared pleasure of our day-to-day fidelity.

It is in this sense that something marvelous is offered to us when we travel the route of love and joy. With regard to this, we keep in mind the promise of Jesus: “I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be full. This is my commandment: that you love one another as I have loved you” (Jn 15:11-12). The Risen Christ does not distribute arid norms and ideas; rather he inspires warm love and joy filled with surprises.

It is a fact that his joy and love are given to believing humanity, daily reborn. There are no words to adequately describe these gifts. In silence, with a radiant smile, one says: Thank you my good God!

We also smile before the fall of oppression and sadness; unfortunately, injustice and suffering go hand in hand! This is not about a superficial happiness, separated from political

responsibility and day-to-day living. This is not the message of the Man from Galilee. The message of the Beatitudes leaves no room for doubt: “Those who weep now will laugh; those who laugh now will weep and suffer”(Lk 6:21, 25). This expresses both the historical conflict and the eschatological hope.

We are interested in the joy that transforms a crushing reality. Often the rich man enjoys his plenty at the cost of the poor; we see this aggressiveness in the powerful communications media that mock the poor. We are brought to see that the eschatological promise of the laughter that will fill the mouth of the afflicted is realized within our own historical moment. The sense of humor among the poor and their –often- paradoxical joy becomes more understandable within this historical work.

Another amazing thing is the celebration of the joyfulness of Jesus Christ. This does not occur automatically within the place of worship. The official liturgy is all too often overly rational and boring. In some cases, the believing group is limited to singing alleluias but has no responsible part in human history. In this way there is no synchronization with the Joyful Risen One who transforms human endeavor. In this dimension, there is more value in the prayer and religiosity of the poorer nations with their great spiritual and festive attributes. Here the God of Joy is palpable. In both the official and elitist celebrations as well as in the more popular version, the gracious presence of Jesus of Galilee calls and impels us. These and so many other marvels are yet to be discovered... It is my hope that the reader feels this as well since it is the object of these pages. On the basis of the humor of Jesus that we have revealed in the biblical passages, it is possible to discover the amazing joy of Jesus Christ today. My work does not cultivate nostalgia for the biblical past but, on the contrary, I wish to strengthen faith in the joyful Christ of yesterday, today and always.

For this reason these pages are not finished. Continue on in your search and encounter with the Teacher of Joy. This is the experience of those of us who believe and walk together with everyone of good will, respecting their religion or their indifference. The joy of God has neither frontiers nor signs that tell us to “stop” or exclude people who are different from us. In the path without frontiers the most important sign tells us: “Christ was raised from the dead ... so that we too may live a new life” (Rom 6:4). This is marvelous news. Life is the grace of God.

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