



1) OPENING PRAYER

Lord,
our help and guide,
make your love the foundation of our lives.
May our love for you express itself
in our eagerness to do good for others.
You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

2) GOSPEL READING - LUKE 11,42-46

Jesus said: But alas for you Pharisees, because you pay your tithe of mint and rue and all sorts of garden herbs and neglect justice and the love of God! These you should have practised, without neglecting the others.

Alas for you Pharisees, because you like to take the seats of honour in the synagogues and to be greeted respectfully in the market squares!

Alas for you, because you are like the unmarked tombs that people walk on without knowing it!

A lawyer then spoke up. 'Master,' he said, 'when you speak like this you insult us too.'

But he said, 'Alas for you lawyers as well, because you load on people burdens that are unendurable, burdens that you yourselves do not touch with your fingertips.'

3) REFLECTION

- In today's Gospel the conflictive relation between Jesus and the religious authority of the time continues. Today in the church we have the same conflict. In a determinate diocese the Bishop convoked the poor to participate actively. They accepted the request and numerous began to participate. A great conflict arose. The rich said that they had been excluded and some priests began to say: "the Bishop is doing politics and forgets the Gospel".
- Luke 11, 42: Alas for you who do not think of justice and love. "Alas for you, Pharisees, because you pay your tithe of mint and rue and all sorts of garden herbs and neglect justice and the love of God. These you should have practiced without neglecting the others". This criticism of Jesus against the religious heads of the time can be repeated

against many religious heads of the following centuries, even up until now. Many times, in the name of God, we insist on details and we forget justice and love. For example, Jansenism rendered arid the living out of faith, insisting on observance and penance and leading people away from the path of love. Saint Theresa of Lisieux, the Carmelite Sister grew in a Jansenistic environment which marked France at the end of the XIX century. After a painful personal experience, she knew how to recover the gratuity of the Love of God with the force which has to animate the observance of the norms from within; because, without the experience of love, observance makes an idol of God.

The final observation of Jesus said: "You should practice this, without neglecting the others". This observation recalls another observation of Jesus which serves as a comment: "Do not imagine that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets. I have come not to abolish but to complete them. In truth I tell you, till heaven and earth disappear, not one dot, not one little stroke, is to disappear from the Law until all its purpose is achieved. Therefore, anyone who infringes even one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be considered the least in the Kingdom of Heaven; but the person who keeps them and teaches them will be considered great in the Kingdom of Heaven. For I tell you, if your uprightness does not surpass that of the Scribes and Pharisees you will never get into the Kingdom of Heaven" (Mt 5,17-20).

- Luke 11, 43: Alas for you, because you like to take the seats of honour. "Alas for you, Pharisees, because you like to take the seats of honour in the Synagogues and to be greeted respectfully in the market squares". Jesus calls the attention of the disciples on the hypocritical behaviour of some Pharisees. They like to go around the squares with long tunics, and receive the greetings of the people, to occupy the first seats in the synagogues and the seats of honour in the banquets (cf. Mt 6, 5; 23, 5-7). Mark says that they liked to enter into the houses of the widows to recite long prayers in exchange for some money. Such persons will be judged very severely (Mk 12, 38-40). This also happens today in the Church.

- Luke 11, 44: Alas for you, unmarked tombs. "Alas for you, Scribes and Pharisees, because you are like whitewashed tombs that look handsome on the outside, but inside are full of the bones of the dead and every kind of corruption" (Mt 23,27-28). The image of "whitewashed tombs" speaks of itself and does not need any comments. Through this image, Jesus condemns a fictitious appearance of persons who are correct, but interiorly there is the complete negation of what they want to appear to be on the outside. Luke speaks about unmarked tombs: Alas for you, because you are like those unmarked tombs that people walked on without knowing it. ". Anyone who walks on or touches a tomb becomes impure, even if the tomb is hidden under the ground. This image is very strong: on the outside the Pharisee seems to be just and good, but this aspect is deceitful because inside there is a hidden tomb, that without people being aware spreads a poison that kills, communicates a mentality that leads people away from God, suggests an erroneous understanding of the Good News of the Kingdom. It is an ideology which makes of God a dead idol.

- Luke 11, 45-46: Criticism of the Doctors of the Law and response of Jesus: A lawyer

then spoke up and said: "Master, when you speak like this you insult us too!" In his response Jesus does not turn back, rather he shows clearly that the same criticism is also for the Scribes: "Alas for you lawyers as well , because you load on people burdens that are unbearable, burdens that you yourselves do not touch with your fingertips!" In the Sermon on the Mountain, Jesus expresses the same criticism which serves as a comment: "The Scribes and the Pharisees occupy the chair of Moses. You must therefore, do and observe what they tell you, but do not be guided by what they do , since they do not practice what they preach. They tie up heavy burdens and lay them on people's shoulders, but will they lift a finger to move them?" (Mt 23, 2-4).

4) PERSONAL QUESTIONS

- Hypocrisy maintains an appearance which deceives. Up to what point does my hypocrisy reach? How far does the hypocrisy of our Church go?
- Jesus criticized the Scribes who insisted in the disciplinary observance of the minute points of the law, as for example the to pay the tithe of mint and rue and all forts of garden herbs and forget the objective of the Law which is the practice of justice and the love. Can this criticism also apply to me?

5) CONCLUDING PRAYER

How blessed is anyone who rejects the advice of the wicked
and does not take a stand in the path that sinners tread,
nor a seat in company with cynics,
but who delights in the law of Yahweh
and murmurs his law day and night. (Ps 1,1-2)