



1) Opening Prayer

Father,
guide and protector of your people,
grant us an unfailing respect for your name,
and keep us always in your love.
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 7,15-20

Jesus said to his disciples: 'Beware of false prophets who come to you disguised as sheep but underneath are ravenous wolves.

You will be able to tell them by their fruits. Can people pick grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles? In the same way, a sound tree produces good fruit but a rotten tree bad fruit. A sound tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor a rotten tree bear good fruit.

Any tree that does not produce good fruit is cut down and thrown on the fire. I repeat, you will be able to tell them by their fruits.'

3) Reflection

- We are reaching the final recommendations of the Sermon on the Mountain. Comparing the Gospel of Matthew with that of Mark one perceives a great difference in the way in which they present the teaching of Jesus. Matthew insists more on the content of the teaching and organizes it into five great Discourses, of which the first one is the Sermon of the Mountain (Mt 5 to 7). Mark, over fifteen times, says that Jesus taught, but he rarely says what he taught. In spite of this difference, both agree on a point: Jesus taught very much. To teach was what Jesus did the most (Mk 2, 13; 4, 1-2; 6, 34). He used to do it always (Mk 10, 1). Matthew is interested in the content. But does he want to say that Mark does not do it? Depends on what we want to say when we speak about content! To teach is not only a question of communicating a truth in such a way that people learn it by heart. The content is not limited to words, but it is also composed by gestures and consists in the way in which Jesus used to relate himself with persons. The content has never been separated from the person who communicates it. The person, in

fact, is the origin of the content. The good content without goodness is like milk spilt on the ground. It does not convince and conversion does not take place.

- The final recommendations and the result of the Sermon on the Mountain in the conscience of the people are the points of the Gospel of today (Mt 7, 15-20) and of tomorrow (Mt 7, 21-29). (The sequence of the Gospel of the days of the week is not always the same as that of the Gospels).

Matthew 7, 13-14: Choose the sure way

Matthew 7, 15-20: The prophet is known by the fruits

Matthew 7, 21-23: Not only speak, but act.

Matthew 7, 24-27: Construct the house on rock.

Matthew 7, 28-29: The new conscience of the people.

- Matthew 7, 15-16^a: Beware of false prophets. In the time of Jesus, there were prophets of all types, persons who announced apocalyptic messages to involve people in different movements of that time: Essen, Pharisee, Zelots, and others (cf. Ac 5, 36-37). When Matthew writes there were also prophets who announced messages diverse from the one proclaimed by the community. The Letters of Paul mention these movements and tendencies (cf. 1 Co 12,3; Gal 1,7-9; 2,11-14;6,12). It must not have been easy for the community to make the discernment of spirits. From here results the importance of the words of Jesus on false prophets. The warning of Jesus is very strong: "Beware of false prophets who come to you disguised as sheep but underneath are ravenous wolves". The same image is used when Jesus sends the disciples on mission: "I am sending you out as sheep among wolves" (Mt 10, 16 e Lc 10, 3). The opposition between the ravenous wolf and the meek sheep is irreconcilable, unless the wolf is converted and loses its aggressiveness as the Prophet Isaiah suggests (Is 11, 6; 65, 25). What is important here in our text is the gift of discernment. It is not easy to discern the spirits. Sometimes it happens that personal interests or of a group lead the person to proclaim false those prophets who announce the truth and disturb. That happened with Jesus. He was eliminated and put to death, considered a false prophet by the religious authority of that time. Ever so often, the same thing has happened and continues to happen in our Church.

- Matthew 7, 16b-20: The comparison of the tree and of its fruits. To help to discern the spirits, Jesus uses the comparison of the fruit: "You will be able to tell them by their fruits". A similar criterion had been suggested by the Book of Deuteronomy (Dt 18, 21-22). And Jesus adds: "Can you pick grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles? In the same way a sound tree produces good fruit, but a rotten tree bad fruit. A sound tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor a rotten tree bear good fruit. Any tree that does not produce good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. In the Gospel of John, Jesus completes the comparison: "Every branch in me that bears no fruit, he cuts away. Every branch that does bear fruit, he prunes to make it bear even more. As a branch cannot bear fruit all by itself, unless it remains part of the vine, neither can you unless you remain in me. Those branches will be cut off and thrown into the fire to be burnt" (Jn 15, 2.4.6)

4) Personal Questions

- False prophets! Do you know any case in which a good and honest person who proclaimed a truth which disturbed was condemned as a false prophet?
- In judging from the fruits of the tree of your personal life, how do you define yourself: as false or as true?

5) Concluding Prayer

Yahweh, look at my suffering and rescue me,
for I do not forget your Law.

Plead my cause and defend me;

as you promised, give me life. (Ps 119,153-154)