

31 ‘Simon, Simon, listen! Satan has demanded to sift all of you like wheat, ³²but I have prayed for you that your own faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned back, strengthen your sisters and brothers.’ ³³And he said to him, ‘Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death!’ ³⁴Jesus said, ‘I tell you, Peter, the cock will not crow this day, until you have denied three times that you know me.’ (Luke 22: 31—34)

Do you remember sports lessons when you were a school kid? When I was at school it often happened as follows: The teacher announced a competition in soccer and identified two pupils to choose their teammates. One here, the next one there, then here again, and so on. And as soon as the procedure was announced you knew that you would be the last one to be chosen. Not really chosen. To be honest: You were mercilessly sorted out. In the end, one team had bad luck and had to take you onto the team, just because everyone needed to participate. Being sorted out, being left over, being the loser, who has to be taken, even if nobody wants you...

Children grow up and become adults. But such experiences are deeply rooted and live on in our memories. Being sorted out, being left over is an awful experience. It happens, when you are old or sick, when you don't have sufficient education, when you are not able to work under pressure. When you are not able to keep up with the others. People undergo extraordinary efforts to not be sorted out. Nobody wants to be sifted out.

Nobody wants to belong to the unwanted, to the losers.

31 ‘Simon, Simon, listen! Satan has demanded to sift all of you like wheat,

That is how the reading begins. A sieve, as you can see it on the cover of the bulletin, separates. It separates the wheat from the chaff. It separates the good from the bad. It separates the wanted from the unwanted. A sieve is very helpful, as long as it is used to separate things. A sieve is of satanic effect as soon as you use it to separate people. Then people are treated like farming produce and are thrown onto a machine to sort them out. Bad potatoes here, good ones there. What counts is your quality, your beauty maybe. No one wants bruises and

stones. People who are sorted out no longer know who they are. They lose confidence, that someone maybe interested in them, values them as a person. They feel left out and forgotten.

In the biblical story of Cain and Abel, Cain must have felt like living in a separating sieve. He saw himself fall through, and his brother Abel remained undisturbed and happy. But Abel would have to pay for it!

Esau as well saw himself fall through the sieve, while his brother Jacob was dancing around. He would have to pay for it!

Joseph's brothers looked at him, the favorite son of the father, and saw themselves sorted out. Joseph, too, would have to pay for it!

Whenever people are sorted out, rage, despair and violence are growing.

Many things in our society are working like a big sieve. They sift people out; they shake people, separate them from each other, and transform them into rivals. Who remains? Who fails? Who gets what? And who has more?

Which company? Which religion? The sick or the healthy? The unhurt or the handicapped? The others or we?

What stabilizes people when they find themselves shaken on the sieve of life?

Which experience strengthens and comforts people when they lose ground under their feet, when they can't prevent falling through the safety net of society, when they arrive at our door, with broken dreams and overwhelming fears in their luggage. When they lose ground?

In the end, it is always the same that helps: It is the experience of community. It is solidarity. It is communion...Faithfulness...Prayer. What helps to regain confidence and hope is a community filled with God's spirit and abundant life.

Jesus says to Peter: **I have prayed for you that your own faith may not fail...**

What holds Peter, what can hold us in all harassments, in all crises; in each experience of being shaken... is not our own power or toughness. What holds us is the fact, that Christ stands by our side. What holds Peter is Jesus' prayer for him, and that Jesus abides by him and by us. What holds us is the invitation to Christ's table, where there always is a space free for us.

In the end it is our life in communion which holds us.

“And you, when once you have turned back, strengthen your sisters and brothers.”

If you translate it exactly, it is: When once you have returned, come back...”

Having come back whereof and wherefrom?

Maybe from what people occupies more than their faith: questions about health and money and their status...

We do not have to give in to the pressure, that we always have to be a winner, that we are forced to participate in the battle of the fastest or the best or the most beautiful in life. That we are forced to present a wonderful job ladder. The famous painter Hundertwasser once said: “The straight line is unholy and unmoral.”

So, let us not live the straight lines but choose the holy and curved ones.

It is so stressful, when we try to participate in everything – to be in control of everything. When we do not allow ourselves to let things happen.

I wonder: Which prices do people really pay to be a winner?

Which prices do we pay? Or our families, our children? What consequences does it have for our health, for our inner peace, if we always have to be a winner? Following the inhuman pressure always to be a winner, our love grows cold. Being bound to be a winner creates nothing but defeats. Produces victims. Destroys lives. Our own and that of the others, too.

We need to act differently and to meet something different. We need not to be measured by what we had hoped for and what we had dreamed of. We live on what we call grace or mercy.

And this means:

What makes me precious is not how suitable and usable I am, nor how efficient I am. I am allowed to just be! So many people who are living on the rough side of life are looking for a message of mercy...a sign of grace.

Grace and mercy tell us:

You can stop wanting to be a winner.

You don't have to walk on the water.

You don't have to be in control of your life all the time.

Stop giving the illusion of a straight and unbroken life story. Such a story does not exist.

You don't have to be God.

You are allowed to be a human being. You are also allowed to be a broken person. You don't have to be whole.

What a relief to live by such a grace!

The gospel invites us to let things be! We don't have to win. We shall love!

One person can always fall through a hole when the sieve is shaken. But two persons who hold each other by the hand cannot fall through so easily. Three, four, or five people who hold onto each other will not be sifted out. Sticking together avoids being sorted out and enables us to live freely and happily.

In Jesus' name. Amen