



Preparing for the Mass of Sunday 5th November 2023 - The Thirty First Sunday in Ordinary Time

1 Relax & Remember

Set aside 10 -15 minutes and create a suitable environment by removing any distractions. Make sure that you are comfortable. Perhaps light a candle. Make the sign of the cross † and remain still for a minute of settling silence. **Call to mind the love that God has for you. Remember that through this scripture our Lord is truly present.** Then read the Gospel, preferably aloud and slowly, and pay attention to any words that stand out. If any do, meditate on them for a few minutes and be invited into a dialogue with God.



2 Read

Taken from the Gospel for Sunday 5th November 2023 - The Scribes and Pharisees Denounced (Matthew 23:1-12)

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.'



3 Reflect

After spending a few minutes considering this Gospel, continue by reading Fr Henry Wansbrough's reflection.

This is the fiercest of all the hard things which the gospel of Matthew has to say about the scribes and Pharisees. It introduces a sevenfold curse upon them. The Pharisees were the party of the Jews most concerned about the exact observance of the prescriptions of the Law of Moses. The 'scribes' were lawyers to whom they would turn in the case of a clash between two laws. Their attention to detail and their fussiness often made them lose sight of the real purpose of the Law. However, Jesus was prepared to meet them on the Pharisees' own ground and debate with them on their own terms. In the gospels, and especially in Matthew (written towards the end of the first century), the hostility of the early Christians to the Pharisees has obviously become fiercer, no doubt because of their persecution of the followers of Jesus. As Matthew warns, 'They will flog you in their synagogues.' One of their concerns was obviously the status of the religious leaders. It looks as though they were almost turning themselves into little gods. So here the gospel stresses, by contrast, that all the disciples of Jesus are equal: in Christianity there is only one Father, only one Teacher for all.

What are the charges here levelled against the Pharisees? What qualities earn Christian leaders the respect of others?

Dom Henry Wansbrough OSB

4 Respond & Request

Now slowly and prayerfully read the Gospel once again but this time in silence. Consider how this Gospel could apply to your life in general. Then thank God for any insight you may have received. Conclude by asking God to bless you with one of the following spiritual gifts to help you act on any resolution you have made: love, understanding, wisdom, faithfulness, peace, self control, patience, or joy. Please remember to pray for the Church and particularly our school families. **Then conclude by requesting the prayers of Our Lady & St Joseph.**



WEDNESDAY WORD PLUS †

Fr Henry's reflections on the first and second readings of Sunday 5th November 2023



First Reading: A Corrupt Leadership

Malachi 1:14-2:2.8-10

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. 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?

In the three-year cycle there are only two Sunday readings from the prophet Malachi. This prophet could perhaps be called anonymous, for 'Malachi' means only 'My messenger'. The book is printed at the very end of the Old Testament – conveniently, because it ends with a message about the coming of the final messenger of the Lord before the Day of the Lord; this leads on perfectly into the New Testament and the gospel of Matthew. The book was probably written soon after the return of the Jews from exile in Babylon. The prophets of this time show that the enthusiastic return was quickly followed by a period of disillusionment and slackness in the performance of religious duties: they could not even get started on rebuilding the Temple. Today's passage denounces the religious leaders for their failure truly to give glory to God, both by their sacrifices and by their failures in moral leadership. Are they really striving to give leadership in celebrating the covenant between God and his people? The reading is obviously chosen to pair with the gospel reading, where the religious leadership at the time of Jesus is also fiercely criticized. Slackness in religious observance is a danger in any age, even our own.

Is the Church in our day becoming slack and lukewarm?

Second Reading: Paul's Care for his Converts

1 Thessalonians 2:7-9.13

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.

This is the earliest of Paul's letters that we possess, and he stresses, as he often does later, his unremitting care for the churches he has founded around the eastern Mediterranean region. He seems to be defending himself, perhaps against a charge that he had neglected them. Certainly the urgency with which he moved from one city to another cannot have left him time to instruct these new congregations fully; this is why his letters to them are so rich in teaching for us! They supplement the rudimentary instruction which he gave to them when he was present. Elsewhere he underlines how heavily this anxiety for the well-being of these young communities weighs upon him. The vividness and excitement of his letters show how earnest and eager he was. Writing to the Corinthians, at the end of a recital of the persecutions, dangers and hardships he has undergone in the service of Christ and the gospel, he adds, 'Beside all the external things, there is, day in day out, the pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches' (2 Corinthians 11:28). Paul's self-defence stands in sharp contrast to the first reading and the criticism of the slackness of religious leaders.

What do we expect from our pastors?

“His letters show how earnest and eager Paul was.”

The Wednesday Word: Connecting Home, School & Parish through the Word of God
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