

31 Sunday A Homily, November 5, 2023

There was a Lutheran pastor, who always started each service with "The Lord be with you." the people would respond, "And also with you." But, one Sunday the PA system wasn't working so the first thing he said was "There's something wrong with this microphone." The people responded, "And also with you!"

Yes, my dear brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ, we need to practice what we speak to the people and being faithful to god. God chooses the occasion to correct us in right time in right way.

In the first reading, prophet Malachi is showering God's curses on the unfaithful priests of his time. The priests of his period were indifferent to their rituals and their teaching responsibilities, and were often unfair in the judgments they made about people. God was not happy with the priests of Israel because they were not teaching God's messages and not carrying out God's commands.

In today's gospel, Jesus offers a word of judgment against contemporary religious leaders who are more concerned with self-promotion than giving service to others. Christ-like leadership calls for integrity and honesty from all those in authority, whether priests, parents, teachers or politicians. There should be in leaders no double standards. Rather, there should grow a deep sense of equality with, and mutual respect between, leaders and those they rule, and a desire in both to serve. Service, not status, is the mark of this new community, and true humility is the only position its members should seek.

Jesus raises three objections to the Pharisees:

(1) "They do not practice what they teach" (v. 3). They lack integrity of life and fail to practice what they preach. They create a double standard -- they say one thing and do another. When parents create double

standards by forbidding their children to do what they have no hesitation in doing themselves, they make the same mistake.

(2) The scribes and the Pharisees, in their excessive zeal for God's laws, split the 613 laws of the Torah into thousands of rules and regulations affecting every movement of the people, thus making the observance of God's laws a heavy burden.

(3) "They do all their deeds to be seen by others" 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

"The greatest among you," he reminds his community, "must be your servant. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled; but whoever humbles himself will be exalted." What is implied in each of Jesus' statements is that Christian leaders should be the exact opposite: they should practice what they preach, follow Jesus in lightening the yoke of the Torah (see Matt 11:28-30), seek to forego claims to honor from other human beings (see Matt 6:1, 3, 6, 18), and prefer lower status to lording it over others.

Leaders should have a spirit of humble service in thought, word and deed. "The measure of a true Christian is not how many servants he has, but how many men he serves." *We have to live the faith we profess.* Are we glorifying God in words deeds or seeking for self-glory? Are we seeking respect from others? Respect cannot be demanded -- it must be earned.

St. Francis of Assisi ceaselessly reminded his friars that if they could boast about anything as their own, it was their sins. Hence, let us use everything we are and have in a way that brings glory to God and His family.

