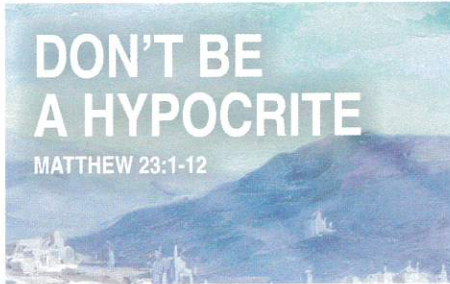


Sunday Message

31ST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

THE WORD

Year A • 5 November 2023 • Psalter Week 3



It would be easy to focus on the wrong-doings of the Pharisees this week, and to gain a perverse kind of satisfaction from Jesus' annoyance with these spiritual leaders for telling people to live one way while living a different way themselves.

Naturally, we would never want to be seen to act in such a way ourselves - but this can lead us to a false sense of pride. In our attempts to do what is right, in our conviction that our way of seeing and doing things is the correct one, it is not hard to fall into the trap of believing ourselves to be 'all perfect' while seeing others as sinners!

It is true that Jesus often seems to come into conflict with the Pharisees and Scribes. But this was not so much because of their interpretation of the law as the hypocritical way they used it to oppress ordinary people and to control their lives.

There is a lesson in this for us. When we start to dictate to others in our families or communities or parishes about how they should or should not be, we run the risk of losing sight of the spirit of the law as given to us by Jesus. We need to be careful that we practise what we claim to profess. ■

REFLECT

Just over a century ago, from 1913-21, Woodrow Wilson was president of America. His time in office coincided with the First World War. Wilson was a bright man, having been head of Princeton University before winning the White House. As son of a Presbyterian minister, he was also deeply religious.

Wilson came to office with high ideals. As a devout Christian, he believed in the primacy of morality in politics. Politics was about doing the moral thing. He was described as the great moralist. And that's what he tried to be.

After the devastation of World War I, Wilson outlined his vision for a new world order, a just world where peoples and nations would shape their own destinies, where colonialism and oppression would be no more. He proposed setting up a League of Nations to prevent war. The League would settle international disputes and protect the interests of smaller countries. Unfortunately, that noble plan failed, and 20 years later, another world war took place.

Wilson was an idealist, but there was a problem - his own moral blind spots. While supporting the rights of the weak abroad, he ignored the plight of the weak in his own country. He opposed women's demand for the right to vote. And he supported systemic

racism. A native of the Deep South, he was sympathetic to the Ku Klux Klan and reintroduced segregation in the civil service. This moral failing has damaged Wilson's reputation.

Of course, it's dangerous to get too sanctimonious about Wilson or others whose words and actions don't always match. Humans are prone to hypocrisy. It happens in politics; it happens in business and in relationships. It happens in the Church. The clerical abuse scandals shocked Catholics to the core and left them wondering how so many priests and religious could have behaved in such a hypocritical manner. The Church's credibility was undermined, because the gap between what they professed and what they did (or didn't do) was obvious for all to see. It will be very difficult to get that credibility back.

As Christians, we need to ensure there is no gap between what we profess in Church and how we live outside Church. Our words and deeds must always spring from a life lived in Jesus.

Today's Gospel offers three points for reflection.

First is an admission: I am not perfect. None of us is perfect. We are all frail, fragile, broken

PRAY

Pray for Church leaders and for all Christians, that the example we give will lead people to God.

SAY

"Lord, help me to practice what I profess. May I always be faithful to you. Amen."

LEARN

We are always in need of conversion.

The Christian must never allow the failings of Church leaders and other Christians to obscure the truth of the Gospel message.

DO

During the month of November, make a special effort to visit the graves of loved ones.

people, who sin and fail and sin and fail. It's something we all have in common from the top down. It is important to acknowledge our weakness, our sinfulness and salutary to admit we are not perfect, that there may even be a hint of the hypocrite in us. The first step is acknowledging our sinfulness.

Second is the need for frequent self-scrutiny. Knowing I'm not perfect, I need to examine my life regularly. I have blind spots. We all have blind spots we may not be aware of. We need to look at our attitudes, our behaviours, our prejudices, our habits, to see if there are any inconsistencies between what we profess and how we live. Is there any hint of the hypocrite in me? The second step is to examine my life.

Third is the need for constant conversion. Having looked at our lives, we seek to change, to mature, to grow. Because we're not perfect, it's hard to live like we should. We make mistakes; we need constant conversion. What attitudes do I have, what behaviours do I engage in, that need changing? How well do I love God and my neighbour, no matter who that neighbour is? Step three is to change whatever needs changing.

Three practical steps to reduce the danger of hypocrisy. ■

ENTRANCE ANTIPHON

Forsake me not, O Lord, my God;
be not far from me!
Make haste and come to my help,
O Lord, my strong salvation!

