

Palm SUNDAY



PASTORAL CHALLENGE:
To promote the participation of the laity in spaces
of cultural, political, social, and ecclesial transformation.



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Encounter with the Word to illuminate life*

From the Holy Gospel according to Saint Luke 22, 14-23,56

“When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table and he said to them, “I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God. After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, “Take this and divide it among you. For I tell you I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.” And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you. But the hand of him who is going to betray me is with mine on the table. The Son of Man will go as it has been decreed. But woe to that man who betrays him!” They began to question among themselves which of them it might be who would do this.

A dispute also arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest. Jesus said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves. You are those who have stood by me in my trials. And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me, that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”

“Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.” But he replied, “Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and death.” Jesus answered, “I tell you, Peter before the rooster crows today, you will deny three times that you know me.”

Then Jesus asked them, “When I sent you without a purse, bag, or sandals, did you lack anything?” “Nothing,” they answered. He said to them, “But now if you have a purse, take it, and also a bag; and if you don’t have a sword, sell your cloak and buy one. It is written: ‘And



* For the biblical texts we use a translation offered by the Bible of the Church in America of CELAM.

he was numbered with the transgressors, and I tell you that this must be fulfilled in me. Yes, what is written about me is reaching its fulfillment.” The disciples said, “See, Lord, here are two swords.” “That’s enough!” he replied.

“Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him. On reaching the place, he said to them, “Pray that you will not fall into temptation.” He withdrew about a stone’s throw beyond them, knelt, and prayed, “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.” An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. When he rose from prayer and went back to the disciples, he found them asleep, exhausted from sorrow. “Why are you sleeping?” he asked them. “Get up and pray so that you will not fall into temptation.”

“While he was still speaking a crowd came up, and the man who was called Judas, one of the Twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him, but Jesus asked him, “Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?” When Jesus’ followers saw what was going to happen, they said, “Lord, should we strike with our swords?” And one of them struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his right ear. But Jesus answered, “No more of this!” And he touched the man’s ear and healed him.

Then Jesus said to the chief priests, the officers of the temple guard, and the elders, who had come for him, “Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come with swords and clubs? Every day I was with you in the temple courts, and you did not lay a hand on me. But this is your hour—when darkness reigns.”

“Then seizing him, they led him away and took him into the house of the high priest. Peter followed at a distance. And when some there had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and had sat down together, Peter sat down with them. A servant girl saw him seated there in the firelight. She looked closely at him and said, “This man was with him.” But he denied it. “Woman, I don’t know him,” he said. A little later someone else saw him and said, “You also are one of them.” “Man, I am not!” Peter replied. About an hour later another asserted, “Certainly this fellow was with him, for he is a Galilean.” Peter replied, “Man, I don’t know what you’re talking about!” Just as he was speaking, the rooster crowed. The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: “Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times.” And he went outside and wept bitterly.

The men who were guarding Jesus began mocking and beating him. They blindfolded him and demanded, “Prophecy! Who hit you?” And they said many other insulting things to him. 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 Messiah,” they said, “tell us.” 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 say that I am.” Then they said, “Why do we need any more testimony? We have heard it from his lips.” Then the whole assembly rose and led him off to Pilate. And they began to accuse him, saying, “We have found this man subverting our nation. He opposes payment of taxes to Caesar and claims to be Messiah, a king.” So Pilate asked Jesus, “Are you the king of the Jews?” “You have said so,” Jesus replied. Then Pilate announced to the chief priests and the crowd, “I find no basis for a charge against this man.” But they insisted, “He stirs up the people all over Judea by his teaching. He started in Galilee and has come all the way here.”

On hearing this, Pilate asked if the man was a Galilean. When he learned that Jesus was under Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who was also in Jerusalem at that time.

When Herod saw Jesus, he was greatly pleased, because for a long time he had been wanting to see him. From what he had heard about him, he hoped to see him perform a sign of some sort. He plied him with many questions, but Jesus gave him no answer. The chief priests and the teachers of the law were standing there, vehemently accusing him. Then Herod and his soldiers ridiculed and mocked him. Dressing him in an elegant robe, they sent him back to Pilate. That day Herod and Pilate became friends—before this, they had been enemies.



Pilate called together the chief priests, the rulers, and the people, and said to them, "You brought me this man as one who was inciting the people to rebellion. I have examined him in your presence and have found no basis for your charges against him. Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us; as you can see, he has done nothing to deserve death. Therefore, I will punish him and then release him."

