



### 1) Opening prayer

Almighty and ever-living God,  
your Spirit made us your children,  
confident to call you Father.  
Increase your Spirit within us  
and bring us to our promised inheritance.  
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 18,1-5.10.12-14

*At this time the disciples came to Jesus and said, 'Who is the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven?' So he called a little child to him whom he set among them. Then he said, 'In truth I tell you, unless you change and become like little children you will never enter the kingdom of Heaven. And so, the one who makes himself as little as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven. 'Anyone who welcomes one little child like this in my name welcomes me.*

*'See that you never despise any of these little ones, for I tell you that therein heaven are continually in the presence of my Father in heaven.*

*'Tell me. Suppose a man has a hundred sheep and one of them strays; will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hillside and go in search of the stray? In truth I tell you, if he finds it, it gives him more joy than do the ninety-nine that did not stray at all. Similarly, it is never the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones should be lost.*

### 3) Reflection

- Here, in Chapter 18 of the Gospel of Matthew begins the fourth great discourse of the New Law, the Discourse of the Community. As has already been said before (on Monday of the 10th Week of the Year), the Gospel of Matthew written for the communities of the Christian Jews of Galilee and of Syria, present Jesus as the new Moses. In the Old Testament, the Law of Moses was codified in the five books of the Pentateuch. Imitating the ancient model, Matthew represents the New Law in five great Discourses: (a) The Sermon on the Mountain (Mt 5, 1 to 7, 29); (b) the Discourse of the Mission (Mt 10,

1-42); (c) The Discourse of the Parables (Mt 13, 1-52); (d) The Discourse of the Community (Mt 18, 1-35); (e) The discourse of the Future of the Kingdom (Mt 24,1 to 25,46). The narrative parts which are inserted among the five Discourses describe the practice of Jesus and show how he practiced and embodied the New Law in his life.

- The Gospel today gives the first part of the Discourse of the Community (Mt 18, 1-14) which has as key word “the little ones”. The little ones are not only the children, but also the poor persons, those who are not important in society and in the community, and also the children. Jesus asks that these “little ones” should always be the centre of the concern of the communities because “The Father in Heaven does not will that one of these little ones should be lost” (Mt 18, 14).

- Matthew 18, 1: The question of the disciples which provokes the teaching of Jesus. The disciples want to know who is the greater in the Kingdom. The simple fact of this question reveals that they had not understood anything or very little the message of Jesus. The whole Discourse of the Community, is in order to make them understand that among the followers of Jesus the spirit of service should prevail, the gift of self, of pardon, of reconciliation and of gratuitous love, without seeking one’s own interest and one’s own promotion.

- Matthew 18, 2-5: The fundamental criterion: the little one and the greater one. The disciples ask for a criterion so as to be able to measure the importance of the persons in the community: “Who is the greater in the Kingdom of Heaven?” Jesus answers that the criterion are the littler ones! The little ones are not socially important; they do not belong to the world of the great. The disciples have to become children. Instead of growing up, to the heights, they must grow down and toward the periphery, where the poor and the little ones live. In this way, they will be the greater in the Kingdom! The reason is the following: “Anyone who receives one of these little ones receives me”. Jesus identifies himself with them. The love of Jesus for the little ones cannot be explained. Children have no merit. It is the complete gratuity of the love of God which manifests itself and asks to be imitated in the community of those who call themselves disciples of Jesus.

- Matthew 18, 6-9: Do not scandalize the little ones. These four verses concerning the scandal to little ones are omitted from today’s Gospel. We give a brief commentary on them. To scandalize the little ones means: to be the cause for them to lose their faith in God and to abandon the community. Matthew keeps a very hard phrase of Jesus: “Anyone who scandalizes even one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for him to have a mill stone tied around his neck and then be thrown into the sea”. It is a sign that at that time many little ones no longer identified themselves with the community and sought another refuge. And today, in Latin America, for example, every year, approximately three million persons abandon the historical Church and go toward the Evangelical churches. This is a sign that they do not feel at home among us. What is lacking in us? Which is the cause of this scandal of the little ones? In order to avoid the scandal, Jesus orders to cut the foot or take out the eye. This phrase cannot be taken literally. It means that we should be very firm, strict in fighting against scandal which draws the little ones away. We cannot, in any way, allow that the little ones should feel marginalized in our community; because in this case, the community would not be a sign

of the Kingdom of God.

- Matthew 18, 10-11: The angels of the little ones are in the presence of the Father. Jesus recalls Psalm 91. The little ones take Yahweh as their refuge and make the most High their fortress (Ps 91, 9) and because of this: “No disaster can overtake you, no plague come near your tent; he has given angels orders about you to guard you wherever you go. They will carry you in their arms in case you trip over a stone” (Ps 91, 10, 12).
- Matthew 18, 12-14: The parable of the one hundred sheep. According to Luke, this parable reveals the joy of God on the conversion of a sinner (Lk 15, 3-7). According to Matthew, it reveals that the Father does not want that not even one of the little ones be lost. In other words, the little ones should be the pastoral priority of the Community, of the Church. They should be in the centre of the concern of all. Love toward the little ones and the excluded should be the axis of the community of those who want to follow Jesus; because it is in this way that the community becomes the proof of the gratuitous love of God who accepts all.

#### **4) Personal questions**

- Who are the poorest persons of our neighbourhood? Do they participate in our community? Do they feel at home or do they find in us a cause to withdraw?
- God the Father does not want any of the little ones to get lost. What does this mean for our community?

#### **5) Concluding Prayer**

Your instructions are my eternal heritage,  
they are the joy of my heart.  
I devote myself to obeying your statutes,  
their recompense is eternal. (Ps 119,111-112)