



## 1. Opening prayer

Lord Jesus, send your Spirit to help us to read the Scriptures with the same mind that you read them to the disciples on the way to Emmaus. In the light of the Word, written in the Bible, you helped them to discover the presence of God in the disturbing events of your sentence and death. Thus, the cross that seemed to be the end of all hope became for them the source of life and of resurrection.

Create in us silence so that we may listen to your voice in Creation and in the Scriptures, in events and in people, above all in the poor and suffering. May your word guide us so that we too, like the two disciples from Emmaus, may experience the force of your resurrection and witness to others that you are alive in our midst as source of fraternity, justice and peace. We ask this of you, Jesus, son of Mary, who revealed to us the Father and sent us your Spirit. Amen.

## 2. Reading

a) A key to the reading:

The Gospel of this Sunday places us before the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax collector (Lk 18, 9-14). We have added the parable of the widow and the judge (Lk 18, 1-8), because both of these form a small unity, the purpose of which is to help us discover what our prayerful attitude should be before God. The two parables show us that Jesus had another way of seeing the things of life and prayer. He succeeded to perceive a revelation of God there where others saw only the ruins. He sees something positive in the tax collector, of whom everybody said: "He does not know how to pray!" And in the poor widow, of whom society said: "She disturbs and bothers even the judge!" Jesus lived so united to the Father through prayer, that for him everything became an expression of prayer.

Today, the simple people of the town who say that they do not know how to pray, know how to speak with Jesus, they speak with God all the time. Do you know any such persons? The people have many ways to express their devotion and their prayer.

During the reading let us try to pay attention to the two following things: Which is the objective and who are the those to whom the two parables are addressed? Which are the attitudes of the persons who are mentioned in the parables?

b) A division of the text to help in the reading:

- Luke 18, 1: The objective of the first parable
- Luke 18, 2: Description of the attitude of the judge
- Luke 18, 3: Attitude of the widow before the judge
- Luke 18, 4-5: Reaction of the judge before the widow
- Luke 18, 6-8: Jesus applies the parable
- Luke 18, 9: Those to whom the second parable is addressed
- Luke 18, 10: Introduction to the theme of the parable
- Luke 18, 11-12: It describes how the Pharisee prays
- Luke 18, 13: It describes how the Tax Collector prays
- Luke 18, 14: Jesus gives his opinion on both

c) Text:

*Luke 18, 1-141 Then he told them a parable about the need to pray continually and never lose heart. 2 'There was a judge in a certain town,' he said, 'who had neither fear of God nor respect for anyone. 3 In the same town there was also a widow who kept on coming to him and saying, "I want justice from you against my enemy!" 4 For a long time he refused, but at last he said to himself, "Even though I have neither fear of God nor respect for any human person, 5 I must give this widow her just rights since she keeps pestering me, or she will come and slap me in the face." ' 6 And the Lord said, 'You notice what the unjust judge has to say? 7 Now, will not God see justice done to his elect if they keep calling to him day and night even though he still delays to help them? 8 I promise you, he will see justice done to them, and done speedily. But when the Son of man comes, will he find any faith on earth?' 9 He spoke the following parable to some people who prided themselves on being upright and despised everyone else, 10 'Two men went up to the Temple to pray, one a Pharisee, the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee stood there and said this prayer to himself, "I thank you, God, that I am not grasping, unjust, adulterous like everyone else, and particularly that I am not like this tax collector here. 12 I fast twice a week; I pay tithes on all I get." 13 The tax collector stood some distance away, not daring even to raise his eyes to heaven; but he beat his breast and said, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner." 14 This man, I tell you, went home again justified; the other did not. For everyone who raises himself up will be humbled, but anyone who humbles himself will be raised up.'*

### **3. A moment of prayerful silence**

so that the Word of God may penetrate and enlighten our life.

### **4. Some questions**

to help us in our personal reflection.

- a) Which point pleased you the most in both of these parable? Why?
- b) Which is the attitude of the widow and of the judge? What is it that strikes the most in the attitude of the each one of them? Why?
- c) Which are the attitudes of the Pharisee and of the Tax Collector? What strikes us the most in the attitude of each one of them? Why?

- d) How does Jesus apply this parable?
- e) What do these two parables teach us concerning prayer?

