



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 6,1-6.16-18

Jesus said to his disciples: 'Be careful not to parade your uprightness in public to attract attention; otherwise you will lose all reward from your Father in heaven.

So when you give alms, do not have it trumpeted before you; this is what the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets to win human admiration. In truth I tell you, they have had their reward. But when you give alms, your left hand must not know what your right is doing; your almsgiving must be secret, and your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you.

'And when you pray, do not imitate the hypocrites: they love to say their prayers standing up in the synagogues and at the street corners for people to see them. In truth I tell you, they have had their reward. But when you pray, go to your private room, shut yourself in, and so pray to your Father who is in that secret place, and your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you.

'When you are fasting, do not put on a gloomy look as the hypocrites do: they go about looking unsightly to let people know they are fasting. In truth I tell you, they have had their reward. But when you fast, put scent on your head and wash your face, so that no one will know you are fasting except your Father who sees all that is done in secret; and your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you.

3) Reflection

- The Gospel of today continues the meditation on the Sermon on the Mountain. In the previous days we have reflected at length on the message of chapter 5 of Matthew's Gospel. In today's Gospel and the following days we meditate on the message of

chapter 6 of this Gospel. The sequence of chapters 5 and 6 can help us to understand it. The passages in italics indicate the text of today's Gospel. The following is the schema:

Matthew 5, 1-12: The Beatitudes: solemn opening of the New Law

Matthew 5, 13-16: The new presence in the world: Salt of the earth and Light of the world

Matthew 5, 17-19: The new practice of justice; relationship with the ancient law

Matthew 5, 20-48: The new practice of justice: observing the new Law.

Matthew 6, 1-4: The new practice of piety: alms

Matthew 6, 5-15: The new practice of the works of piety: prayer

Matthew 6, 16-18: The new practice of the works of piety: fasting

Matthew 6, 19-21: New relationship to material goods: do not accumulate

Matthew 6, 22-23: New relationship to material goods: correct vision

Matthew 6, 24: New relationship to material goods: God and money

Matthew 6, 25-34: New relationship to material goods: abandonment in Providence.

Today's Gospel treats three themes: alms giving (6, 1-4), prayer (6, 5-6) and fasting (6, 16-18). These are three works of piety of the Jews.

- Matthew 6,1: Be careful not to parade your uprightness to attract attention. Jesus criticises those who do the good works to be seen by men (Mt 6,1). Jesus asks to build up interior security not in what we do for God, but in what God does for us. From the advise that he gives there results a new type of relationship with God: "Your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you" (Mt 6,4). "Your Father knows what you need before you ask him" (Mt 6, 8). "If you forgive others their failings, your heavenly Father will forgive your failings" (Mt 6, 14). It is a new way which opens itself now to have access to the Heart of God our Father. Jesus does not allow that the practice of justice and of piety be used as a means for self promotion before God and before the community (Mt 6, 2.5.16).

- Matthew 6, 2-4: How to practice almsgiving. To give alms is a way of sharing, very recommended by the first Christians (Ac 2, 44-45; 4, 32-35). The person who practices alms giving and sharing to promote herself before others merits to be excluded from the community, as it happened to Ananias and Saphira (Ac 5, 1-11). Today, in society as well as in the Church, there are persons who make great publicity of the good that they do to others. Jesus asks the contrary: to do good in such a way that the left hand does not know what the right hand does. It is the total detachment and the total gift in total gratuity of the love which believes in God the Father and imitates all that he does.

- Matthew 6, 5-6: How to practice prayer. Prayer places the person in direct relationship with God. Some Pharisees transformed prayer into an occasion to show themselves before others. At that time, when the trumpet sounded in the three moments of prayer, morning, noon and evening, they should stop in the place where they were to pray. There were people who sought to be in the corners in public places, in such a way that everybody would see that they were praying. Well then, such an attitude perverts our relationship with God. This is false and has no sense. This is why, Jesus says that it is better to close up oneself in our room to pray in secret, maintaining the authenticity of the relationship. God sees you even in secret, and he always listens to you. It is a question of a personal prayer, not of a community prayer.

- Matthew 6, 16-18: How to practice fasting. At that time the practice of fasting was accompanied by some very visible external gestures: not to wash one's face, not to comb one's hair, use sober dresses. These were visible signs of fasting. Jesus criticises this form of fasting and orders to do the contrary, and thus others cannot become aware that you are fasting: bathe, use perfume, and comb your hair well. In this way, only your Father who sees in secret knows that you are fasting and he will reward you.

4) Personal questions

- When you pray, how do you live your relationship with God?
- How do you live your relationship with others in the family and in community?

5) Concluding Prayer

Yahweh, what quantities of good things you have in store
for those who fear you,
and bestow on those who make you their refuge,
for all humanity to see. (Ps 31,19)