

SPIRITUALITY

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Matt 23:9b, 10b

R⁷. Alleluia, alleluia.

You have but one Father in heaven
and one master, the Christ.

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Gospel Matt 23:1-12; L151A

Jesus spoke to the crowds
and to his disciples,
saying,
“The scribes and the
Pharisees
have taken their seat on
the chair of Moses.
Therefore, do and observe
all things whatsoever
they tell you,
but do not follow their example.
For they preach but they do not
practice.
They tie up heavy burdens hard to
carry
and lay them on people’s shoulders,
but they will not lift a finger to move
them.
All their works are performed to be
seen.
They widen their phylacteries and
lengthen their tassels.
They love places of honor at banquets,
seats of honor in synagogues,
greetings in marketplaces, and the
salutation ‘Rabbi.’
As for you, do not be called ‘Rabbi.’
You have but one teacher, and you are
all brothers.
Call no one on earth your father;
you have but one Father in heaven.
Do not be called ‘Master’;
you have but one master, the Christ.
The greatest among you must be your
servant.
Whoever exalts himself will be
humbled;
but whoever humbles himself will be
exalted.”



Reflecting on the Gospel

This Sunday’s gospel is the source for the familiar adage, “practice what you preach.” Over the centuries since Matthew’s gospel recorded these words of Jesus who is berating the scribes and Pharisees because “they preach but they do not practice,” other sayings have crept into our language usage that address the same issue. For example, we might be admonished to walk the walk; or we might hear

it spoken that actions speak louder than words; or we might recall the words attributed to St. Francis of Assisi, preach the gospel but use words only when needed; or we might quote another passage from Scripture capturing the same idea, “by their fruits you will know them” (Matt 7:16, 20, NABRE). No doubt a web search would produce other similar and very familiar sayings. The sheer number of them suggests that maybe we have a bit of a problem with our words and actions being consistent with each other. Like the scribes and Pharisees we too sometimes say things but do the opposite. The real issue here is integrity. Honesty in living and relating to others means that our whole selves—words and actions, body and soul—are united by hearts turned toward God.

This gospel is saying that turning our hearts toward God who is to be central in our lives is a matter of doing works out of love for God and others, and acting with the integrity of Jesus. Our words and deeds—our word-behaviors—must reveal our ultimate word-behavior: that we are disciples of Jesus, the servant of others. To be humble servant is simply living in right relationship with God and others. This means that we never forget our first and most important title, which is not to be teacher or master, but to be humble servant. This means that we practice what we preach. And what we preach is Jesus, who is humble servant now exalted.

In very clear terms Jesus condemns the scribes and Pharisees for the way they act. They don’t practice what they preach and they relish titles but do not live up to the demands these titles place upon them. Both these ways of acting reveal a corrupted disposition toward God and God’s people. Then Jesus admonishes the crowd and the disciples to focus on him and him alone as the true teacher and master. He is true Teacher and Master in showing us how to be servant of all: he humbled himself. For this, he is exalted by his Father. *How* he is truly reveals *who* he is. *How* we are reveals us to be . . .

Living the Paschal Mystery

All our lives we grapple with lining up words with deeds. Gradually on our life journey we discover that our proper “seat” is in the place of the servant and our true “place of honor” is at God’s table where all are equals. When we have this clear in our own minds, then words and deeds are not in opposition, but witness to integrity of self consistent with being followers of Jesus.

The new life we might experience by such servant-living takes the form of others respecting us not because of a title or words we speak, but because of the genuine goodness of who we are and what we do. Rather than lay heavy burdens on others, we reach out to help them carry their life load. Rather than putting on symbols of prestige or taking places of honor, we spend ourselves for the least fortunate among us. Being humble servant means we place ourselves at the service of others, recognizing all as our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Focusing the Gospel

Key words and phrases: The scribes and the Pharisees; they preach but they do not practice; love . . . the salutation ‘Rabbi’; but one teacher; but one master, the Christ; be your servant; humbled; exalted

To the point: In very clear terms Jesus condemns the scribes and Pharisees for the way they act. They don’t practice what they preach and they relish titles but do not live up to the demands these titles place upon them. Both these ways of acting reveal a corrupted disposition toward God and God’s people. Then Jesus admonishes the crowd and the disciples to focus on him and him alone as the true teacher and master. He is true Teacher and Master in showing us how to be servant of all: he humbled himself. For this, he is exalted by his Father. *How* he truly reveals *who* he is. *How* we are reveals us to be . . .

Connecting the Gospel

to the first reading: Malachi is condemning the priests of his day for the same infidelity for which Jesus condemns the scribes and Pharisees of his day.

to experience: We often struggle to align what we do with what we say, especially when we are in some position of authority (e.g., parents, teachers, civic leaders). What is at stake is not only our own integrity, but also the well-being of those for whom we are role models.

Connecting the Responsorial Psalm

to the readings: We have no need for any status or title other than that which has already been given us: we are God’s children (see first reading and gospel). Whenever we pursue anything else as the source of our status—power, public recognition, domination—we are “violating the covenant” (first reading). We make ourselves the masters and one another the slaves to our burdensome commands (gospel). Malachi chastises such behavior (first reading) and Jesus condemns it (gospel).

Psalm 131 expresses the self-understanding Jesus, our “one master” (gospel), wishes to teach us. The core of discipleship is humble relationship with God (psalm) leading to humble, servant-oriented relationship with one another (gospel). To learn this we must give up false strivings for glory and prestige. We must seek our true place before God. What we will discover, the psalm promises, is genuine peace and ultimate hope.

to psalmist preparation: An implied challenge in this Sunday’s responsorial psalm is that you be willing to grow to your full stature as a son or daughter of God. What do you need to let go of in order for this growth to happen?

ASSEMBLY & FAITH-SHARING GROUPS

- I know I have failed to practice what I preach when . . . The strongest preaching I do by the way I live is . . .
- What my behavior reveals about who I am is . . .
- As a disciple I am genuinely a learner when . . . a child of the Father when . . . a humble servant when . . .

PRESIDERS

My practicing what I preach demands of me . . . My title “Father” demands of me . . .

DEACONS

My community of faith sees me being “servant” when . . .

HOSPITALITY MINISTERS

When hospitality is “performed to be seen” its impact on the community is . . . When hospitality is done as humble service its impact on the community is . . .

MUSIC MINISTERS

When I use my music ministry to further my personal status, Christ calls me back to humble service by . . .

ALTAR MINISTERS

Serving others demands that I humble myself by . . . God then exalts me by . . .

LECTORS

My title as “minister of the word” accurately describes my *identity* to be . . . It reveals my proper *relationship* to God and others to be . . .

EXTRAORDINARY MINISTERS OF HOLY COMMUNION

Distributing Holy Communion is an act of humble service when I . . .