

Thirty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle A

October 30, 2011

First Reading

Malachi 1:14b—2:2b,8-10

Through the prophet Malachi, God judges the priests of Israel and calls them to be more faithful to the Covenant.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 131:1-3

We find peace in the Lord.

Second Reading

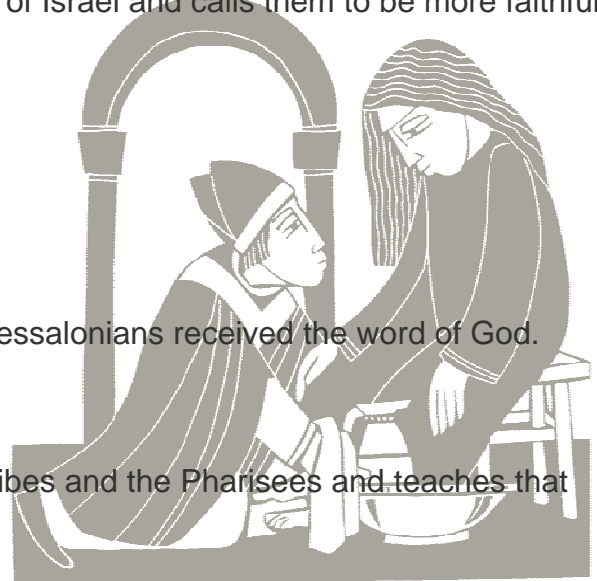
1 Thessalonians 2:7b-9,13

Paul gives thanks to God for the way in which the Thessalonians received the word of God.

Gospel Reading

Matthew 23:1-12

Jesus warns against following the example of the scribes and the Pharisees and teaches that those who would be great must be servants.



Background on the Gospel Reading

Today's Gospel continues to elaborate on the tension between Jesus and the scribes and Pharisees. Our Lectionary sequence at this point, however, is not quite a continuous reading of Matthew. In between last week's reading from Matthew and this week's, we find Jesus' question to the Pharisees about the Messiah being "David's son." Having concluded a series of dialogues with the Pharisees and other religious leaders, Jesus now directs his words to the crowds, warning them not to follow the example of the scribes and Pharisees.

The scribes and Pharisees were teachers of the Mosaic Law. They were entrusted with its interpretation and, thus, were influential in determining Jewish practice. In order to appreciate the conflict that is evident in this passage, we must understand that Jesus was basing his teachings on the same laws and traditions available to the Pharisees. Both were interpreting the Law of Moses in order to better adapt it to contemporary Jewish life. The differences between their teachings, therefore, are often highlighted and amplified by Matthew.

This part of Matthew's Gospel reflects aspects of the conflict between his Christian community and Pharisaic Judaism. Matthew's Church is thought to have included many Jewish Christians who may not have believed that a break with the synagogue was necessary to be a follower of Jesus. Jesus tells the crowd that it is correct to do and observe what the scribes and Pharisees teach; it is their example that is to be avoided, namely, their love of being honored and exalted. Hence, the Gospel reflects the tension of an active internal debate within the early Church.

Jesus references two aspects of Jewish spiritual life prescribed by the Law of Moses. *Phylacteries* are small boxes which contain Scripture verses that are placed on the left forearm and forehead. *Tassels* refer to the fringes worn on the corners of a person's garments; the tassels help to remind those who wear them to keep the commandments.

The warning Jesus gives against seeking places of honor in the community was directed as much toward the Christian community as the named Jewish leaders. Indeed, it is a warning that resonates with us today. Christian leadership is a call to service for the glory of God; those who would be leaders among us must, like Jesus, be servants of all.

Family Connection

“Do as I say, not as I do.” How many of us have been tempted to say this to our children? In today's Gospel we hear a resounding reply from Jesus, “Practice what you preach.” Those who know us best, our family and especially our children, can identify the inconsistencies between what we want to teach and the example that we give. The challenge for all of us, especially for those of us who are parents, is to model with consistency the faith and the Christian way of life we wish to teach our children.

As you gather as a family, talk about what it means to practice what you preach. Identify some examples of people you know who practice what they preach. What do you observe about these people? What do you admire about them?

In today's Gospel, we hear Jesus talk about the importance of acting in ways that are consistent with our faith. Read together today's Gospel, Matthew 23:1-12. Talk together about ways in which your family might better practice the faith that you profess. Choose one action to take that will show your faith in action. Pray together that your family's faith will be shown consistently in your actions. Pray the Prayer for Vocations.

Prayer for Vocations

God, in Baptism you called me by name
and made me a member of your people, the Church.
Help all your people to know their vocation in life,
and to respond by living a life of holiness.
For your greater glory and for the service of your people,
raise up dedicated and generous leaders
who will serve as sisters, priests, brothers, deacons, and lay ministers.

Send your Spirit to guide and strengthen me
that I may serve your people
following the example of your Son, Jesus Christ,
in whose name I offer this prayer.
Amen.