



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 8,5-17

When Jesus went into Capernaum a centurion came up and pleaded with him. 'Sir,' he said, 'my servant is lying at home paralysed and in great pain.' Jesus said to him, 'I will come myself and cure him.' The centurion replied, 'Sir, I am not worthy to have you under my roof; just give the word and my servant will be cured. For I am under authority myself and have soldiers under me; and I say to one man, "Go," and he goes; to another, "Come here," and he comes; to my servant, "Do this," and he does it.'

When Jesus heard this he was astonished and said to those following him, 'In truth I tell you, in no one in Israel have I found faith as great as this. And I tell you that many will come from east and west and sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob at the feast in the kingdom of Heaven; but the children of the kingdom will be thrown out into the darkness outside, where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth.' And to the centurion Jesus said, 'Go back, then; let this be done for you, as your faith demands.' And the servant was cured at that moment.

And going into Peter's house Jesus found Peter's mother-in-law in bed and feverish. He touched her hand and the fever left her, and she got up and began to serve him.

That evening they brought him many who were possessed by devils. He drove out the spirits with a command and cured all who were sick. This was to fulfil what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: He himself bore our sicknesses away and carried our diseases.

3) Reflection

- The Gospel today continues the description of the activity of Jesus to indicate how he put into practice the Law of God, proclaimed on the Mountain of the Beatitudes. After the

cure of the leper in the Gospel of yesterday (Mt 8, 1-4), now follows the description of other cures:

- Matthew 8, 5-7: The petition of the centurion and the answer of Jesus. When analyzing the texts of the Gospel, it is always good to be attentive to small details. The centurion is a pagan, a foreigner. He does not ask for anything, he only informs Jesus telling him that his servant is sick and suffers terribly. Behind this attitude of people in regard to Jesus, there is the conviction that it was not necessary to ask things to Jesus. It was sufficient to communicate the problem to him. And Jesus would have done the rest. An attitude of unlimited trust! In fact, the reaction of Jesus is immediate: "I will come myself and cure him!"

- Matthew 8, 8: The reaction of the centurion. The centurion did not expect such an immediate gesture and so generous. He did not expect that Jesus would go to his house. And beginning by his own experience of 'head' he gives an example to express his faith and the trust that he had in Jesus. He tells him: "Lord, am not worthy to have you under my roof, just say a word and my servant will be cured. For I am under authority myself and have soldiers under me; and I say to one man, 'Go' and he goes, to another, 'Come here' and he comes, to my servant, 'Do this and he does it'". This reaction of a foreigner before Jesus reveals that which was the opinion of the people in regard to Jesus. Jesus was a person who could be trusted and that he would not have driven away those who would go to him to tell him their problems. This is the image of Jesus which the Gospel of Matthew communicates to us even now that we read it in the XXI century.

- Matthew 8, 10-13: Jesus' comment. The official was admired of the reaction of Jesus and Jesus was admired of the reaction of the official: "In truth I tell you, in no one in Israel have I found faith as great as this". And Jesus already foresaw what was happening when Matthew wrote the Gospel: "And I tell you many will come from east and west and sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob at the feast in the Kingdom of Heaven, but the children of the

Kingdom will be thrown out into the darkness outside where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth". The message of Jesus, the New Law of God proclaimed from the top of the Mountain of the Beatitudes is a response to the deepest desires of the human heart. The sincere and honest pagans like the centurion and so many others coming from the East and the West, perceived in Jesus the response to their yearning and accept it. The message of Jesus is not, in the first place, a doctrine or morals, nor a rite or a series of norms, but a deep experience of God which responds to what the human heart desires. If today many go away from the Church or seek other religions, it is not always their fault, but it could be ours, because we do not know how to live nor radiate God's message.

- Matthew 8, 14-15: The cure of Peter's mother-in-law. Jesus goes to Peter's house and cures his mother-in-law. She was sick. In the second half of the first century, when Matthew writes, the expression: "Peter's House" evoked the Church, constructed on the rock which was Peter. Jesus enters into this house and cures Peter's mother-in-law: "He touched her hand and the fever left her and she got up and began to serve him". In Greek word used is diakonew, to serve. A woman becomes deaconess in Peter's

House. This is what was happening in the communities of that time. In the letter to the Romans, Paul mentions the deaconess Phoebe of the community of Cenchreae (Rm 16, 1). We have much to learn from the first Christians.

- Matthew 8, 16-17: The fulfilment of the prophecy of Isaiah. Matthew says that “when evening came”, they brought many persons to Jesus who were possessed by the devil. Why only at night? Because in Mark’s Gospel, from where Matthew takes his information, it was a Saturday (Mk 1, 21), and Saturday ended at the moment when the first star appeared in the sky. Then people could go out of the house, carry a burden and take the sick to the place where Jesus was. And “Jesus with his word cast out the evil spirits and cured all the sick! Using a text of Isaiah, Matthew throws light on the meaning of this gesture of Jesus: “So that what Isaiah had said would be fulfilled”. Ours were the sufferings he was bearing, ours sorrows he was carrying”. In this way, Matthew teaches that Jesus was the Messiah-Servant, announced by Isaiah (Is 53,4; cf. Is 42,1-9; 49,1-6; 50,4-9; 52,13-53,12). Matthew was doing what our communities do today: to use the Bible to enlighten and interpret the events and discover the presence of the creative word of God.

4) Personal Questions

- Compare the image of God that you have with that of the centurion and of the people, who followed Jesus.
- The Good News of Jesus is not, in the first place, a doctrine or morals, nor a rite or a series of norms, but it is a profound experience of God that responds to what the human heart yearns for. How do the Good News strike you, in your life and in your heart?

5) Concluding Prayer

Proclaim with me the greatness of Yahweh,
let us acclaim his name together.
I seek Yahweh and he answers me,
frees me from all my fears. (Ps 34,3-4)