GLORIA

Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace to people of good will.

We praise you,
we bless you,
we adore you,
we glorify you,
we give you thanks for your great glory,
Lord God, heavenly King,
O God, almighty Father.

Lord Jesus Christ, Only Begotten Son,
Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father,
you take away the sins of the world,

have mercy on us;
you take away the sins of the world,
receive our prayer;
you are seated at the right hand of the Father,
have mercy on us.

For you alone are the Holy One,
you alone are the Lord,
you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ,
with the Holy Spirit,
in the glory of God the Father.
Amen.

COLLECT

Almighty and merciful God,
by whose gift your faithful offer you
right and praiseworthy service,
grant, we pray,
that we may hasten without stumbling
to receive the things you have promised.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of
the Holy Spirit,
God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

FIRST READING Malachi 1:14 - 2:2, 8-10

A reading from the prophet Malachi.

I am a great king, says the Lord of Hosts, and my name is feared throughout the nations. And now, priests, this warning is for you. If you do not listen, if you do not find it in your heart to glorify my name, says the Lord of Hosts, I will send the curse on you and curse your very blessing. But you, you have strayed from the way; you have caused many to stumble by your teaching. You have destroyed the covenant of Levi, says the Lord of Hosts. And so, I in my turn have made you contemptible and vile in the eyes of the whole people in repayment for the way you have not kept to my paths but have shown partiality in your administration. Have we not all one Father? Did not one God create us? Why, then, do we break faith with one another, profaning the covenant of our ancestors?

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

PSALM

Psalms 130

Response:

Keep my soul in peace before you, O Lord.

- O Lord, my heart is not proud nor haughty my eyes. I have not gone after things too great nor marvels beyond me. (R.)
- Truly I have set my soul in silence and peace. A weaned child on its mother's breast, even so is my soul. (R.)
- O Israel, hope in the Lord both now and forever. (R.)

SECOND READING 1 Thessalonians 2:7-9, 13

A reading from the first letter of St. Paul to the Thessalonians.

Like a mother feeding and looking after her own children, we felt so devoted and protective towards you, and had come to love you so much, that we were eager to hand over to you not only the Good News but our whole lives as well. Let me remind you, brothers, how hard we used to work, slaving night and day so as not to be a burden on any one of you while we were proclaiming God's Good News to you.

Another reason why we constantly thank God for you is that as soon as you heard the message that we brought you as God's message, you accepted it for what it really is, God's message and not some human thinking; and it is still a living power among you who believe it.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Alleluia, alleluia! Speak, Lord, your servant is listening:
you have the message of eternal life. Alleluia!

GOSPEL

Matthew 23:1-12

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew.

Addressing the people and his disciples Jesus said, 'The scribes and the Pharisees occupy the chair of Moses. You must therefore do what they tell you and listen to what they say; but do not be guided by what they do: since they do not practise what they preach. They tie up heavy burdens and lay them on men's shoulders, but will they lift a finger to move them? Not they! Everything they do is done to attract attention, like wearing broader phylacteries and longer tassels, like wanting to take the place of honour at banquets and the front seats in the synagogues, being greeted obsequiously in the market squares and having people call them Rabbi.

'You, however, must not allow yourselves to be called Rabbi, since you have only one master, and you are all brothers. You must call no one on earth your father, since you have only one Father, and he is in heaven. Nor must you allow yourselves to be called teachers, for you have only one Teacher, the Christ. The greatest among you must be your servant. Anyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and anyone who humbles himself will be exalted.'

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

PROFESSION OF FAITH

I believe in one God,
the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all things visible and invisible.

I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the Only Begotten Son of God,
born of the Father before all ages.
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made, consubstantial with
the Father;
through him all things were made.
For us men and for our salvation
he came down from heaven,

(all bow during the next three lines)

and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the
Virgin Mary,
and became man.

For our sake he was crucified under
Pontius Pilate,
he suffered death and was buried,
and rose again on the third day
in accordance with the Scriptures.
He ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory
to judge the living and the dead
and his kingdom will have no end.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord,
the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son is adored
and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.

I believe in one, holy, catholic and
apostolic Church.
I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness
of sins
and I look forward to the resurrection of the
dead
and the life of the world to come. Amen.

PRAYER OVER THE OFFERINGS

May these sacrificial offerings, O Lord,
become for you a pure oblation,
and for us a holy outpouring of your mercy.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

COMMUNION ANTIPHON

You will show me the path of life,
the fullness of joy in your presence, O Lord.

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

May the working of your power, O Lord,
increase in us, we pray,
so that, renewed by these heavenly
Sacraments,
we may be prepared by your gift
for receiving what they promise.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.