



## Opening prayer

Shaddai, God of the mountain,  
You who make of our fragile life  
the rock of your dwelling place,  
lead our mind  
to strike the rock of the desert,  
so that water may gush to quench our thirst.  
May the poverty of our feelings  
cover us as with a mantle in the darkness of the night  
and may it open our heart to hear the echo of silence  
until the dawn,  
wrapping us with the light of the new morning,  
may bring us,  
with the spent embers of the fire of the shepherds of the Absolute  
who have kept vigil for us close to the divine Master,  
the flavour of the holy memory.

## 1. LECTIO

a) The text:

*Luke 14:25-33* 25 Now great multitudes accompanied him; and he turned and said to them, 26 "If any one comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. 27 Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me, cannot be my disciple. 28 For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? 29 Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, 30 saying, 'This man began to build, and was not able to finish.' 31 Or what king, going to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and take counsel whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? 32 And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends an embassy and asks terms of peace. 33 So therefore, whoever of you does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.

b) A moment of silence:

Let us allow the voice of the Word to resonate within us.

## 2. MEDITATIO

a) Some questions:

- If any man comes to me without hating . . . . he cannot be my disciple: Are we convinced that we must get to the point of separating ourselves from all that ties our hearts: affection received and given, life itself, in order to follow Jesus?
- Anyone who does not carry his cross and come after me cannot be my disciple: Do I possess the logic of the cross, that is, the logic of love freely given?
- The means to fulfil this: does my capability to think inform my life of faith or is it just an interior impulse that dissolves with time and slips by the events of my daily life?
- To avoid having onlookers make fun of something started: does the reward of someone who started to follow the Lord and then did not have the human resources to go on, that is, derision for inability, apply to me?
- None of you can be my disciple unless he gives up all his possessions: am I convinced that the key to discipleship is the poverty of non-possession and the beatitude of belonging?

b) A key to the reading:

We are among those who follow Jesus, with all our baggage of the past. One among so many, our name can be lost. But when He turns around and his word strikes the pain of the ties that strongly bind the pieces of our life, questions roll in the most ancient valley of echoes and one single humble reply comes forth from the ruins of unfinished edifices: Lord, to whom shall we go? You alone have the words of eternal life.

v. 25-26. Great crowds accompanied him on his way and he turned and spoke to them: «If any man comes to me without hating his father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters, yes and his own life too, he cannot be my disciple». The Lord is not interested in counting those who come to him. His words are strong and are free of all illusion. Is there anyone who does not know what it means to hate? If I hate a person, I stay away from that person. This choice between the Lord and affection for parents is the first demand of discipleship. To learn from Christ, it is necessary to find once more the nucleus of every love and interest. The love of a follower of the Lord is not a possessive love, but a love of freedom. To follow someone without any guarantees such as blood relationship can give, namely, family ties and one's own blood, that is, one's life, is discipleship, a place where life is born of divine Wisdom.

v. 27. Anyone who does not carry his cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. The only tie that helps us follow Jesus is the cross. This symbol of love that cannot be taken back, capable of being word even when the world silences everything by condemnation and death, is the lesson of the Rabbi born in the smallest village in Judea.

v. 28. Which of you here, intending to build a tower, would not first sit down and work out the cost to see if he had enough to complete it? To build a tower requires a large sum for

someone who has limited resources. A good intention to build is not enough, it is necessary to sit down, calculate expenses, seek the means to bring the project to completion. Man's life is incomplete and unsatisfied because the larger the project the larger the debt! A project made to measure: not to know how to calculate what is within our means to accomplish is not the wisdom of those who after having ploughed wait for the rain, but the lack of awareness of those to expect flowers and harvest from seed thrown among stones and brambles, without making the effort to loosen the soil.

v. 29-30. Otherwise if he laid the foundation and then found himself unable to finish the work, the onlookers would all start making fun of him and saying: "Here is a man who started to build and was unable to finish". The derision of others which grates like sand on one's the feelings of hope of the person who wanted to reach high on his own, is the reward of one's own arrogance clothed in good will. How many humiliations do we not carry with us, but what little fruit do we reap from these painful experiences! Putting down foundations and then not finish the building is useless. Shattered desires sometimes are good tutors to our naïve self-affirmation... but we fail to understand them so long as we try to cover up our failures and the delusion of our waking up from the fairytale world of the dreams of our childhood. Yes, Jesus does tell us to become childlike, but a child will never pretend to build a "real" tower! The child will be happy with a small tower on the beach, because he/she knows well his/her capacity.

