

Homily Notes for Sunday, Nov 5, 2017 31st in O.T. A.

Readings: Malachi 1:14b-2:2b, 8-10; Ps 131:1-3; I Thess 2:7b-9, 13; Matthew 23:1-12

1. Introduction: Today's readings focus on leadership, both identifying and criticizing bad leadership and emphasizing the importance of church leaders, like St. Paul, to be good models for others.

2. The first reading, Malachi 1:14b-2:2b, 8-10: In today's Gospel, Jesus criticizes the hypocrisy of many religious leaders of his day. The first reading prepares us for the full force of Jesus' warning by showing Malachi pouring out God's curses on the unfaithful priests of his time -- around 450 BC, after Judah's return from exile in Babylon and the rebuilding of the Temple. The priests of this period were indifferent to their rituals and their teaching responsibilities, and were often unfair in the judgments they made about people. Through Malachi, the Lord God thunders, "*You have turned aside from the way and have caused many to falter by your instruction... You do not keep my ways.*" Further, the Lord God emphatically condemns the Temple priests for not teaching His messages and not carrying out His commands, and He says to them, "*I, therefore have made you contemptible and base before all the people.*" Sad to say, many modern clerics of all denominations have a lot in common with the clerics of Malachi's day. No wonder so many of our faithful go "outside the system" we've created in order to discover Who God really IS, and what He really wants of them.

3. The second Reading, 1 Thessalonians 2:7b-9, 13: The roaming teachers of religions in those days had a reputation for avarice and pride. That is why Paul did not demand support from those whom he taught but also worked to support himself. He tried to convince the Thessalonians that the message they received was not just human teaching, but rather the word of God. Unlike the Pharisees and Jewish teachers, Paul wanted to be a burden to no one. Today, many priests, deacons and lectors are faithfully, humbly, and generously carrying on Jesus' mission to the world as Paul did, sharing the word of God with those who believe. To do this, each prays and strives for the zeal and integrity of a life like Paul's, for Jesus' and for Paul's kind of leadership (like that of a shepherd for sheep, or of a father for his children), which nurtures mutual love between him and those to whom he speaks.

4. Gospel: The context: For Jesus in Jerusalem, it was the third day of what we have come to call "Holy Week." It was a day of controversy and personal attacks. Jesus was under fire and lashed out at the religious leaders of Israel for rejecting him as Messiah. Luke's account records three woes Jesus called down upon the Pharisees and four He called down upon the scribes. Matthew's account arranges these (23:13-36) into a series of seven woes against the "scribes and Pharisees," whom Jesus calls hypocrites and publicly humbles by telling God's truth about them. The passage in Matthew consists of the seven prophetic woes and a prophetic lament over the fate of Jerusalem. In Mark's Gospel, Jesus denounces the "scribes" for their pious pretensions, their hunger for status, and their exploitation of widows. In this Gospel incident, then, we are all advised strongly to consider our own conduct and attitudes carefully, lest we, too, suffer these "woes."

5. Three sins of the Scribes and Pharisees: Jesus raises three objections to the Pharisees: (1) "They do not practice what they preach, (2) They adopt a very narrow and burdensome superiority. (3) "They do all their deeds to be seen by others". As a prophetic peacemaker, Jesus challenges those who pervert religion into an opportunity to gain personal honor, glory and power. Jesus accuses the scribes and Pharisees of seeking the glory that rightly belongs to God. The real goal of the Pharisees was to dress and act in such a way as to draw attention to themselves instead of glorifying God. In their misguided zeal for religion, they sought respect and honor for themselves rather than for God. They expressed their love of honor in several ways, thereby converting Judaism into a religion of ostentation.

6. What is implied in each of Jesus' statements about the Pharisees is that Christian leaders should do the opposite. They should practice what they preach, follow Jesus in lightening the yoke of the Torah (see Mt 11:28-30), seek to forego claims to honor from other human beings (see Mt 6:1, 3, 6, 18), and prefer lower status to lording it over others.

7. What is our situation in the Church today? Very often today we are quite ignorant of the Word of God and the Commandments of God. In order to be effective leaders of the Christian Community and of our own families, we need to know clearly the commandments of God so that we can give clear leadership. At the same time, we must not be like the Pharisees, being too rigid and lacking compassion and understanding. We should work as friends and colleagues of those who need our assistance.

Application:

- 1. We need to be models of the positive characteristics and cleanse ourselves of the negative.**
- 2. We, as Catholics, especially in our teaching of the Ten Commandments, we have a particular gift to help others to discover and develop their consciences.**
- 3. In caring for our marriages and our families we can help little babies and young children grow in a healthy, not a psychotic manner. Example from *The Sociopath next door*, Chapter 7: What causes sociopathy? The concept of *attachment disorder* and the lesson from the Romanian orphanages.**
- 4. Can we recognize the tremendously important role that the beliefs and sacraments of the Catholic Church can have in developing a healthy community and a healthy society?**
- 5. Are we willing to serve our Lord and Savior to make this promise come true?**