But the whole crowd shouted, "Away with this man! Release Barabbas to us!" Barabbas had been thrown into prison for an insurrection in the city, and murder. Wanting to release Jesus, Pilate appealed to them again. But they kept shouting, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" For the third time, he spoke to them: "Why? What crime has this man committed? I have found in him no grounds for the death penalty. Therefore, I will have him punished and then release him." But with loud shouts, they insistently demanded that he be crucified, and their shouts prevailed. So Pilate decided to grant their demand. He released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, the one they asked for, and surrendered Jesus to their will.

As the soldiers led him away, they seized Simon from Cyrene, who was on his way in from the country, and put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus. A large number of people followed him, including women who mourned and wailed for him. Jesus turned and said to them, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and your children. For the time will come when you will say, 'Blessed are the childless women, the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never nursed!' Then 'they will say to the mountains, 'Fall on us!' and to the hills, 'Cover us!'" For if people do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?"

Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left. Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.

The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is God's Messiah, the Chosen One." The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar and said, "If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself." There was a written notice above him, which read: "this is the king of the Jews."

One of the criminals who hung there, hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Messiah? 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, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise."

"It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When he had said this, he breathed his last. The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, "Surely this was a righteous man." When all the people who had gathered to witness this sight saw what took place, they beat their breasts and went away. But all those who knew him, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.

"Now there was a man named Joseph, a member of the Council, a good and upright man, who had not consented to their decision and action. He came from the Judean town of Arimathea, and he himself was waiting for the kingdom of God. Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus' body. Then he took it down, wrapped it in a linen cloth, and placed it in a tomb cut in the rock, one in which no one had yet been laid. It was Preparation Day, and the Sabbath was about to begin.

The women who had come with Jesus from Galilee followed Joseph and saw the tomb and how his body was laid in it. Then they went home and prepared spices and perfumes. But they rested on the Sabbath in obedience to the commandment."



“We let ourselves be illuminated”

The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, “He saved others; let him save himself if he is God’s Messiah, the Chosen One (Lk 23,35).



Just as consumerism and ecocide have become globalized, we are also witnesses, hopefully not accomplices, of the normalization of corruption and violence in our socio-political spheres as Jesus himself realistically warns us: "They know that between the pagans who are considered rulers, dominate the nations as if they were their owners and the powerful impose their authority (Mk 10,42), which ends up "destroying the social and economic fabric in entire regions". (AD 70)

Our socio-religious communities suffer from ideological polarization (cf. DA 75) and the creation of elite or discarded ghettos because a few defend their great privileges and many suffer exclusion and discrimination. And, faced with this reality, Jesus vehemently exhorts: *"It will not be so between you; Rather, whoever among you wants to become great should become a servant of others; and whoever wants to be the first to become a servant of all"* (Mk 10,42-43).

The demonic quest for power needs manipulated laws, alienating communications, religious commercialization, and the murderous plot to eliminate those who have the "authority" that emanates from mercy, love, solidarity, universal brotherhood, and social friendship. (cf. Fratelli Tutti, 186).

Christian discipleship can and must be a real alternative to our world, following "The way, truth, and life of Jesus Christ" (cf. John 14,6), for which it is essential to "promote the participation of the laity in spaces of cultural, political, social and ecclesial transformation" (AELA, challenge 6). The arrogance of the political-religious power of the time of Jesus cannot be perpetuated in our communities, because "the laity is already awakening their conscience about their mission in promoting public policies that make possible a more just and humane economy" (AELA, challenge 6, a), training for "participation, care, and social, cultural and political transformation" (Ibid).

We have to make a "Paschal journey" of conversion, to take the step from "saving ourselves" to saving ourselves together; from "taking advantage of power" to serving others with honesty; from using the "religious simoniac prestige" to sharing the lives and dreams of the discarded; from the "temptation to eliminate those who are different" to the fraternity in diversity; from the "authoritarianism of those with professional titles or ritual theatricality" to the authenticity that recreates the community, because we are called to "live the common dignity of our baptismal vocation to overcome clericalism and authoritarianism" (AELC, challenge 19).

Around us, there usually are Caiaphas, Sanhedrin, Pilate, Simon, Judas, Barabbas, a lot of mobs, and all kinds of "selfish and ambitious attitudes" that betray Jesus Christ, his Gospel, and the synodal ecclesia (cf. Acts 5:1-11), just to stay in power, silencing the voice of prophetic love.

