



### 1) Opening prayer

Father,  
help us to seek the values  
that will bring us enduring joy in this changing world.  
In our desire for what you promise  
make us one in mind and heart.  
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 23,23-26

*Jesus said: 'Alas for you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You pay your tithe of mint and dill and cummin and have neglected the weightier matters of the Law-justice, mercy, good faith! These you should have practised, those not neglected. You blind guides, straining out gnats and swallowing camels!*

*'Alas for you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of cup and dish and leave the inside full of extortion and intemperance. Blind Pharisee! Clean the inside of cup and dish first so that it and the outside are both clean.*

### 3) Reflection

- The Gospel today presents two other times that this expression was used: 'Alas for you...' when Jesus speaks against the religious leaders of his time. The two 'Alas for you...' of today denounce the lack of coherence between word and attitude, between exterior and interior. Today we continue our reflection which we begun yesterday.
- Matthew 23, 23-24: The fifth 'Alas for you...' against those who insist on the observance and forget mercy. You pay your tithe of mint and dill and cummin and have neglected the weightier matters of the Law: justice, mercy and fidelity". This fifth 'Alas for you...' of Jesus is against the religious leaders of that time and can be repeated against many religious of the following century even up to our time. Many times, in the name of Jesus, we insist on details and we forget mercy. For example, Jansenism reduces lived faith to something arid, insisting on the observance and penance which led people away from the way of love. The Carmelite Sister Teresa of Lisieux grew in the

Jansenism environment which marked France at the end of the XIX century. Beginning from a personal painful experience, she knew how to recover the gratuity of love of God, a force which should animate the observance of the norms from within; because without love, the observance makes an idol of God.

- Matthew 23, 25-26: The sixth 'Alas for you...' against those who clean things on the outside and are dirty inside. "You clean the outside of the cup and dish and leave the inside full of extortion and intemperance. In the Sermon on the Mountain, Jesus criticises those who observe the letter of the Law and transgress the spirit of the Law. He says: "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 to you anyone who is angry with his brother will answer for it before the court. Anyone who calls his brother 'Fool' will answer for it before the Sanhedrin; and anyone who calls him 'Traitor' will answer for it in hell fire. You have heard that it was said, You shall not commit adultery, but I say this to you, if a man looks at a woman lustfully, he has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Mt 5, 21-22. 27-28). It is not sufficient to observe the letter of the Law. It is not sufficient not to kill, not to rob, not to commit adultery, not to swear in order to be faithful to what God asks of us. The one who observes fully the Law of God is the one who, besides observing the letter, goes deeply to the root and pulls out from within "the desires of extortion and intemperance" which may lead to murder, theft, and adultery. The fullness of the law is realized in the practice of love.

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

- There are two expressions of 'Alas for you...' two reasons to receive the criticism from Jesus. Which of these two applies to me?
- Observance and gratuity: Which of these applies to me?

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

Proclaim God's salvation day after day,  
declare his glory among the nations,  
his marvels to every people! (Ps 96,2-3)