

5 November 2017 (31st Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A)

Malachi 1:14-2:2,8-10; Psalm 130(131); 1 Thessalonians 2:7-9,13; Matthew 23:1-12.

Do what they tell you and listen to what they say; but do not be guided by what they do!

One can show that he truly is a disciple of Jesus when he not only listens to the word of God and internalises it, but also lives this word. In today's gospel Jesus criticises the leaders of the Jews because while they taught and preached the law of the Torah, they themselves did not live out of it. They also added rules that were originally meant for priests while they were offering sacrifice in the temple, and expected ordinary Jews to carry them out in their daily life.

Although some of the sayings in today's gospel passage have got a historical basis to them and are no longer relevant, there is still a very relevant message for us today. We too need to be open to listen to God's word and more importantly let it influence the way we look at each other and the world around us, and act accordingly. It is part of our mission as Christians to give witness to God's word by the way we live our daily life.

For myself as this is a particularly challenging gospel. My role as priest is to be servant of the community and to teach God's word within our community. My call is to preach by my way of life more than by the words I preach, and I pray and hope that what Jesus said of the Pharisees cannot be said of me too!

Jesus also tells us not to call anyone 'Rabbi,' 'father,' or 'teacher;' we have one Father in heaven and we should look at each other as sisters and brothers. Jesus himself taught us to pray as one family, together addressing God as 'Abba:' 'Our Father in heaven.' Similarly we are called to be disciples of only one master and teacher, the Christ himself, no one else should be our master here on earth.

Unfortunately in many institutions, leaders are given honorific titles. Throughout the centuries the Church has picked up titles that were used by emperors, royalty and nobility. In some cultures it is still inconceivable to call any elder by name, all have to be addressed by a title. Perhaps the title in itself does mean nothing, as long as it does not become an excuse to stop a healthy fraternal relationship from developing between the different members of the Church community. We need to remind ourselves that we are all brothers and sisters, children of the one Father in heaven, and this should be the basis of all our relationships.

For myself as leader in this community of the Church, I ask you to keep me in your prayers. With you I am a disciple and for you I try to be a servant; I too need prayers to remain faithful in my call as Christian, so that hopefully I can be of good example to the rest of the community.

Fr Mario