### **5. For those who wish to deepen more into the theme**

#### a) The context of yesterday and of today

The context of the time of Jesus and of Luke is expressed in the two phrases of introduction which speak about the 'need to pray continually and not lose heart' (Lk 18, 1) and of 'some who boasted of being just and despised others' (Lk 18, 9). The context of today continues to be the same as before, because also today it is necessary to pray always and today also there are persons who boast of being just and who despise others.

#### b) Comment on the text:

Luke 18, 1: The objective of the first parable

Luke introduces this parable with the phrase: "on the need to pray continually and never lose heart". In other passages he insists in the same way on perseverance in prayer and on the need to believe that God hears our prayer and responds to our petitions. Faith in God which responds to our petitions is the red thread which pervades the whole Bible, where, from Exodus it is ceaselessly repeated that "God hears the cry of His People" (Ex 2, 24; 3, 7).

Luke 18, 2: Description of the attitude of the Judge

Jesus wishes to clarify for those who listen to him, which is the attitude of God before our prayer. For this, in speaking of the judge, he thinks of God the Father who is the end of the comparison which he is making. If it were not Jesus, we would not have the courage to compare God with a judge "who neither has fear of God nor respect for anyone". This audacious comparison, made by Jesus himself, strengthens, on the one hand, the importance of perseverance in prayer and, on the other, the certainty of being heard by God the Father.

Luke 18, 3: The attitude of the widow before the judge

In the attitude of the widow before the judge we have the situation of the poor in society at the time of Jesus. Widows and orphans had no one to defend them and their rights were not respected. The fact that Jesus compares our attitude with that of the poor widow, without anyone to defend her, who seeks to claim her rights before a judge who has no human sensibility, shows Jesus' sympathy for poor persons who insistently struggle to claim their rights.

Luke 18, 4-5: The reaction of the judge before the widow

The judge ends by giving in before the insistence of the widow. He does justice not out of love for justice, but in order to free himself from the widow who continually pesters him.

Luke 18, 6-8: Jesus applies the parable

Jesus draws the conclusion: If an atheistic and dishonest judge pays attention to a widow who insists on her petition, how much more will God, the Father, listen to those who pray to him night and day, even if he makes them wait. This is the central point of the parable, confirmed by the final question of Jesus: "When the Son of man comes, will he find any faith on earth? That is, will our faith be so persistent as that of the widow, who resists

without losing heart, until she obtains God's answer? Because as the Ecclesiasticus says: "It is difficult to resist the expectation of God!"

Luke 18, 9: Those to whom the second parable is addressed

This second parable of the Pharisee and the Tax collector is introduced in the second phrase: "He spoke the following parable to some people who prided themselves on being upright and despised everyone else!" The phrase of Luke refers simultaneously, to the time of Jesus and to the time of Luke. Then, in the communities of the years 80's, to whom Luke addressed his Gospel, there were some holding fast to the ancient tradition of Judaism which despised those who lived in Paganism (cf. Acts 15, 1, 5).

Luke 18, 10: This introduces the theme of the parable

Two men went up to the Temple to pray: one was a Pharisee and the other a Tax collector. There could be no greater contrast between these two. In the opinion of the people of that time, a tax collector was worth nothing and could not address himself to God, because he was an impure person, in so far as a tax collector, while the Pharisee was an honoured person and a very religious one.

Luke 18, 11-12: It describes how the Pharisee prays

The Pharisee prays standing up and thanks God because he is not like others: thieves, dishonest, adulterous. His prayer is nothing else than praising himself and the things he does: he fasts and pays tithes on all he gets. It is an exaltation of his good qualities and the contempt of others, whom he despises, especially the tax collector who is together with him in the same place. He does not consider him as his brother.

Luke 18, 13: It describes how the tax collector prays

The tax collector does not dare even to raise his eyes, but he beats his heart and says: "My God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" He takes his place before God.