What a pity that the "favorite" of the Father becomes the "crucified" of the brothers!



Reflection to impact life from the Pastoral Challenges



We begin Holy Week walking in synodality. And how good it is for us to walk this propitious time of prayer with an open heart and to think that synodality cannot be just a concept or a particular event, but must be reflected both in ecclesial structures and processes (cf. DC 68). Thus, synodality is a natural way of being Church where the laity “is an active and creative part in the execution of pastoral projects in favor of the community” (cf. DAp 213).

When dealing with this topic, the Final Document of Aparecida (n. 210), referred us to the reading of the text of *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, which refers to lay life as follows:

Their field of evangelizing activity is the vast and complicated world of politics, society, and economics, but also the world of culture, the sciences and the arts, international life, of the mass media. It also includes other realities which are open to evangelization, such as human love, the family, the education of children and adolescents, professional work, and suffering. (EN 70).

The laity plays a determining role in social life, mainly in politics and the economy. Their responsibility from faith and from their being Catholics is to “order, manage and transform society according to evangelical criteria and the heritage of the Social Doctrine of the Church”, but this cannot be done from individualities, but rather by transforming themselves into social agents with the responsibility of “contributing to the construction of unity and the development of society”.

Today more than ever, our peoples need political leaders aware of ethical values in their lives, with a leadership won by their testimony of service as their mission, who know how to respond from faith to the temptations of financial and media powers.

We are in a propitious time to support the mission carried out by the laity in their daily work in the world, be it with testimony and activity, with the daily dedication of their lives; everything contributes to the creation of structures, according to the criteria of the Gospel (Cf. DAp 210) feeling ourselves “missionary disciples who go forth”.



The challenge we all face to influence life

To face this challenge implies that during this Lent, we review our conversion process at the personal, community, pastoral and synodal levels with sincerity, recognizing that conversion must be practical, accompanied by concrete works, and not a mere speech.

Bearing in mind and heart the desire to promote the participation of the laity in spaces of cultural, political, social, and ecclesial transformation:

- *What attitudes of Jesus do you think we should have to promote this participation?*
- *Do you remember any words of Pope Francis that guide us in the challenge of lay participation?*
- *What new defies does facing this challenge pose to the pastoral care of your community?*
- *What could you personally commit to promoting this lay participation in different spaces?*

Let us take another step in our process of conversion and promote and defend the dignity of life and the human person:

- **From our conversion:** Being aware that It is the laypeople of our continent who, conscious of their call to holiness by virtue of their baptismal vocation, have to act as leaven in the dough to build a temporal city in keeping with God's project. (Cf. DAp 505)
- **From our community conversion:** Valuing the presence and contribution of laymen and women on training teams supplies a special unique richness because out of their experiences and competencies, they offer criteria, contents, and valuable witnesses for those who are in formation. (Cf. DAp 281)
- **From our pastoral conversion:** We recognize the value and effectiveness of parish councils, and national councils of laypeople, because they foster communication and participation in the church and their active presence in the world. Building citizenship in the broadest sense, and building ecclesial in laypeople is one and the same movement. (Cf. DAp 215)
- **From our synodal conversion:** Encourage laypeople to participate in discernment, decision-making, planning, and execution of the diocesan project and plan (Cf. DAp. 371).



Celebrar la vida

Lord Jesus,
As we begin Holy Week,
grant us to be faithful to our baptism.
Grant us to be witnesses of cultural,
political, social, and ecclesia
transformation;
so that in living in the world
we bring the grace of the Gospel
to all areas of our life.
Amen.

ACRONYMS

- AEALC: Ecclesial Assembly of Latin America and the Caribbean, 2021
CV: Christus Vivit, Papa Francisco
DAp: Documento of Aparecida, 2007.
DC: Documento para el camino. Asamblea Eclesial de América Latina y El Caribe, 2021
DDC: Document for Community Discernment, Ecclesial Assembly of Latin America and the Caribbean, 2021
EG: Evangelli Gaudium, Pope Francis
SA DF: Amazon Synod, Final Document.
SN: Narrative Synthesis. Listening to the 1st Ecclesial Assembly of Latin America and the Caribbean, 2021

*Guided by Mary, we fix our gaze on Jesus Christ,
author, and perfecter of faith*



Our Lady of Altagracia, Patron Saint of the Dominican Republic