



1) Opening Prayer

God of wisdom and love,
source of all good,
send your Spirit to teach us your truth
and guide our actions in your way of peace.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

2) Gospel Reading - Matthew 5,20-26

Jesus said to his disciples: *'For I tell you, if your uprightness does not surpass that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never get into the kingdom of Heaven. 'You have heard how it was said to our ancestors, You shall not kill; and if anyone does kill he must answer for it before the court. But I say this to you, anyone who is angry with a brother will answer for it before the court; anyone who calls a brother "Fool" will answer for it before the Sanhedrin; and anyone who calls him "Traitor" will answer for it in hell fire. So then, if you are bringing your offering to the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar, go and be reconciled with your brother first, and then come back and present your offering. Come to terms with your opponent in good time while you are still on the way to the court with him, or he may hand you over to the judge and the judge to the officer, and you will be thrown into prison. In truth I tell you, you will not get out till you have paid the last penny.'*

3) Reflection

- The text of today's Gospel is placed in a larger unity: Mt 5, 20 to Mt 5, 48. In this Matthew shows us how Jesus interpreted and explained the Law of God. Five times he repeats the phrase: "You have heard how it was said to our ancestors, but I say to you!" (Mt 5,21.27.33.38.43).

According to some Pharisees, Jesus was eliminating the law. But it was exactly the contrary. He said: "Do not imagine that I have come to abolish the Law and the Prophets. I have come not to abolish but to complete them" (Mt 5, 17). Before the Law of Moses, Jesus has an attitude of rupture and of continuity. He breaks away from the mistaken interpretation which was

closed up in the prison of the letter, but he affirms categorically the last objective of the law: to attain to the greatest justice, which is Love.

- In the communities for which Matthew writes his Gospel there were diverse opinions concerning the Law of Moses. For some, it no longer had any sense, for others it should be observed even up to the minimum details. Because of this there were many conflicts and disputes. Some said of the others that they were stupid and idiot. Matthew tries to help both groups to better understand the true sense of the Law and presents some counsels of Jesus to help them face and overcome the conflicts which arose within the families and the communities.
- Matthew 5, 20: Your justice should surpass that of the Pharisees. This first verse gives the general key to everything which follows in Mt 5, 20-48. The Evangelist indicates to the communities how they should practice a greater justice which surpasses the justice of the Scribes and the Pharisees and which leads to the full observance of the law. Then, after this general key on a greater justice, Matthew quotes five very concrete examples of how to practice the Law, in such a way that its observance leads to the perfect practice of love. In the first example of today's Gospel, Jesus reveals what God wanted in giving Moses the fifth commandment, "Do not kill!"
- Matthew 5,21-22: Do not kill. "You have heard how it was said to our ancestors, you shall not kill and if anyone does kill he must answer for it before the court." (Ex. 20, 13). To observe fully this fifth commandment it is not sufficient to avoid murdering. It is necessary to uproot from within oneself everything which in one way or other can lead to murder, for example, anger, hatred, the desire of vengeance, exploitation, etc. "anyone who is angry with his brother will answer for it before the court". That is, anyone who is angry against the brother merits or deserves the same punishment of condemnation by the court which, according to the ancient law, was reserved to the murderer! But Jesus goes beyond all this. He wants to uproot the origin of murder: "Anyone who calls a brother 'Fool' will answer for it before the Sanhedrin; and anyone who calls him 'Traitor' will answer for it in hell fire". In other words, I observe truly the commandment "Not to kill if I succeed to take away from my heart any sentiment of anger which leads to insult the brother. That is, if I attain the perfection of love.
- Matthew 5, 23-24: The perfect worship wanted by God. "If you are bringing your offering to the altar and there you remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar, go and be reconciled with your brother first, and then come back and present your offering". In order to be accepted by God, and be united to him, it is necessary to be reconciled with the brother, with the sister. Before the destruction of the Temple, in the year 70, when the Christians still participated in the pilgrimages to Jerusalem to take their offering to the altar of the Temple, they always remembered this phrase of Jesus.
Now in the years 80's, in the moment in which Matthew writes, the Temple and the Altar no longer existed. The community itself had become the Temple and the Altar of God (1Co 3, 16).

- Matthew 5,25-26: To be reconciled. One of the points on which the Gospel of Matthew insists the most is reconciliation, because in the communities of that time there were many tensions among the groups which had different tendencies, without any dialogue. Nobody wanted to give in or cede before the other. Matthew enlightens this situation with words of Jesus on reconciliation which demand acceptance and understanding. Because the only sin which God does not forgive is our lack of forgiveness of others (Mt 6, 14). For this reason, he seeks reconciliation first, before it is too late.
- The ideal of greatest justice. Five times, Jesus quotes a commandment or a usage of the ancient law: Do not kill. (Mt 5, 21), Do not commit adultery (Mt 5, 27), Do not bear false witness (Mt 5, 33), Eye for eye, tooth for tooth 5, 38), To love neighbour and to hate the enemy (Mt 5, 43). And five times he criticizes the ancient way of observing these commandments and he indicates a new way to attain justice, the objective of the law (Mt 5,22-26; 5, 28-32; 5,34-37; 5,39-42; 5,44-48). The word Justice is present seven times in the Gospel of Matthew (Mt 3, 15; 5, 6.10.20; 6, 1.33; 21, 32). The religious ideal of the Jews of that time was "to be just before God". The Pharisees taught: "A person attains justice before God when he/she observes all the norms of the Law in all the details!" This teaching resulted in a legalistic oppression and produced much anguish in persons of good will, because it was very difficult for a person to be able to observe all the norms (Rm 7,21-24). This is why Matthew takes some words of Jesus on justice showing that this leads to surpass the justice of the Pharisees (Mt 5, 20). For Jesus, justice does not come from what I do for God observing the law, but from what God does for me, accepting me with love, like a son, like a daughter. The new ideal that Jesus proposes is this: "To be perfect as the Heavenly Father is perfect!" (Mt 5,48). That means: I will be just before God, if I try to accept and to forgive persons as God accepts and forgives me gratuitously in spite of my many defects and sins.

4) Personal Questions

- Which are the more frequent conflicts in my family? And in our community? Is reconciliation easy in the family and in the community? Yes or no? Why?
- The advice of Jesus, how can this help me to improve relationships in the sphere of our family and of the community?

5) Concluding Prayer

Lord, you visit the earth and make it fruitful,
you fill it with riches;
the river of God brims over with water,
you provide the grain. (Ps 65,9)