



1) Opening Prayer

Almighty God,
our hope and our strength,
without you we falter.
Help us to follow Christ
and to live according to your will.
Who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

2) Gospel Reading - Matthew 6,24-34

Jesus said to his disciples: 'No one can be the slave of two masters: he will either hate the first and love the second, or be attached to the first and despise the second. You cannot be the slave both of God and of money.

'That is why I am telling you not to worry about your life and what you are to eat, nor about your body and what you are to wear. Surely life is more than food, and the body more than clothing!

Look at the birds in the sky. They do not sow or reap or gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they are? Can any of you, however much you worry, add one single cubit to your span of life? And why worry about clothing? Think of the flowers growing in the fields; they never have to work or spin; yet I assure you that not even Solomon in all his royal robes was clothed like one of these.

Now if that is how God clothes the wild flowers growing in the field which are there today and thrown into the furnace tomorrow, will he not much more look after you, you who have so little faith? So do not worry; do not say, "What are we to eat? What are we to drink? What are we to wear?" It is the gentiles who set their hearts on all these things. Your heavenly Father knows you need them all.

Set your hearts on his kingdom first, and on God's saving justice, and all these other things will be given you as well. So do not worry about tomorrow: tomorrow will take care of itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.'

3) Reflection

- Today's Gospel helps us to review the relationships with material goods and presents two themes of diverse importance: our relationship with money (Mt 6, 24) and our relationship with

Divine Providence (Mt 6, 25-34). The advice given by Jesus gave rise to several questions of difficult response. For example, how can we understand today the affirmation: "You cannot serve God and money" (Mt 6, 24)? How can we understand the recommendation not to worry about food, about drink and about dress (Mt 6, 25)?

- Matthew 6, 24: You cannot serve God and money. Jesus is very clear in his affirmation: "No one can serve two masters: he will either hate the first and love the second, or be attached to the first and despise the second. You cannot serve God and money... Each one has to make his/her own choice. They should ask themselves: "To what do I give the first place in my life: to God or to money?" On this choice will depend the understanding of the advice which follow on Divine Providence (Mt 6, 25-34). It is not a question of a choice made only in one's head, but rather of a very concrete choice of life that has something to do also with attitudes.

- Matthew 6, 25: Jesus criticises the excessive worry about eating and drinking. This criticism of Jesus, even in our days, causes great fear in people, because the great worry of all parents is how to get food and clothing for their children. The reason for the criticism is that life is worth more than food and the body more than the clothes. In order to clarify or explain his criticism Jesus presents two parables: the birds of the air and the flowers.

- Matthew 6, 26-27: The parable of the birds of the air: life is worth more than food. Jesus orders them to look at the birds. They do not sow, or reap or gather into barns, but they always have something to eat because the Heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they are?" Jesus criticises the fact that the worry about food occupies the whole horizon of the life of persons, without leaving space to experience and relish gratuity of the fraternity and of the sense of belonging to the Father. This is why the neo-liberal system is criminal because it obliges the great majority of persons to live 24 hours a day, worried about food and clothing, and produces in a rich minority, quite limited one, the anguish of buying and consuming up to the point of not leaving space for nothing else. Jesus says that life is worth more than the goods to be consumed! The neo-liberal system prevents from living the Kingdom.

- Matthew 6, 28-30: the Parable of the lilies in the fields: the body is worth more than clothing. Jesus asks to look at the flowers, the lilies of the fields. How elegant and beautiful God dresses them! "Now if that is how God clothes the wild flowers growing in the field which are there today and thrown into the furnace tomorrow, will he not much more look after you, you who have so little faith?" Jesus says to look at the things of nature, because seeing the flowers and the field, people will remember the mission which we have: to struggle for the Kingdom and to create a new life living together which can guarantee the food and the clothes for everybody.

- Matthew 6, 31-32: Do not be like the Gentiles. Jesus once again criticises the excessive worry for food, drink and clothing. And he concludes: "The Gentiles are concerned about these things!" There should be a difference in the life of those who

have faith in Jesus and those who do not have faith in Jesus. Those who have faith in Jesus share with him the experience of the gratuity of God the Father, Abba. This experience of paternity should revolutionize the life together. It should generate a community life which is fraternal, and the seed of a new society.

- Matthew 6, 33-34: Set your hearts on the Kingdom first. Jesus indicates two criteria: "To seek first the Kingdom of God" and not to worry about tomorrow". To seek first the Kingdom and its justice is a means to seek to do God's Will and allow God to reign in our life. The search for God is concretely expressed in the search of a fraternal and just life together. And from this concern for the Kingdom springs a community life in which all live as brothers and sisters and nobody is lacking anything. Here there will be no worry of tomorrow, that is, there will be no worry to store up things.
- Seek first of all the Kingdom of God and its justice. The kingdom of God should be in the centre of all our concerns. The Kingdom demands a life together, where there is no storing up of things, but sharing in such a way that all have what is necessary to live. The Kingdom is the new fraternal life together, in which each person feels responsible for others. This way of seeing the Kingdom helps to understand better the parables of the birds and the flowers, because for Jesus Divine Providence passes through the fraternal organization. To be concerned about the Kingdom of God and its justice is the same as to be concerned about accepting God, the Father and of being brother and sister of others. Before the growing impoverishment caused by economic neo-liberalism, the concrete form which the Gospel presents to us and thanks to which the poor will be able to live is the solidarity and the organization.
- A sharp knife in the hands of a child can be a mortal weapon. A sharp knife in the hand of a person hanging on a cord can be an arm which saves. The words of God on Divine Providence are like this. It would not be evangelical to say to a jobless father, who is poor, who has eight children and a sick wife: "Do not worry about food or drink! Because why worry about health and clothes?" (Mt 6, 25-28). We can say this only when we ourselves imitate Jesus, organize ourselves to share, guaranteeing in this way to the brother the possibility to survive. Otherwise, we are like the three friends of Job, that in order to defend God they told lies on human life (Job 13, 7). It would be like "abandoning an orphan and betraying a friend" (Job 7, 27). In the mouth of the system of the rich, these words can be a mortal arm against the poor. In the mouth of the poor they can be a real and concrete outlet for a better life together, more just and more fraternal.

4) Personal Questions

- What do I understand by Divine Providence? Do I trust in Divine Providence?
- We Christians have the mission of giving a concrete expression to what we have within. In which way are we expressing our trust in Divine Providence?

5) Concluding Prayer

I observe your instructions,

I love them dearly.

I observe your precepts, your judgements,

for all my ways are before you. (Ps 119,166-167)