vv. 31-32. Or, again, what king marching to war against another king would not first sit down and consider whether with ten thousand men he could stand up to the other who advanced against him with twenty thousand? If not, then while the other king was still a long way off, he would send envoys to sue for peace. No one can win a war without first sending envoys of peace. To fight for royal supremacy over every other is in itself a lost battle, because man is not called to be a ruling king, but the lord of peace. Approaching the other while still a long way away is the most beautiful sign of victory where no one wins and no one loses, but all become servants of the one true sovereignty in the world: peace and fullness of the gifts of God.

v. 33. So, in the same way, none of you can be my disciple unless he gives up all his possessions. If we examine the capital sins, we shall discover them in the manner of possessing that Jesus speaks of. A person who bases his/her life on possessions is a dissolute person who pretends having power over all things (pride), enjoying a life of pleasure (lust) going beyond the limits as a personal right (anger), being hungry for material goods (gluttony), stealing from others (envy), keeping things for him/herself (avarice), spoiling him/herself apathetically without committing to anything (sloth). The disciple, on the other hand, travels on the rails of the living virtues of the gifts of the Spirit: he/she is a person who has a sense of the things of God (wisdom) and shares it without keeping it to him/herself, and delves deep into the essential meaning of all that is Life (knowledge), who listens to the voice of the Spirit (counsel), and reflects on every discernment (counsel), who allows him/herself to be protected by the limitations of his/her being (fortitude) and does not give in to the allurements of sin, who knows the secrets of history (knowledge) to build horizons of goodness, who does not take unto him/herself the right of making sense, but who welcomes the source of divine

intervention (piety) who springs from the abyss of silence and is thankful for the marvels of grace of his Creator (fear of God) without being afraid of his/her smallness. Thus a disciple is another Jesus.

### **c) Reflection:**

Our hearts are nets made of chain. We have ties of tenderness and gratitude, ties of love and dependence, endless ties with everything that touches our feelings. Jesus speaks of ties of consanguinity: father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters, and of ties with life itself which in the Semitic mentality is symbolised by blood. But the heart must be free of these ties in order to go to Him and create a new tie that gives life because it gives the person freedom to be his/her authentic self. Every disciple has but one task: to learn and not to depend. Blood ties create dependence: how often does affective blackmail stop people from building the tower of their existence? How often do the words: If you love me, do this! Or: If you love me, do not do this...? Life itself can imprison you when it ties you to that which does not suit you physically or mentally thus influencing your complicated story, or when it ties you to that which you choose haphazardly by a will made weak by a thousand grids of events and blackmail. The cross does not tie, it urges that all that you have may be shed, blood and water, even to the last drop: your whole life as a gift that does not expect any reward. To belong rather than to possess is the secret of the gratuitous love of the Master and of the disciple. Anyone who follows Jesus is not just any disciple who learns a doctrine, but is one who becomes a beloved disciple, capable of narrating the wonders of God when the fire of the Spirit will turn him/her into a flame on the candlestick of the world.

### **3. ORATIO**

Psalm 22

The Lord is my shepherd,  
I shall not want;  
he makes me lie down in green pastures.  
He leads me beside still waters;  
he restores my soul.  
He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.  
Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,  
I fear no evil;  
for thou art with me;  
thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.  
Thou prepares a table before me  
in the presence of my enemies;  
thou anointest my head with oil, my cup overflows.  
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life;  
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

### **4. CONTEMPLATIO**

Lord, as you turn around and look at me, your words go through my mind and challenge me with everything that is my life. It is as though a pair of scissors unhesitatingly but sweetly cut the umbilical cords that nourish me to keep me going. And this certain and necessary action restores my full breath and my freedom. Scripture says in its first pages of the human race: Man will leave his father and mother and will go towards a new fullness, all his, towards the unity of one person, capable of bearing fruit and new life. But we have not grasped the key word of this magnificent project, a word that inconveniences because it is like the waves of the sea where you cannot let yourself go with no security, the word: movement. Life does not stop. A love and a life received from a father and a mother. Yes, a full love, but one that does not limit horizons. Man will leave... and will go... A man and a woman, two in one, children who will be the face of their meeting of love, but who tomorrow will leave to go in their turn... if you stop to grasp life, life dies in your grasp. And with life also your unfulfilled dream dies, the dream of a full love that is never exhausted. Lord, grant us to understand that to love is to follow, to listen, to go, to stop, to lose oneself in order to find oneself in a movement of freedom that fulfils every desire for eternal possession. Let me not, for the sake of possessing a part of life, lose the joy of belonging to life, to that divine Life that comes and goes in me for others and from others to me to make of the days that go by waves of Freedom and of gift from God within the limitations of each life. Grant that I may always be the beloved disciple of your dying Life, capable of welcoming in inheritance the sonship and guardianship, in your Spirit, of every authentic motherhood.