



### 1) Opening prayer

God our Father,  
may we love you in all things and above all things  
and reach the joy you have prepared for us  
beyond all our imagining.  
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 23,1-12

*Then addressing the crowds and his disciples Jesus said, 'The scribes and the Pharisees occupy the chair of Moses. You must therefore do and observe what they tell you; but do not be guided by what they do, since they do not practise what they preach. They tie up heavy burdens and lay them on people's shoulders, but will they lift a finger to move them? Not they! Everything they do is done to attract attention, like wearing broader headbands and longer tassels, like wanting to take the place of honour at banquets and the front seats in the synagogues, being greeted respectfully in the market squares and having people call them Rabbi. 'You, however, must not allow yourselves to be called Rabbi, since you have only one Master, and you are all brothers. You must call no one on earth your father, since you have only one Father, and he is in heaven. Nor must you allow yourselves to be called teachers, for you have only one Teacher, the Christ. The greatest among you must be your servant. Anyone who raises himself up will be humbled, and anyone who humbles himself will be raised up.*

### 3) Reflection

- Today's Gospel is part of a long criticism of Jesus against the Scribes and the Pharisees (Mt 23, 1-39). Luke and Mark mention only a few lines of this criticism against the religious heads of the time. It is only the Gospel of Matthew which has a longer presentation of this. This very severe text makes us foresee the polemics which existed in the communities of Matthew with the communities of the Jews of Galilee and Syria of that time.
- In reading this text, which is strongly contrary to the one of the Pharisees, we have to

be very attentive so as not to be unjust against the Jewish People. We Christians, for centuries, have had attitudes against the Jews and, for this reason, against the Christians. What is important in meditating these texts is to discover their objective. Jesus condemns the lack of coherence and of sincerity in the relationship with God and with the neighbour. He is speaking about hypocrisy, that of yesterday as well as that of today, of our hypocrisy!

- Matthew 23, 1-3: The basic error: they say, but they do not do. Jesus addresses himself to the multitude and to the disciples and criticizes the Scribes and the Pharisees. The reason for attacking them is the incoherence between their words and their acts. They speak but they do not do. Jesus recognizes the authority and the knowledge of the Scribes "The Scribes and the Pharisees occupy the chair of Moses! You must, therefore, do and observe what they tell you, but do not be guided by what they do, since they do not practice what they preach".

- Matthew 23, 4-7: The fundamental error is manifested in diverse ways. The fundamental error is incoherence: "They say, but they do not do". Jesus enumerates the diverse points which reveal this incoherence. Some Scribes and Pharisees imposed heavy laws upon the people. They knew the Laws well, but they did not practise them; neither did they use their knowledge to lessen the weight imposed upon the people. They did everything possible to be seen and praised, they wore special tunics for prayer and they liked the first places and to be greeted in the public squares. They wanted to be called "Teacher". They represented a type of community which maintained, legitimized and nourished the difference of social classes. It legitimized the privileges of the great and the inferior position of the little ones. Now, if there is something which displeases Jesus, it is appearances which deceive.

- Matthew 23, 8-12: How to overcome the fundamental error. How should a Christian community be? All the community functions should be assumed as a service: "The greatest among you must be your servant!" You should call nobody Teacher (Rabbi), nor Father, nor Guide; because the community of Jesus has to maintain, legitimize and nourish not the differences, but rather the fraternal spirit. This is the fundamental Law: "You are all brothers and sisters!" The fraternal spirit comes from the experience that Jesus is Father, and makes of all of us brothers and sisters. "Anyone who raises himself up will be humbled, and anyone who humbles himself will be raised up."

- The group of the Pharisees! The group of the Pharisees was born in the II century before Christ, with the proposal of a more perfect observance of the Law of God, especially regarding the prescriptions on purity. They were more open to novelty than the Sadducees. For example, they accepted faith in the Resurrection and faith in the angels, something which the Sadducees did not accept. The life of the Pharisees was an exemplary witness: they prayed and studied the Law during eight hours a day; they worked eight hours in order to be able to survive; they dedicated eight hours to rest. This is the reason why people respected them very much. And in this way, they helped people to keep their own identity and not to lose it, in the course of centuries.

- The so-called Pharisaic mentality. With time, the Pharisees took hold of power and no longer listened to the appeals of the people, nor did they allow them to speak. The word

“Pharisee” means “separated”. Their observance was so strict and rigorous that they separated themselves from the rest of the people. This is why they were called “separated”. From this comes the expression “pharisaic mentality”. It is typical of the persons who think to obtain justice through the rigid and rigorous observance of the Law. Generally, they are persons who are afraid, who do not have the courage to assume the risk of liberty and of the responsibility. They hide themselves behind the Law and the authority. When these persons obtain an important function, they become harsh and insensitive and indifferent to hide their own imperfection.

- Rabbi, Guide, Teacher, Father. These are four titles that Jesus prohibits people to use. Today, in Church, the priests are called “Father”. Many study in the University of the Church and obtain the title of “Doctor” (Teacher). Many persons receive spiritual direction and take advice from persons who are called “Spiritual directors” (Guides). What is important is to take into account the reason which impelled Jesus to prohibit the use of these titles. If these were used by persons in order to affirm their position of authority and their power, these persons would be in error and would be criticized by Jesus. If these titles were used to nourish and deepen the fraternal spirit and service, they would not be criticized by Jesus.

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

- Which is my reason for living and working in community?
- How does the community help me to correct and to improve my motivations?

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

I am listening.

What is God's message?

Yahweh's message is peace for his people,  
for his faithful, if only they renounce their folly. (Ps 85,8)