



### 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 5,43-48

*Jesus said to his disciples: 'You have heard how it was said, You will love your neighbour and hate your enemy. But I say this to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you; so that you may be children of your Father in heaven, for he causes his sun to rise on the bad as well as the good, and sends down rain to fall on the upright and the wicked alike. For if you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Do not even the tax collectors do as much? And if you save your greetings for your brothers, are you doing anything exceptional? Do not even the gentiles do as much? You must therefore be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect.'*

### 3) Reflection

- In today's Gospel we get to the summit of the Mountain of the Beatitudes, where Jesus proclaimed the Law of the Kingdom of God, the ideal of which can be summarized in this lapidarian phrase: "Be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 5, 48) Jesus was correcting the Law of God! Five times, one after another, he had already affirmed: "It was said, but I say to you!" (Mt 5, 21.27, 31.33.38). This was a sign of great courage on his part, in public, before all the people gathered there, to correct the most sacred treasure of the people, the origin of their identity, which was the Law of God. Jesus wants to communicate a new way of looking and of practicing the Law of God. The key, so as to be able to get this new look, is the affirmation: "Be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect". Never will anyone be able to say: "Today I have been perfect as the Heavenly Father is perfect!" We are always below the measure which Jesus has placed before us. Perhaps, because of this, he has placed before us an ideal

which is impossible for us mortal beings to attain?

- Matthew 5, 43-45: It was said: You will love your neighbour and hate your enemy. In this phrase Jesus explains the mentality with which the Scribes explained the Law; a mentality which resulted from the divisions among the Jews and the non Jews, between neighbour and non neighbour, between saint and sinner, between the clean and the unclean, etc. Jesus orders to overthrow this pretence, these interested divisions. He orders to overcome divisions. "But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you! So that you may be children of your Father in Heaven, for he causes his sun to rise on the bad as well as the good, and sends down rain to fall on the upright and the wicked alike". And from here we draw from the source from which springs the novelty of the Kingdom. This source is proper to God who is recognized as Father, who causes his sun to rise on the bad as well as the good. Jesus orders that we imitate this God: "Be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect" (5, 48). And, it is in imitating this God that we can create a just society, radically new:

- Matthew 5,46-48: Be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect. Everything is summarized in imitating God: "But I say to you: love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in Heaven who causes the sun to rise on the bad as well as on the good, and sends down rain to fall on the upright and the wicked alike. For if you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Do not even the tax collectors do as much? And if you save your greetings for your brothers, are you doing anything exceptional? Do not even the gentiles do as much? Therefore, you be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 5, 43-48). Love is the beginning and the end of everything. There is no greater love than to give one's life for the brother (Jn 15, 13). Jesus imitated the Father and revealed his love. Every gesture, every word of Jesus, from his birth until the hour of his death on the cross, it was an expression of this creative love which does not depend on the gift received, neither does it discriminate the other because of race, sex, religion or social class, but which comes from wishing well in a completely gratuitous way. This was continually growing, from birth until his death on the Cross.

- The full manifestation of the creative love in Jesus. This was when on the Cross he offered forgiveness to the soldier who tortured him and killed him. The soldier, employed by the Empire, placed the wrist of Jesus on the arm of the Cross, placed a nail and began to hammer. He hammered several times. The blood fell flowing down. The body of Jesus twisted with pain. The mercenary soldier, ignorant of what he was doing and of what was happening around him, continued to hammer as if it was a nail on the wall to hang a picture. At that moment Jesus addresses this prayer to the Father: "Father, forgive them; they do not know what they are doing!" (Lk 23, 34). In spite of all the will of men, the lack of humanity did not succeed to extinguish humanity in Jesus. They take him, they mock him, they spit on his face, they scoff him, they make of him a clown king with a crown of thorns on the head, they scourged him, torture him, make him walk on the streets as if he were a criminal, he has to listen to the insults of the religious authority, on Calvary they leave him completely naked at the sight of all. But the poison of lack of humanity does not succeed to reach the source of humanity which sprang from

the Heart of Jesus. The water which sprang from within was stronger than the poison from without, wanting to contaminate everything. Looking at that ignorant and rude soldier, Jesus felt compassion for the soldier and prayed for him and for all: "Father, forgive them!" And he adds even an excuse: "They are ignorant. They do not know what they are doing!" Before the Father, Jesus is in solidarity with those who torture him and ill treat him. Like the brother who sees his murder brothers before the judge and he, victim of his own brothers, tells the judge: "You know they are my brothers. They are ignorant. Forgive them. They will become better!" It was as if Jesus was afraid that the minimum anger against man could extinguish in him the remaining humanity which still existed. This unbelievable gesture of humanity and of faith in the possibility of recovering that soldier has been the greatest revelation of the love of God. Jesus can die: "It is fulfilled!" And bowing his head he gave up his spirit (Jn 19, 30). In this way he fulfilled the prophecy of the Suffering Servant (Is 53).

#### **4) Personal questions**

- Which is the most profound reason for the effort which you make to observe God's Law: to merit salvation or to thank for God who in his immense goodness has created you, keeps you alive and saves you?
- What meaning do you give to the phrase: "to be perfect as the Heavenly Father is perfect?"

#### **5) Concluding Prayer**

Have mercy on me, O God, in your faithful love,  
in your great tenderness wipe away my offences;  
wash me clean from my guilt,  
purify me from my sin. (Ps 51,1-2)