



1) Opening prayer

Almighty God,
our hope and our strength,
without you we falter.
Help us to follow Christ
and to live according to your will.
Who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

2) Gospel Reading - Matthew 5,38-42

Jesus said to his disciples: 'You have heard how it was said: Eye for eye and tooth for tooth. But I say this to you: offer no resistance to the wicked. On the contrary, if anyone hits you on the right cheek, offer him the other as well; if someone wishes to go to law with you to get your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone requires you to go one mile, go two miles with him. Give to anyone who asks you, and if anyone wants to borrow, do not turn away.'

3) Reflection

- Today's Gospel forms part of a small literary unit which goes from Mt 5, 17 to Mt 5, 48, in which is described how to pass from the ancient justice of the Pharisees (Mt 5, 20) to the new justice of the Kingdom of God (Mt 5, 48). It describes how to go up to the Mountain of the Beatitudes, from where Jesus announces the new Law of Love. The

great desire of the Pharisees was to live in justice, to be just before God. And this is the desire of all of us. Just is the one who succeeds to live where God wants him/her to live. The Pharisees tried to attain justice through the strict observance of the Law. They thought that with their own effort they could succeed in being where God wanted them to be. Jesus takes a stand concerning this

practice and announces the new justice which should exceed, surpass the justice of the Pharisees (Mt 5, 20). In today's Gospel we are reaching almost the summit of the mountain. Only a little is lacking. The summit is described in one phrase: "Be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 5, 48), on which we will meditate in tomorrow's Gospel. Let us look closely at this last degree which is still lacking to reach the summit of the Mountain, of which Saint John of the Cross says: "Here reign silence and love".

- Matthew 5, 38: Eye for eye and tooth for tooth. Jesus quotes a text of the Ancient Law saying: "You have heard how it was said: Eye for eye and tooth for tooth!" He shortened the text, because the complete text said: "Life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, blow for blow" (Ex 21, 23-25). Like in the previous cases, here also Jesus makes a completely new rereading. The principle "eye for eye, tooth for tooth" was already found in the origin of the interpretation which the Scribes made of the law. This principle should be overthrown, because it perverts and destroys the relationship between persons and with God.

- Matthew 5, 39^a: Do not give back evil for evil received. Jesus affirms exactly the contrary: "But I say to you do not offer resistance to the wicked". Before some violence received, our natural reaction is to pay the other one with the same coin. Vengeance asks for "eye for eye, tooth for tooth". Jesus asks to pay back the evil not with evil, but with good. Because if we do not know how to overcome the violence received, the spiral of violence will take up everything and we will not know what to do. Lamech said: For a wound received I will kill a man, and for a scar I would kill a young person. If the vengeance of Cain was worth seven that of Lamech will count for seventy-seven" (Gen 4, 24). And it was precisely because of this terrible act of vengeance that everything ended in the confusion of the Tower of Babel. (Gen 11,1-9). Faithful to the teaching of Jesus, Paul writes in the Letter to the Romans: "Never pay back evil with evil; let your concern be to do good to all men. Do not allow yourselves to be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good" (Rm 12, 17.21). To be able to have this attitude is necessary to have much faith in the possibility to recover that the human being has. How can we do this in practice? Jesus offers four concrete examples.

- Matthew 5, 39b-42: the four examples to overcome the spiral of violence. Jesus says: "rather (a) if anyone hits you on the right cheek, offer him the other as well; (b) if anyone wishes to go to Law with you to get your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. (d) And if anyone requires you to go one mile, go two miles with him. (e) Give to anyone who asks you, and if anyone wants to borrow, do not turn away" (Mt 5, 40-42). How are these four affirmations to be understood? Jesus himself helps us to understand. When the soldier hit him on the cheek, he did not offer the other cheek. Rather, he reacted with energy: "If there is some offence in what I said, point it out, but if not, why do you strike me?" (Jn 18, 23) Jesus does not teach us to be passive. Saint Paul thinks that paying evil with

good “you will make others be ashamed” (Rm 12, 20). This faith in the possibility to recover the human being is possible only beginning from the root which comes from the total gratuity of the creative love which God shows us in the life and the attitudes of Jesus.

4) Personal Questions

- Have you some time felt within you such a great anger as to want to apply the vengeance “eye for eye, tooth for tooth”? What did you do to overcome this?
- Does life in community, living together, favour today in the Church and in us the creative love which Jesus proposes in today’s Gospel?

5) Concluding Prayer

Give ear to my words, Yahweh,
spare a thought for my sighing.
Listen to my cry for help,
my King and my God! To you I pray. (Ps 5,1-2)