Luke 18, 14: Jesus gives his opinion on both parables

If Jesus had asked the people, who returned home justified, all would have answered: "The Pharisee!" But Jesus thinks differently. The one who returns justified (in a good relationship with God) is not the Pharisee, but rather the tax collector. Once again, Jesus turns everything the other way round. Perhaps this application made by Jesus of the parable did not please many persons.

c) Extending the information:

i) The first Christians present us with an image of Jesus praying, who lived in permanent union with the Father. The breathing of the life of Jesus was to do God's Will (Jn 5, 19). Jesus prayed very much and insisted so that the people and his disciples also pray. Because it is in our relation with God that truth emerges and that the person finds herself in all reality and humility.

ii) The two parables reveal something of the prayerful attitude of Jesus before the Father. They reveal that even for Him it was not always easy. Like the widow you must insist very much, as it is also seen in the prayer made in the Garden of Olives (Lk 22, 41-42). He insisted up until death, He did not lose heart and he was heard (Hb 5, 7). The two parables also reveal his experience and intimacy with God as Father who accepts all and whose love has gratuity as a central mark. God's love for us does not depend on what

we do for Him. He has loved us first. He accepts the tax collector.

iii) Luke is the Evangelist who gives us more information about the life of prayer of Jesus. He presents Jesus in constant prayer. The following are some moments in which Jesus appears in prayer in the Gospel of Luke:

- \* When he is twelve years old, he goes to the Temple, to the house of the Father (Lk 2, 46-50).
- \* At the moment of being baptised and of assuming his mission, he prays (Lk 3, 21).
- \* When he begins his mission, he spends forty days in the desert (Lk 4, 1-2).
- \* In the hour of temptation, he faces the Devil with the texts from Scripture (Lk 4, 3-12).
- \* Jesus usually participates in the celebrations in the Synagogue on Saturday (Lk 4, 16).
- \* He seeks solitude in the desert to pray (Lk 5, 16; 9, 18).
- \* Before choosing the twelve apostles, he spends the night in prayer (Lk 6, 12)
- \* He prays before meals (Lk 9, 16; 24, 30).
- \* Before speaking about reality and of his passion, he prays (Lk 9, 18)
- \* In time of crisis, on the Mountain to pray and he is transfigured while he prays (Lk 9, 28)
- \* In revealing the Gospel to the little ones, he says: "Father, I thank you!" (Lk 10, 21)
- \* In praying, he awakens in the Apostles the will to pray (Lk 11, 1).
- \* He prays for Peter so that he may be strong in faith (Lk 22, 32).
- \* He celebrates the Passover Supper with his disciples (Lk 22, 7-14).
- \* In the Garden of Olives, he prays, and sweat becomes drops of blood (Lk 22, 41-42).
- \* In the anguish of the agony he asks his friends to pray with him (Lk 22, 40.46).
- \* At the hour of being nailed on the cross, he asks pardon for those who do not know what they are doing (Lk 23, 34).
- \* In the hour of death, he says: "Into your hands I commend my spirit!" (Lk 23, 46; Ps 31, 6).

iv) This long list indicates everything which follows. For Jesus, prayer was intimately united to life, to concrete facts, to the decisions which he had to take. In order to be faithful to the Father's project, he tried to remain alone with him. He listened to him. In the difficult and decisive moments of his life, Jesus prayed the Psalms. Just like any pious Jew, he knew them by heart. But the recitation of the Psalms does not take away his creativity. Rather, Jesus composed himself a Psalm which he has transmitted to us. It is the Our Father. His life was a permanent prayer: "I always seek the will of the Father!" (Jn 5, 19. 30). To him is applied what the Psalm says "I am in prayer!" (Ps 109, 4).

## 6. Prayer of a Psalm

Psalm 146 (145): A Picture of our God

Alleluia! Praise Yahweh, my soul!

I will praise Yahweh all my life,

I will make music to my God as long as I live.

Do not put your trust in princes, in any child of Adam,  
who has no power to save.

When his spirit goes forth he returns to the earth,  
on that very day all his plans come to nothing.  
How blessed is he who has Jacob's God to help him,  
his hope is in Yahweh his God,  
who made heaven and earth,  
the sea and all that is in them.

He keeps faith for ever,  
gives justice to the oppressed,  
gives food to the hungry;  
Yahweh sets prisoners free.

Yahweh gives sight to the blind,  
lifts up those who are bowed down.  
Yahweh protects the stranger,  
he sustains the orphan and the widow.

Yahweh loves the upright,  
but he frustrates the wicked.  
Yahweh reigns for ever, your God, Zion,  
from age to age.

## **7. Final Prayer**

Lord Jesus, we thank for the word that has enabled us to understand better the will of the Father. May your Spirit enlighten our actions and grant us the strength to practice that which your Word has revealed to us. May we, like Mary, your mother, not only listen to but also practice the Word. You who live and reign with the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit forever and ever. Amen.